

OF SWINE FLU AND MOTHER AFRICA

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Thank you swine flu and Mexico! For once Africa has not been blamed for being the source of a deadly virus. From Ebola to Lassa Fever, Rift Valley Fever, White Nile virus, the Marburg Virus, the “Jealousy” malady and even AIDS and all so called haemorrhagic fevers have been attributed to poor old Africa. Africa is good for some blame at least.

The ongoing swine flu has been first detected in Mexico and the reports indicate that a small five year old Mexican boy was the first victim. Imagine just if his father or any other Sanchez or Mexican had been on safari in the Serengeti plains and the swine fever would have been called the African swine flu and Mother Africa would have been blamed for a mild yet deadly flu that you can avoid by wearing a face mask and washing your hands! Shame of shames, an African virus that does not kill millions would have been bad for Africa’s reputation. This time around the Mexicans are to blame even though it could very well be gringo/American tourists who took the virus there and brought it back to their homes. Back in 1981, the first AIDS victim was an American but somehow the scientists argued that the deadly virus must have originated from the “dark” continent. By the way, the Israelis have reportedly protested against the present flu being called the swine flu. Not kosher at all. The virus is said to be a combination of swine, bird and human flu, a combination that poor Africa cannot really afford come to think of it. Now that this deadly flu is beginning to ravage the Western world a vaccine may be found for it fast as it is no malaria killing millions in over populated underdeveloped countries.

I still would like to argue that the swine flu may very well have originated in Africa itself. We have a swine fever attacking pigs in many parts of Africa. We have had flu of various types and too many birds to count. And we claim we are the origin of human kind. Why can’t we be the origin of all its fevers, maladies and viruses? George Bush called the whole continent a disease ridden country and one similar racist American blogger also referred to Africa as a collection of filthy disease ridden lands. Insults aside, if our continent, which has at least 53 distinct countries, is the origin of human beings, then it should consequently be the centre and origin of all the viruses and

diseases. Logical, no? On another level, we are often told we do not have proper attitudes towards hygiene though our detractors do not bother to query how come we have so many rivers and no clean drinking water, how come we are destitute while our lands have riches and how come we cannot afford modern medicines. Recently, there was a big hue and cry by so called Western twitters (mostly actors and entertainment personalities) to buy and send us mosquito nets aplenty. I read a message from Dead Aid author Dambissa Mayo that in some places the thankful African ladies have turned the mosquito nets into wedding dresses, to hell with the mosquitoes. It reminds me of Emperor Menelik of Ethiopia, the victor of Adwa over Italian colonialists, who was fascinated by the electric chair and imported one and, alas, since there was no electricity, used the chair as an ordinary chair for himself. Misplaced importing move on his part. When it comes to our self appointed aid givers they often give us Dead Aid or irrelevant material. Like refrigerators where there is no electricity, vaccines that require a fridge where there is no electricity, blankets to desert people, fish soup powder to people who detest fish, fishing nets to highlanders, dates to those who do not eat dates but would brew it into a potent arak and cause deadly brawls in refugee camps, etc. The charity business is often profit oriented or many times a balm for the guilty conscience of the West and decadently rich people. Colgate where tooth brushes have never been seen.

The contention that all evil viruses originate in Africa is part of the old and persisting prejudiced and selective perception propagated by the Western media on and about Africa. The news agencies often quoted by African newspapers themselves (AP, UP, AFP, Reuters and AFP) are not African at all and even the Russian news agency and Xinhua are more or less in the same can. Then Western agencies often circulate the negative image of Africa, focusing on “savagery and wars, tribal unrest and carnage, shocking corruption, flogging and rape, a South Sudanese marrying a goat or a Nigerian raping a child to cleanse himself from Aids,” and so and on . The war in Bosnia or Croatia is ethnic but “tribal “in Africa. Bestiality, child rape and cannibalism are features of decadent Western societies but highlighted when it touches on Africa. It is part of the “dark continent” syndrome, Joseph Conrad’s Heart of Darkness rhetoric of Empire (to quote the title of David Spurr’s book). Primitive and savage, raw meat eaters, all of them “The White Man’s Burden” awaiting salvation and enlightenment from the West—the image sticks. The Africanization of the viruses falls in place. Saudi

Arabia is an ally of the West but an obscurantist medieval regime that hangs women and beheads people every Friday and oppresses women to no end but one hardly reads a continuing denunciation of this. The presentation of Africa in the western media, the harping on the viruses, on the “tribal” wars (by the way why are the Sans people called Hottentots and the Ewes Pygmies?), the famine, the viruses, Aids, the diseases—all are part of the rhetoric that the Empire has maintained throughout the long decades to demonize Mother Africa. Of course, we cannot deny that considerate Africans despots have chipped in to help!

So, if the Swine Flu had been attributed to Africa we could have welcomed it gladly. Bring it on kind of attitude. Africans are resilient and tough—didn’t they survive the slave trade and brutal colonialism? If one more virus is attributed to them what can it do to them? Nada, as the Mexicans would say. If Africa is the origin of the creature called human, Africa deserves to be the mother of all its maladies and viruses. Mother Africa, accused of originating so many devastating viruses, makes no apologies as it lets the Mexicans and others enjoy for once their pathetic swine flu.