

The Democratic Republic of Congo's Economic War:  
Investigating the Origin of Anonymous Commodities in the Global Capitalist System

*"Since the 19th century, when the world looks at Congo it sees a pile of riches with some black people inconveniently sitting on top of them. They eradicate the Congolese people so they can possess the mines and resources. They destroy us because we are an inconvenience." As he speaks, I picture the raped women with bullets burying through their intestines and try to weigh them against the piles of blood-soaked electronic goods sitting beneath my Christmas tree with their little chunks of Congolese metal whirring inside. Bertrand smiles and says, "Tell me, who are the savages? Us, or you?"*

-Johann Hari

"Congo's Tragedy, the War the World Forgot"

In Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, first published in 1899 and years later subject to a polemical but much-needed critique by one of Africa's most prolific writers, King Leopold's colonial project in the Congo is described as "the vilest scramble for loot that ever disfigured the history of human conscience."<sup>1</sup> More than a century later, after a protracted war in which an estimated 4.2 million citizens perished and the nation's stability was invested in the UN's largest peacekeeping force to date, Conrad's oft-repeated phrase is, tragically, just as pertinent.<sup>2</sup> Yet despite such baffling statistics, the Congo receives only cursory attention in the international media. When Western news analysts do find something of relevance to disseminate to their audiences, it remains unknowingly tainted by the same discourse which animated the historical narratives of European travelers and writers such as Conrad, seeking to project an image of this other world as antithetical in its "triumphant bestiality" to civilized European society.<sup>3</sup> To be sure, Conrad's writings carry overtly racist descriptions considered unacceptable today, but the simple act of using the title "Heart of

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, (New York, 1999), 79.

<sup>2</sup> Oxfam International, "Congo-Kinshasa: Scaling Down the UN Peacekeeping Force in Congo Could Prolong the Humanitarian Crisis, Oxfam Warns," February 15 2007, <<http://allafrica.com/stories/200702160347.html>>

<sup>3</sup> Chinua Achebe, *An Image of Africa; Racism in Conrad's "Heart of Darkness,"* *Massachusetts Review*, 1977, <<http://social.chass.ncsu.edu/wyrick/debclass/achcon.htm>>

Darkness” to describe the Congo war, as one American news report did in January 2002, perpetuates historical representations of the Congo as “inherently chaotic and irrational” and guarantees that western observers, worlds away from the daily suffering of the people on their television screens, will dismiss acts of violence as “lacking in political rationale.”<sup>4</sup> With the purpose of rectifying common misrepresentations which by virtue of their carelessness are responsible for enacting a double violence in addition to the more palpable forms of violence enacted against the people of the Congo, this paper attempts to provide a more accurate depiction of the second Congo war which began in 1998 and which has been described as the deadliest since World War II.<sup>5</sup> The very first step in redressing the errors of representation concerns the terminology employed when referring to the Congo war. To describe the Congo war as a “civil war” is not only erroneous but also irresponsible. The connection between American news observers and acts of grotesque violence taking place in the DRC is more direct than most acknowledge; the Congo war was an international war in which legitimate and illegitimate actors alike, neighboring African states, rebel groups, multinational companies and western consumers contributed to the creation of an “alternative system of profit” from the country’s abundant and lucrative natural resources.<sup>6</sup>

A variety of resources abound in Africa. In 1979, the continent was responsible for 80 per cent of the world’s gold production, 75 per cent of its diamonds, and large quantities of antimony, manganese, chrome, copper, cobalt, coltan, uranium and petroleum.<sup>7</sup> Large quantities of these resources are found in the Central African region, specifically in the

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<sup>4</sup> Kevin C Dunn, *Imagining the Congo: The International Relations of Identity* (New York, 2003), 5.

<sup>5</sup> International Rescue Committee, “The Congo Crisis at a Glance: the Forgotten Emergency,” <http://www.theirc.org/what/page-27814363.html?foo=/what/page.jsp>

<sup>6</sup> Cynthia J. Arnson, “The Political Economy of War: Situating the Debate,” in *Rethinking the Economics of War: The Intersection of Need, Creed and Greed*, (Washington, 2005), 3.

