

Blood Diamond

Doublethink and Deception over those Worthless Rocks of Desire

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“All that was needed was an unending series of victories over your own memory. ‘Reality control,’ they called it; in Newspeak, ‘doublethink.’” George Orwell, 1984.

Part I

Blood Diamond is a Hollywood film depicting horrific bloodshed in West Africa, in 1999, spawned by the lust for diamonds. The film opens with the understatement that “thousands have died and millions have become refugees.” But more than 70,000 people died in Sierra Leone’s war. The film immediately segues to a palatial boardroom in Antwerp, Belgium, to the G-8 Conference on diamonds. The all-white executives are ostensibly concerned, holding worried discussions about...the fate of people? *Africa’s* people?

“According to a *devastating* report by *Global Witness*,” says one of the G-8 execs, “these [conflict] stones are being used to purchase arms and finance civil war.” The inference is that world leaders were surprised by the revelations of *Global Witness*—a London-based watchdog organization that the film clearly advertised for exposing corporate malfeasance. “We must remember that these stones comprise only a small percentage of the legitimate diamond industry,” says another G-8 exec, “whose trade is critical to the economies of many emerging nations.” Excuse me? *Legitimate* diamond industry? *Emerging* nations...?

The Africans in the film are remarkably well dressed and salubrious, and the African scenes are remarkably sunny, clean, or, well, *sanitized*: the effects of poverty and hunger are made invisible. Indeed, the film plays and replays miscellaneous objectionable stereotypes and inaccuracies, but this is Hollywood, after all, part of the American media, where degrading racial themes are routinely peddled. The film also has its share of embedded corporate branding—Hustler; Smirnoff, National Geographic; Guinness; BBC; UNCHR, Mercedes, World Food Program...

At the end of the film a disclaimer tells us that in 2003 the international community—those G-8 executives “partnered” with the diamond industry—established formal mechanisms to control the flow of conflict diamonds. The film’s disclaimer parrots the line of the World Diamond Council, an international organization created by the diamond industry. Both assure consumers that more than 99% of rough stones today come from conflict-free sources, thanks to the United Nations-mandated *Kimberley Process*—a voluntary self-regulation scheme where the industry crafts ‘passport’ documents certifying all stones as conflict free. According to the people who profit from diamonds, the blood diamonds problem is passé.¹

“It’s not passé,” says Father Rocco Puopolo of the Africa Faith and Justice Network. A child soldier in Sierra Leone shot Puopolo in 1999. “The diamond industry can claim what they want. The film is a template for what I believe is going on in parts of Africa today.”

Looking behind the scenes of the movie—and behind the sparkle of the World Diamond Council—we are reminded of George Orwell’s novel 1984, where the character Winston falsifies news to peddle the Party’s propaganda. Orwell’s ‘Ministry of Truth’ turned all truth upside-down, and all deceptions downside-up. Orwell gave us ‘doublethink’ and ‘newspeak’ and a fictionalized portrait of the future grounded in Orwell’s experience of propaganda.

Is the diamond industry peddling Orwellian diamondthink? “More than 99% of diamonds are conflict free,” the industry chorus tells us, “thus all diamonds are conflict free.” Like the Blood Diamond disclaimer, the World Diamond Council (WDC) sweeps conflict diamonds into the mindshafts of history. The “Clean Diamond Act”—passed by the U.S. Congress in 2003—does the same. All is well, they say, in Diamondville.

To be sure we understand that, the WDC in 2006 launched a *blitzkrieg* advertising campaign—full-page ads in the New York Times, USA Today, Los Angeles Times, the International Herald Tribune—touting the self-policing successes of the Kimberley Process. The campaign was presumably coordinated to counter the supposed “negative publicity” of the Blood Diamond film.

To shore up lover’s hearts in the pre-Christmas ‘06 diamond rush, the New York Times echoed the WDC’s statement, adding that diamond revenues today bring health care, education and development to African countries, those *emerging* nations. “This [diamond] is supposed to be a symbol of all things good,” a pullout in the NYT article reads—page E-10—next to a seductive model with a glimmering smile and a glamorous gown. The article points buyers to diamonds from Canada: no blood spilt in Canada, right? [2](#) Same paper, same day, had a full-page Tiffany advert—page A-10—with soft aquamarine hues offsetting the sparkle of diamonds and the tender allure of text: “*My True Love Gave to Me.*”

Are blood diamonds merely polished by public relations? The Kimberly Process was launched under the narrow definition that “conflict diamonds” only originate from conflicts between ‘rebels’ and ‘governments’: it refers to smuggling by militias antagonistic to ‘legitimate’ member governments. But the examples of Angola and Zimbabwe illustrate how the new rules are used against immigrants, refugees and poor citizen miners. This is the essence of diamondthink: truth and lie are inseparable, with deadly consequences.

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