

Working Paper:  
CONFLICT MINERALS IN THE CONGO:  
BLOOD MINERALS AND AFRICA'S UNDER-REPORTED FIRST WORLD WAR



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April 2, 2012

"And this also... has been one of the dark places of the earth."  
- Joseph Conrad

The great novelist Joseph Conrad uses these words to describe the Congo, a country blessed with vast amounts of resources and cursed with the aftermath of resulting greed. The Democratic Republic of Congo is an enormous country, similar in size to western Europe, and riddled with war. Starting with the time of Imperialism in the 1870's until now, the natural wealth of the Congo seems only to decimate its economic growth and political stability. This phenomenon, known as the *resource curse* explains the history and perpetuation of violence in the DRC. Additionally, the lack of media attention, which cannot be explained by the traditional factors named for the ex- or inclusion of news stories, rather stems from the same economic and political interests which perpetuate the conference today.

#### A History of Violence in the Congo

The DRC seem to have fallen victim to the so called 'resource curse,' a theory which argues that a higher amount of natural resources in developing nations creates a higher risk for civil war and slower development. Generally, resource rich countries are less wealthy and less competently governed, due to an increase in domestic political corruption, a reduction of economic diversification, and reduced investment in human capital.<sup>1</sup> In the Congo, both the resources and the leaders' access to them are readily available, causing mismanagement and chaos. .

But to understand the scope and deep roots of the corruption, carnage, and political instability, we have to look into the past and consider the origins of the prevailing issues. In the Congo, we can trace them back almost 150 years, to when the British explorer Sir Henry

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<sup>1</sup> Nadira Lalji, "The Resource Curse Revised: Conflict and Coltan in the Congo," *Harvard International Review*, (Fall 207), 34.

Stanley first traveled down the Congo River and discovered the riches of the land in 1871.<sup>2</sup> When the news of its vast resources reached Europe, King Leopold II of Belgium established the *Association Internationale Africaine*, an organization to aid in the colonization of the Congo, masked as a humanitarian venture. Leopold II employed Stanley to return to the African continent and acquire as much land as possible. By bribing Congolese natives into treaties with the help of flattery and gifts or military force, the monarch managed to acquire thousands of square miles of land<sup>3</sup>. The land was not considered a colony of Belgium, but owned directly by Leopold II. It was the world's only major colony owned by a single individual. In the 1885 Conference of Berlin, convened to divide up the African continent, the other European imperial powers accepted his claim and Leopold II named his new territory the Congo Free State.

Leopold II soon began to harvest the land's copious resources. The demand for rubber especially rose in the 1890's, when the growing popularity of bicycles and cars called for rubber tires. The exploitation of the land quickly went hand in hand with the exploitation of its people. Leopold II and his executives forced native Congolese to work, often under horrible conditions. Eye witnesses reported the whipping of laborers (even to death), chopping off of hands and limbs as punishment, and many cases of rape. A common tactic was to storm a village, hold the women hostage until the men reached a quota of rubber. They would then leave in search of the material, often for days or weeks, dying of exhaustion in the process, while the women were raped and starved.<sup>4</sup> Obviously, this left no one to raise crops

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<sup>2</sup> Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost* (New York: Houghton Mifflin 1998), 30.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

or bear healthy children, resulting in the death of an estimated 50% of the population's, probably ca. 10 million people.<sup>5</sup>

Unsurprisingly, Leopold II's methods were extremely unpopular. Black conscripts in his army often joined the rebels they were supposed to be fighting and many protestant missionaries began what may now be considered one of the first human rights movement. The European and American public protested heavily once these atrocities came to light, spearheaded by figures such as Roger Casement, Edward Morel, and Mark Twain. Leopold II lost all support and financial backing. He reluctantly transferred the custody of the Congo Free State to Belgium in 1908 and, as a result. its plunder became slightly less destructive. Though exploitation continued, human right violations were not as atrocious, mainly because the government realized that a continuation would simply result in the total destruction of the native population, and consequently their workforce.

Little over 50 years later, the Congo was swept up in the decade of decolonization. In 1960, it elected Patrice Lumumba as its first freely elected President in a democratic election (these arguably remain the countries only free democratic elections to date). Lumumba seemingly promised a strong independent future for the country: he demanded not just political, but also economic independence from the former imperialistic nations, which were hoping to keep their hold over the countries resources. The USA and Belgium sent aid to anti-Lumumba factions, and in 1961, Lumumba was assassinated<sup>6</sup>.