<sup>7</sup> Greg Lanning and Marti Mueller, *Africa Undermined: Mining Companies and the Underdevelopment of Africa*, (Middlesex, 1979), 19.

Democratic Republic of the Congo, an enormous swathe of land the size of Western Europe.<sup>8</sup> 15 per cent of the world's niobium reserves and 80 per cent of its tantalum reserves are found in Africa, and of this quantity, the Congo contains 60 per cent of the niobium deposits and 80 per cent of the tantalum.<sup>9</sup> It is estimated that some \$6 million in raw cobalt alone exits the DRC daily.<sup>10</sup> In 2004, during the second Congo war, another cobalt ore, heterogenite, was departing the DRC at a rate of 6 000 tons per month.<sup>11</sup> The abundance of natural resources in the Congo has been the primary factor influencing the country's turbulent past and the profitability of resource extraction for the disparate actors involved in the war was responsible for perpetuating the 6-year conflict. Failure to adequately address and analyze the economic causes of the second Congo war is therefore little short of outrageous. Unfortunately, the problem of insufficient analysis of the causes and determinants of the Congo war is not restricted solely to the realm of media, but also includes scholarly explanations of the war that more often than not are suffused with familiar terminology borrowed from the discipline of political science which become unduly preoccupied with theoretical explanations of "state behavior," "political order" and the like. Denis M Tull in his book *The Reconfiguration of Political Order in Africa: A Case Study of North Kivu* claims that in fact, hardly any other issue concerning the conflict in the DRC has attracted more attention by academics, the media and the wider public than the "interplay of violence and economics," but if one peruses the limited literature on the second war in the DRC, it is clear that the explanations are found wanting.<sup>12</sup> Even among the best literature on the Congo

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<sup>8</sup> The total area of the DRC is 2,345,410 sq km. CIA World Fact Book  
<<https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/cg.html>>

<sup>9</sup> Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja, *The Congo: From Leopold to Kabila: a People's History*, (London, New York, 2002).

<sup>10</sup> Keith Harmon Snow and David Barouski, "Suffering in the Congo: Behind the Numbers," *Z Magazine* Online, July-August 2006, <<http://zmagsite.zmag.org/JulAug2006/snow0706.html>>

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Denis M. Tull, *The Reconfiguration of Political Order in Africa: A Case Study of North Kivu (DR Congo)*, (Hamburg, 2005), 160.

war, one finds that habitual academic detachment which expresses itself in the form of “fascination” with the “postcolonial traumas” afflicting the DRC.<sup>13</sup> This is not to say that most academic works to date have failed to provide thorough explanations of the political causes and consequences of the Congo war, but that the most neglected feature of the war, namely the importance of natural resources, is the one which might best expose the motivations of the numerous actors in the war to continue engaging in conflict.

In no way does the fact of placing the onus for the war on the lucrative resource extraction industry and its respective actors minimize the historical political precedents to the Congo war, but these political factors cannot be divorced from economic determinants. This paper will therefore provide an analysis of the way in which Congo’s resources heralded an age of mass exploitation beginning with the reign of Leopold II of Belgium whose brutal practices resulted in 5 to 8 million deaths from murder, starvation, exhaustion and disease.<sup>14</sup> It will go on to examine the transference of power from the hands of King Leopold II to the multinational companies operating in the Congo during Belgian colonialism and subsequently, during the rule of Mobutu. The main body of the paper will diverge from historical analyses to examine the mass appropriation of resources during the Congo war by the many disparate actors aforementioned and the ways in which they interacted to advance an effective economic agenda. Those who attempt to analyze 20<sup>th</sup> century civil wars of African countries in possession of lucrative mineral resources without adequately addressing the relationship between violence and profit are committing a gross act of injustice. It is my fervent hope that in addressing this issue, this paper will succeed in exposing the tyranny of

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<sup>13</sup> John F. Clark, “Introduction; Causes and Consequences of the Congo War,” in *the African Stakes of the Congo War*, Ed John F. Clark, (New York, 2002).

<sup>14</sup> Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold’s Ghost: a Story of Greed, Terror and Heroism in Colonial Africa*, (Boston, 1999), 3.

modern capitalism in an increasingly integrated global economy and its role in eroding both the sovereignty of independent nations and the dignity of human individuals.

