

IE Weekly

By Andy Klein

12/5/06

Think *Blood Diamonds*, Leonardo DiCaprio's heist-caper take on Sierra Leone's bloody, merciless Civil War --- best known for amputating infants --- is reductionary? It's more misguided than you think, argues Philippe Diaz in his incendiary documentary, *The Empire In Africa*. Diaz believes that the global media (including Leo's latest) has been duped by the country's puppet government into scapegoating the anti-corporate Revolutionary United Front (RUF) as the baby butchers --- and he's got the footage to prove it. While most journalists never venture beyond President Kabbah's press-op camp, where starving victims from across the nation have been corralled and bribed to finger the RUF (metaphorically, of course, many are missing both hands), Diaz roamed the villages and uncovered that the true murderers weren't the social reform rebels, but an outside "peace-keeping" squadron named ECOMOG from Nigeria hired to ruin their international sympathies. (Though Sierra Leone boasts abundant natural resources, its citizens are the world's poorest) It's less shocking to learn that this conspiracy leads back to DeBeers and other European profiteers than Diaz's footage of UN-endorsed soldiers beating and killing civilians. While his choppy, talky documentary is slight on coherence, it packs a punch that aches more and more as his film continues to reveal that no side is innocent of atrocities, only the young and peaceful are punished. Ultimately, says a weary survivor, "All Sierra Leoneans have committed their own crimes." But as Diaz wonders, how many more criminals live safely abroad?

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