His eventual successor was General Mobutu, who seized power through a coup d'état endorsed by the USA in 1965<sup>7</sup>. Mobutu changed the name of the country to Zaire, allowed for

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<sup>5</sup> Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost*, 233.

<sup>6</sup> Adam Hochschild, "Congo's Many Plunderers," *Economic and Political Weekly* 4, no. 36 (2001), 287.

<sup>7</sup> Ola Olsson and Heather Congdon Fors. "Congo: The Prize of Predation," *Journal of Peace Research* 3, no. 41 (2004), 323.

international exploitation, and began a large scale plundering of the Congo's natural resources for himself and his cronies. He amassed an estimated 4 billion USD in Swiss banks. Mobutu received continuous support from the US government as an anti-communist outpost in Africa. George Bush even called him "one of our most valued friends," despite his atrocious record of corruption and human rights violations.<sup>8</sup>

This discouraging story of exploitation and human rights violation provides a backdrop for the current political situation.

#### Current Conflict- Economic and Political

The current conflict is extremely complex and includes both political and economic reasons. While the political and ethnic motives explain the onset of the war, its perpetuation is mainly due to economic factors. The Congo supposedly possesses every natural mineral in the periodic table of elements, and so the resource curse strikes again<sup>9</sup>.

The DRC contains about \$24 trillion dollars worth of valuable minerals, such as coltan, gold, diamonds, tin, uranium, etc.<sup>10</sup> This equals the combined GDP of Europe and the United States<sup>11</sup>. An estimated \$6 million in resources leaves the Congo every day<sup>12</sup>. So while Congo is still the victim of plundering, the demanded resource has shifted from the rubber of King Leopold's day to something much more in line with our modern world. Although other

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<sup>8</sup> Hochschild, (2001), 288.

<sup>9</sup> Inter Press Service, "DRC: Minerals Flow Abroad," *Africa Research Bulletin* (2006), 1704.

<sup>10</sup> Joshua Kors, "Blood Mineral," *Current Science* 9, no. 95 (2010), 10-12.

<sup>11</sup>, Valerie Noury, "The Curse of Coltan," *New African* (2010), 35.

<sup>12</sup> *Social Education*, "Congo: Elcetions and the Battle for Mineral Resources," 1, no. 71 (2007), 24.

resources like gold, diamonds, and minerals contribute to the effect, "Columbite-Tantalite" (Coltan) is the new major player. Coltan is currently the most profitable natural resource the Congo possesses, more so than gold or diamonds, and one of the most cherished minerals in the world<sup>13</sup>. Because it releases heat quickly, coltan does not overheat or destroy circuitry, enabling the reduction of size of devices and the invention and improvement of wireless technology<sup>14</sup>. It is fundamental in sustaining and developing out civilization, as it is used in almost all modern technological devices, whether air plane engines or handheld gadgets such as cell phones. As a result, this mineral is in high demand and, depending on developments in the market, may increase even more. For example, in 2000 the Sony Play Station 2 raised the price of coltan from \$49 to \$275 a pound<sup>15</sup>. Therefore the Congo's resources, which make up from 64%-80% of the world's coltan, depending on sources, are not left untouched. While some other countries, like Australia and Canada, also have coltan reserves, they are much harder to access than in the DR Congo<sup>16</sup>. There the mineral lies so close to the earth's surface, it can be reached with simple shovels and pickaxes, requiring no technology or expertise. This makes it easy to mine, and more importantly exploit. Rebel groups as well as government militias monopolize the highly militarized mineral. However, the many different rebel groups involved are each financed by different outside countries or institutions, creating a constant power struggles over the control of these mines.

While the natural riches of the Congo may be a primary reason for the perpetuation of the war, it was not the official cause. The current conflict started in the aftermath of the Rwandan

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<sup>13</sup> Sharife, Khadija, "DR Congo: The Heavy Price of the World's High-Tech," *New African*. (May 2008), 27.

<sup>14</sup> Noury, 34.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>16</sup> Kors, 11.

genocide. After 1994, 1.2 million Hutus fled to the DRC in fear of the now ruling Tutsis' reprisal. Of these 1.2 million 40,000 were involved in the genocide<sup>17</sup>. The others were simply refugees, who eventually found themselves helpless in a conflict zone. Many of these originally innocent refugees then later turned to violence and joined militia groups as their only means of survival. In 1995, the Congolese ruler Mobutu allowed the fleeing Hutus to enter the country. He used their arrival to instigate aggression towards a Congolese Tutsi tribe, the Banyamulenge. After Mobutu even revoked their citizenship, Rwanda, Uganda, and Burundi invaded the DRC in 1996 as the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (AFDL). They claimed to want to stop the injustice and attacks of the main rebel Hutu group, the FDLR, who had found refuge in the Congo. However, some experts believe minerals resources were the main reason for the invasion. The invading armies toppled the leader Mobutu, who had lost his support from the USA after his usefulness had disappeared along with the end of the Cold War. Laurent Kabila, who ensured the invading countries free access to the natural resources, was placed in his stead. He later retreated from his alliance with the invading nations in a dispute over the distribution of resources. Additionally, Mobutu felt the numerous Tutsi government officials instated by the Rwandan and Ugandan armies strained his legitimacy, as they were strongly overrepresented in relation to the population. In 1998, Rwanda, Uganda, and Burundi reconvened their attack on the DRC. Zimbabwe, Angola, Namibia, Chad, and Sudan join Kabila's side in the Second Congo War.<sup>18</sup> Various rebel and militia groups sprung up, further complicating and destabilizing the situation. A perfect example is the MaiMai, a militia group first supported by Kabila, as the Congolese

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<sup>17</sup> Olsson and Congdon Fors. 324.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 325.

army itself was too weak and unorganized, but which he later lost control over. In 2000, 5,300 UN troops join the complex equation through the MUNOC peacekeeping force<sup>19</sup>.

#### Perpetuation of the Conflict

The war officially ended in 2002, under the agreement that Rwanda and Uganda would recall their troops, while Kabila promised to hunt down and prosecute the FDLR. Elections were held in 2006, and Kabila's son Joseph was appointed President. Kabila himself had been assassinated in 2001. However, fighting continues, as does Rwandan, national, and international exploitation. Despite the official withdrawal of Ugandan and Rwandese troops, some soldiers remained behind to continue the plunder. But with most of the troops gone, a power vacuum appeared, which the national Congolese government was unable to fill. Instead, the Rwandan and Ugandan governments began to fund rebel groups to fight as proxies for their armies. Meanwhile other rebel groups, for example the CNDP, follow their own agenda, also plundering the country. The CNDP, claims its legitimacy in fighting government and UN troops because of the FDLR's continued presence in the country. The presence of these countless rebel groups allows for a violent continuing exploitation of the mineral resources and creates chaos, devastating the local population.

While a ceasefire with 25 rebel groups was established in 2008, fighting continues even now and the rebel groups, especially the FDLR, still wreak havoc. They raid the country, completely uncontrolled by the government. In fact, some experts claim the peace agreement only served to increase the importance of proxy militias and to hide the continuing direct involvement of international countries and agents. Since its beginning in 1996, the deadliness

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<sup>19</sup> Noury, 34.



of the conflict has gone up and down. It has never stopped and the death rate has stayed unchanged since the end of the war<sup>20</sup>.

In November 2011, the DRC again held elections. Three months later, Kabila was deemed the winner by a discredited election committee. The elections were marked by violence and chaos, with at least 33 civilian deaths in the capital Kinshasa.<sup>21</sup> In the south and east of the country, the elections were cancelled due to violence and fraud.<sup>22</sup> Kabila's presidential opponent Tshisekedi, the USA, and European nations all question the election results. Violence and chaos due to the disputed election results persist, as do the ongoing unrests in the war-torn regions in the east of the DRC.

Furthermore, the multinational corporations involved in exploiting the countries resources remain a huge factor in the perpetuation of the conflict. They have economic interests in a continuing war and so fuel the fighting to ensure easy access to their coveted resources. Some experts even go so far as to say they are the "engine of the conflict in the DRC"<sup>23</sup>. Mullins and Rothe claim that "while there are ideological, ethical, and political motivations that drove the occupation and its surrounding violence, the main drive – control of the mineral fields – is underwritten by scores of transnational corporations."<sup>24</sup> These corporations are extremely powerful and worth billions of dollars. Often they have a higher income, and therefore more

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<sup>20</sup> Lydia Polgree, "Congo's Death Rate Unchanged Since War Ended," *The New York Times*, January 23, 2008.

<sup>21</sup> Emmanuel Chaco, "DRC Elections—U.N. Condemns Rights Violations," *InterPress Service*, March 23, 2012.

<sup>22</sup> SAPA, "Kabila's party loses 45% of its seats," *News24*, March 2, 2012.

<sup>23</sup> Noury, 35.

<sup>24</sup> Christopher Mullins and Dawn L. Rothe, "Gold, diamonds and blood: International state-corporate crime in the Democratic Republic of the Congo," *Contemporary Justice Review*, 11 no. 2, (June 2008), 81.

power, than medium to small states.<sup>25</sup> During the AFDL invasion in 1996, they were given the opportunity to secure and use this power in the DRC. Companies such as DeBeers Consolidated Mines Ltd., Anglo-American Corporations, Sominki, Tenke Mining Corporation (a subsidiary of European Consolidated Ventures), Bechtel, American Mineral Fields, and Anvil Mining negotiated with the AFDL during the invasion. Many of them landed lucrative deals. During the occupation of 1998, this pattern continued. In their negotiations with the ADFL the two factions agreed to regard rebel held territory as “de facto sovereign states open for investment in coltan mining resources- even though such commercial transactions were still considered illegal”<sup>26</sup>. The corporations (and Rwandan and Ugandan governments) either directly or indirectly fund rebel factions to continue their exploitation. As a result, it has the potential to be a perpetual self-financing war.

Also, unlike for diamonds, coltan requires no certification process in international law. The country of origin and involvement in a conflict must not be traced by buyers. This means corporations can easily feign ignorance or even simply deny their contribution to the perpetuation of the conflict. This is especially easy, as trading houses are often registered and licensed by the Congolese government and most coltan is also shipped directly to Rwanda and Uganda, from where it is exported into other countries. Foreign firms therefore can claim legitimacy, without tracing the origin of the minerals, nor middlemen<sup>27</sup>.

Since the ADFL invasion, the number of corporations involved in mining in the DRC has risen. It is extremely difficult to name an exact number of companies involved. The UN

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<sup>25</sup> Mullins and Rothe, 86.

<sup>26</sup> Dena Montague, “Stolen Goods,” *SAIS Review*, (Winter-Spring 2002), 106.

<sup>27</sup> Marina Litvinsky, “DR Congo: Firms Fuelling Conflict Minerals,” *Interpress Service*, July 22, 2009.

identified 34 which imported minerals from the DRC via Rwanda<sup>28</sup> while the Global Witness Report named 200 companies that were not trying to stop conflict minerals from entering their supply chain<sup>29</sup>.

As a result of this exploitation of the multinational corporations and neighboring governments, the conflict in the DRC has not ended. Until it does, the Congolese population bears the blunt of the suffering.

#### The Affect of the War on Congo's Population

Sadly, the "Congolese population has received little-if any- benefit from its vast natural resources"<sup>30</sup>. Death, displacement, and destruction are the only tangible results for most of the people in this war torn nation. While exact numbers are impossible to calculate and the death tolls are sometimes considered exaggerated, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) estimates about 5.4 million deaths due to the conflict between 1996-2010. Even worse, 45% of these were children<sup>31</sup>. An additional 45,000 still die each month, even after a peace treaty officially marked the end of the war<sup>32</sup>. In fact, this war can claim the sad superlative of being the deadliest war since World War II.

The risk of becoming a civilian casualty is not the only hardship the Congolese have to bear in this war: one million people have been displaced from their homes<sup>33</sup>. Some have been

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<sup>28</sup> Montague, 112.

<sup>29</sup> Rory Carroll, "Multinationals in Scramble for Congo's Wealth," *The Guardian*, October 22, 2002.

<sup>30</sup> Maria Baaz and Maria Stern, "Why Do Soldiers Rape? Masculinity, Violence, and Sexuality in the Armed Forces in the Congo (DRC)," *International Studies Quarterly* no. 53 (2009), 500.

<sup>31</sup> *Social Education*, "Congo: Elections and the Battle for Mineral Resources," 1, no. 71 (2007), 24+.

<sup>32</sup> Kors, 12.

<sup>33</sup> Muzong Kodi, "Time to Act," *Chatham House*, January (2009), 21.

on the move as refugees since 1996. Rebels and soldiers use rape as a common war tactic, whether their victims are young children or grown women. Their aim is to terrorize communities and individuals as much as possible, hoping they will move, leaving the land free to be mined<sup>34</sup>. In addition, extreme poverty riddles the nation, as it remains one of the poorest countries in the world. The country's wealth in resources flows directly into the pockets of a select few, while the 60 million Congolese bear the blunt of the war. The Democratic Republic of Congo stands 150 out of 174 as regards to per capita annual income and its GDP declined 5.8% per year from 1997 until 2000 and a further 4.1% in 2001<sup>35</sup>. The miners, who work under extremely dangerous conditions, receive less than \$ 1 per kilogram of coltan<sup>36</sup>. Some rebels even use forced labor, not paying the miners anything at all. As a Congolese said, the "civilian is the corn field of the military"<sup>37</sup>, free to be trampled on and used up according to their needs.

Of course the weakest are hit especially hard by the effects of this war. In the Congo, children bear especially horrific hardships. Besides the fact that 70% of children in the affected territories do not go to school at all<sup>38</sup> and children as young as 10 are forced to work in the mines under dangerous conditions<sup>39</sup>, thousands of children are conscripted as child soldiers and are forced to actually fight in the war. In the rebel group Union of Congolese Patriots (UPC) alone, 30 000 children were forced to fight. This comprised 30-40% of the

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<sup>34</sup> Baaz and Stern, 502.

<sup>35</sup> Carole J. L. Collins, "Congo: Revisiting the Looking Glass," *Review of the African Political Economy* 93, no. 29 (Sep 2009), 611.

<sup>36</sup> Sharife, 27.

<sup>37</sup> Baaz and Stern, 502.

<sup>38</sup> Litvinsky, 612.

<sup>39</sup> *Social Education*, 29.

army as a whole<sup>40</sup>. These children are either abducted by rebel groups, handed over by families under tremendous pressure from militias, or given to rebel groups by parents who hoped to ensure basic commodities like food, shelter and clothing for their child's survival. Sadly, because of their inexperience and youth, their casualty rates are much higher than those of adult soldiers. Apart from the physical danger of battle, they also bear unbelievable psychological trauma. They are forced to commit horrible acts, often against their own families and tribes. If they refuse to kill, militias threaten their life. Girls are not exempt from suffering. They are often taken along with the young boys, become soldiers, cooks, porters, or sex slaves. Again, as many as 12, 5000 girls were abducted for this purpose by the UPC alone.

#### Under-reported Conflict

Despite these atrocities, the war in the DRC goes unnoticed in most newspapers. Public awareness about the conflict, its economic and political causes, and its devastating effects on the Congolese population remains extremely low. While coverage is slightly higher in alternative media sources, the mainstream media almost entirely disregards it. In the months preceding the outbreak of violence in the Ituri region in 2003, GoogleNews, which monitors 4 500 news sources, listed only 1 200 stories mentioning the DRC, in comparison to 550 000 stories about Iraq that same day<sup>41</sup>. A slightly more recent study, which monitored the coverage of the conflict in *The Australian* from August 1998 to July 2007, found a total of 134 articles focusing on the conflict or politics of the DRC. In terms of word quantity, this is equal to one month of coverage of the Israel-Palestine in October 2000, six months of coverage

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<sup>40</sup> Debbie Sharnak, "Justice and Moral Responsibility in the Congo," *Eyes on the International Criminal Court*, Jan 1 2007.

<sup>41</sup> Ethan Zuckerman, "Using the Internet to Examine Pattern of Foreign Coverage," *Journalism in Africa*, (Fall 2004), 51.

of conflict in Darfur (starting from April 2004) and one and a half months of coverage concerning the lead up to and elections in Zimbabwe in 2008<sup>42</sup>. Clearly, the DRC is entirely underrepresented, especially if you consider that the conflict is 10 times deadlier than that of Iraq or Darfur and 1000 deadlier than that in Israel-Palestine. While numbers cannot in any way describe human suffering and a higher death rate in one conflict should not demean the suffering in another conflict, it does, however, seem news worthy.

Furthermore, the coverage of the war in the DRC is generally fairly neutral. Most newspaper stories seem to avoid strong, emotional language and personalizing examples of individual suffering. Instead they are generally "short, objective and dispassionate descriptions of relevant incidents and issues," where "refugees, internally displaced people and any relief efforts were almost never mentioned"<sup>43</sup>. Other conflicts in Africa, such as Darfur and Zimbabwe include a much more emotive language. The coverage of these conflicts stresses the humanitarian aspect much more and generally pervades a much stronger sense of alarm<sup>44</sup>. As a result, the reader is more engaged and interested in the conflict. In the case of the DRC, the coverage remains matter-of-fact, neither including personal narratives nor judgment.

#### Reasons for Lack of Media Coverage

This lack of and dispassionate coverage cannot simply be explained by the traditional reasons given for media under-representation. While all of these factors definitely apply and contribute to the phenomenon, they cannot fully explain the inclusion of such conflicts as

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<sup>42</sup> Virgil Hawkins, "National interest or business interest: coverage of conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo in The Australian newspaper," *Media, War & Conflict*, 2 no. 62 (2009), 69.

<sup>43</sup> Hawkins, 71.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 73-74.

Darfur and Zimbabwe, but not the DRC. Instead, political and especially economic factors seem to rule out the DRC from most media sources.

Traditional reasons for exclusion from Western news media (and determinants of selling power) focus on various factors, established by Galtung and Ruge<sup>45</sup>. These include the involvement of non elite nations, the killing of non-elite people, little cultural proximity and meaning to readers in the West, and the expectation of further killings, as it is not a new conflict. Zuckerman also adds complicating news gathering factors, such as language barriers, the remoteness of the area, and a lack of infrastructure. Selling power could also be diminished by the over-saturation or boredom of Western readers with the never ending conflict in Africa, the shadow of the Darfur conflict, and simply racism. In fact, these are the most frequently named explanations for its under-representation in the mainstream media.

While all of these factors are undoubtedly true and would contribute to a low cost-revenue relation, they seem lacking in explanatory power. After all, the conflict in Darfur would produce analogous responses to each of the aforementioned points. Even the conflict in Zimbabwe would rate similarly, though they might arguably have more meaning to British and Australian newspapers due to its status as a former British colony. Therefore these factors, though no doubt important, cannot solely explain the lack of media coverage in the West.

Instead we must consider further political and economic interests. First, news media mirrors the interests of policy makers<sup>46</sup>. It often acts in response to government statements and policies. For example, after the first invasion of the ADFL in 1996, media coverage of the war in the DRC was much higher in the USA than it is now. This was due to statements about the conflict by the press secretary. At the time, President Clinton was up for reelection.

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<sup>45</sup> Zuckerman, 52.

<sup>46</sup> Hawkins, 76.

**Comment [1]:** Examples?

In an attempt to make amends for his inaction during the Rwandan genocide in 1994, Clinton supported the plight the Tutsi refugees and bringing the apparent Hutu rebels to justice. Furthermore, Rwanda and Uganda are strong allies of the USA in Africa today. If the media increased coverage, explained the situation, and perhaps even included personal accounts, this could lead to a harsh criticism of the Rwandan and Ugandan governments- and even that of the USA. After all, throughout the 1990's and at least up to 2000, the US government imported a significant amount of coltan from Rwanda and Uganda, which most likely originated in the DRC<sup>47</sup>. This ties the USA directly to the conflict as a perpetuating factor. Increased news coverage would also require a rewriting of the popular victim/genocidaire narrative of the Hutu-Tutsi conflict and an uncovering of the corruption and human rights violations of those governments, which the USA considers friends and allies. It would furthermore potentially jeopardize policies and plans such as the intended military base in Uganda. I expect it is unlikely they would focus on a story which is so against the US policy interests unless it had an extremely high selling power, which the conflict in the clearly DRC does not.

Furthermore, the multinational corporations involved in the exploitation of the DRC and the perpetuation of the war undoubtedly have an enormous impact on the media coverage of the conflict. Obviously, an exposé of their role in the conflict as funding militia responsible for the deadliest conflict since World War II could be detrimental to their image and business. It could cause a snowballing effect of bad press, consumer action or boycotts, and even international legal action. So it is very much in the interest of these multinational corporations to keep the conflict out of the public eye. It seems reasonable to assume that they would lobby both governments and the media to keep this story away from the mainstream media. Additionally, many high executives in media conglomerates have strong business interests

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<sup>47</sup> Montague, 114.



and political connections with other companies, which might be damaged in the process. For example, the fact that Rupert Murdoch, a neo-conservative with such aforementioned interests, owns *The Australian* is surely not unrelated to its disregard of the DRC's story<sup>48</sup>.

Considering these political and economic interests, it is not a huge surprise that the media coverage of the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo remains low. Both the policy interests of governments, as well as the business interests of the multinational corporations hinder a broad presence in the news media.

#### A Ray of Hope?

Despite the dire situation, recent developments suggest that a more hopeful future is possible. Both policies and awareness are on the rise, though slowly.

There are various awareness groups dedicated either entirely to the DRC or devote significant part of their work to advocacy of this conflict. Such groups include Falling Whistles, Global Witness, and the RAISE Hope for Congo campaign. The RAISE Hope for Congo campaign also aims to end the war over conflict minerals. For example, as a subdivision of the Enough project, which aims to stop and prevent genocide, RAISE Hope for Congo works with both Congolese and international organizations, like Amnesty International or "Actions for the Welfare of Women and Children in Kivu." The campaign mainly focuses on sexual violence towards women and girls in the conflict. It aims to "protect and empower" them through the help of grassroots establishments and international organizations. It also seeks to increase the presence of the conflict in the media, offering individuals information and a number of possibilities to get involved<sup>49</sup>. The work of these groups and the increasing

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<sup>48</sup> Hawkins, 81.

<sup>49</sup> Raise Hope For Congo: About the Campaign. *Enough Campaign*. Available from <http://www.raisehopeforcongo.org/content/about/about-the-campaign>. Internet; accessed November 7, 2010.

awareness of these causes might at least lessen the gap left by the lack of media coverage. Knowledge of the conflict is slowly on the rise in the public eye, causing pressure on policy makers and companies involved.

Furthermore, governments and multilateral institutions have also increased their policy actions on the DRC. For example, the US senate passed the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Act of 2010<sup>50</sup> in May 2009 that includes six page section about conflict minerals<sup>50</sup>. It means to ensure that companies comply with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) and find out where their minerals are from. Minerals covered by this documents include coltan (columbite tantalite), cassiterite (tin), wolframite (tantalum), and gold. Though some criticize this legislation for actually causing more harm than good by lowering the market value of these minerals, making survival for small scale miners harder and import for nations like China more profitable, it is still an important sign. The superpower took action, despite aforementioned policy interests, and set a precedent. This could lead other nations to follow suit and might be the first step towards the creation of international legislation along the lines of the Kimberly Process for conflict diamonds. The UN chose a panel of experts to investigate the exploitation of resources in the DRC<sup>51</sup> while the EU appointed a representative to review the case and trade of conflict minerals<sup>52</sup>. International policy action is clearly increasing and will hopefully continue to do so.

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<sup>50</sup>Andrew K. Reese, "'Blood Minerals' in the Supply Chain," *Supply and Demand Executive*, (August 2010), 8.

<sup>51</sup> Daniel Leader, "Business and Human Rights: Time to Hold Companies to Account," *International Criminal Law Review*, 8 (2008), 447.

<sup>52</sup> Reese, 8.

Overall, the conflict in Congo and conflict minerals are stirring more and more awareness and international interest. However, this trend needs to continue and strengthen if real change is to come about.

#### Ending the Conflict

The conflict in the DRC is extremely complex, with innumerable factors, historical developments, and international actors. A solution to the conflict must therefore encompass multiple approaches.

First, coverage in the Western media could greatly increase the reactivity of the public. An uninformed public cannot hold its governments accountable for its inaction, nor can uninformed consumers or shareholders influence the policies of the multinational companies. However, this media is unlikely to change this situation by itself. Reporting a story that goes against the news corporations economic and nations political policy without the promise of a high revenue is not going to make it onto the front page. Therefore it will be the role of advocacy groups to bring attention to this war.

Second, exploitation needs to stop for any chance of political stability to become reality. With multiple parties involved in the plunder, this step alone will require many different approaches. A strong UN force needs to ensure the safety of civilians, as the Congolese population has no faith in the rattled and often times corrupt Congolese army. While the UN protect the population for the time being, the Congolese army needs to be trained, reformed, and structured<sup>53</sup>. By training them properly and ensuring steady pay, they will not need to exploit the land or people, enabling the population to rebuild the trust they have lost. Two other crucial actors are the Rwandan and Ugandan governments. To put an end to the war, they need to stop funding rebel groups. Though rather an obvious cause, it

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<sup>53</sup> Kodi, 21.

remains a difficult aspect to solve. The Rwandan and Ugandan governments are making millions through the smuggle and exportation of minerals. Making them stop requires either a strong incentive or a lot of pressure. An incentive capable of substituting that much of an income hardly exists and international pressure, spearheaded by the USA, also seems unlikely. As Uganda and Rwanda are the closest allies of the USA in Africa, pressuring them to stop funding the rebels not in the interest of US foreign policy – or a very touchy subject at the least. However, if the advocacy movement became large enough, the USA, Rwanda and Uganda would have to cave under the pressure. So hope remains that with enough public awareness, this goal could still be achieved. Additionally, companies like Apple, Intel, and other manufacturers need to stop buying conflict minerals. Both consumer demands and government policies, like the Frank-Dodd Act, can contribute to this goal. Though the Frank-Dodd Act might have set this in motion, international legislation along the lines of the Kimberly Process for conflict diamonds does not yet exist. This hole needs to be filled, as it strengthens national policies and can prevent other countries from simply stepping in and buying conflict minerals for the lower price which the decreasing demand for conflict minerals creates. Lastly, the smaller scale exploitation and smuggling must stop. The land and natural resource distribution must be clarified through negotiations<sup>54</sup>. There needs to be a military control of the air strips and border areas from which minerals are currently smuggled to prevent any rebels or even small scale smugglers from continuing their illegal activities. As long as the smuggle of minerals continues, so will the war. Stopping the steady flow of resources from rebel hands into Rwanda and Uganda would weaken the corrupt system.

Finally, the people responsible for the abhorrent war crimes and human rights violation committed in the Congo need to be punished<sup>55</sup>. Without the prosecution of those

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<sup>54</sup> Kodi, 23.

<sup>55</sup> Sharnak.

responsible, corruption and terror in the government will continue. The message that murder, corruption, and pillaging are not acceptable in a democratic society needs to be established. The government must instate and commit to zero-tolerance policy on corruption. One way to implement such change could require all government officials to declare their assets and business interests when entering and leaving office.<sup>56</sup> The multinational corporations must, of course, also be held accountable. International human rights law applies to the DRC and under "The Norms on the Responsibilities of Transnational Corporations and Other Business Enterprises with Regard to Human Rights," multinational corporations that violate human rights can fall under the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court of the United Nations.<sup>57</sup> The UN needs to make use of this power, hold corporations accountable, and set a precedent. Some corporations might also fall under the jurisdiction of single nations, in which case they should also make use of this power. Furthermore, not just the top officials, but also those rebels who directly committed crimes must be held accountable. Otherwise the rule of law will not take hold. If the belief that "unimportant" people can escape the grasp of the law began to pervade the Congolese society, chaos, corruption and looting will continue. If the Congolese judiciary system is not secure and organized enough to hold these trials yet, truth commissions of the United Nations could be established.

To end this war and build a stable continuing government, many things have to come together. A situation as complex as this requires international, regional, and national action before a lasting peace can prevail. Home governments and the United Nations need to hold multinational corporations, as well as political leaders and grassroots perpetrators accountable for their crimes and participation in the conflict. The claims to the mineral rich lands need to be clarified as well, in order to prevent further conflict. Until all those involved take these steps and involvement in the West increases, an end to the war remains a distant dream.

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<sup>56</sup> Lalji, 37.

<sup>57</sup> Mullins and Rothe, 86.

### Conclusion

Greed, aggression, and western apathy allow for a continuation of Africa's World War. The seesaw of development and exploitation swing in favor of the west, as usual. While our high-tech industry booms, with devices getting more efficient and new innovations flooding our markets incessantly, easily exploited countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo bear the brunt of our progress. This injustice is not a new one. The people of Congo have borne their fate for the last one and a half centuries. Whether rubber or coltan, the people suffer from what should be a blessed abundance of natural riches. But of course they do not. Rape, slaughter, pillaging, and trauma are as commonplace to them as iPods are to us. The Democratic Republic of the Congo suffered from the resource curse ever since the Western powers discovered its natural wealth. Governments and multinational corporations are driving factors behind this war and yet, our media reports little of it. The economic and political powers that be stem the information to protect their interests. An ignorant public can and do little about this situation. Therefore only a combination of policies and awareness can create sustainable change.

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