### I. Resource Exploitation in the Democratic Republic of Congo Prior to the Civil War

#### The Most Profitable Colony in Africa: Leopold II and Belgian Colonialism

If one attempted to conceptualize the loss of sovereignty experienced by the people of the Democratic Republic of Congo over the course of more than a century, the starting point would perhaps be a day in the year 1885 when the state of the Congo was first proclaimed the personal possession of King Leopold II of Belgium. On that day, all “vacant land,” was declared the property of the state.<sup>15</sup> Vast swathes of the country’s territory, including a number of inhabited villages were leased out to private companies whose shareholders were for the most part Belgian, but over 50 per cent of the profits went directly into the hands of the King.<sup>16</sup> His profit making enterprise involved seizing as much ivory as possible from ivory raids, buying tusks from villagers or direct confiscation. Africans were often forced at gunpoint to accept extremely low prices in exchange for the ivory in their possession and tens of thousands of porters, carrying everything from ammunition to red wine on the road which brought ivory supplies from the interior to the sea, endured weeks of hunger and fatigue before perishing of exhaustion at the end of the voyages.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Hochschild, 117.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 119-120.

Even more appalling in its brutality than the ivory raids was the establishment of a highly profitable wild rubber industry which arose in the 1890s when the industrial world was developing an appetite for hoses, tubing, and rubber insulation for the telegraph, the telephone and electrical wiring.<sup>18</sup> Increasing competition from the cultivation of rubber in Latin America and Asia acted as a further impetus to the development of the rubber industry in the Congo.<sup>19</sup> The sole requirement for harvesting enormous quantities of rubber was labour, but as writer Adam Hochschild notes, labour could not be obtained through enslavement since it required adept skills for arduous, painful work.<sup>20</sup> The system of collection instituted therefore required each man in a village to collect about 3 to 4 kilos of dried rubber per fortnight which meant full-time labour.<sup>21</sup> If a village refused to provide rubber, its inhabitants would either be shot or have their hands cut off. Soldiers returned to their officials with baskets of hands or heads indicating the number of people killed.<sup>22</sup>

By the turn of the century, the Congo was producing more than eleven million pounds of rubber a year and it was the most profitable colony in Africa, with total rubber earnings increasing by 96 times from 1890 to 1904.<sup>23</sup> Of these proceeds, a significant portion went to companies such as the Compagnie du Kasai and the Anglo-Belgian India Rubber and Exploration Company (ABIR) which invested 1.35 francs per kilo for harvesting, and sold it in Antwerp for 10 francs per kilo, a profit of more than 700 per cent.<sup>24</sup> In order to guarantee such high profits, the company ABIR in 1900 sent 159 firearms and 40 355 rounds of ammunition to a single rubber-collecting post out of the 35 existing ones to suppress

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 159.

<sup>19</sup> Hochschild, 159.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 161.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 163.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 166.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 172, 160.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 160.

rebellions against rubber-collecting.<sup>25</sup> Of the money that went directly to King Leopold, a large part was invested in the development of public works and urban improvement in the country of Belgium. Today, the enthusiastic tourist can visit monuments and public works whose establishment was accompanied by a massacre of holocaust proportions. The Arcade du Cinquantenaire in Brussels, the Tervuren Museum, public works at Ostend, and extensions to the Royal Palace were all funded by the Congo Free State.<sup>26</sup>

With the transfer of the Congo Free State colony from the private possession of the Belgian king to the Belgian government after 1908, the brutal massacres abated but the economic structure of the country remained intact. The country continued to finance the development of the Belgian metropolis, and with time, the development of other European countries. Its very existence, like most African territories under colonialism, was completely oriented toward the development of the industrialized world. So profitable was the colony that during World War Two, the Belgian government in London was in a position to expend 40 million pounds on its armed forces in Europe and Africa as well as on diplomatic service and related expenditures without having to extract any money from the Belgian gold reserve.<sup>27</sup> Some of the tasks performed by the Congolese during this time included the same tasks performed under Leopold, such as rubber collecting and portage.<sup>28</sup> Economically, the country came to occupy an increasingly significant niche in the international economy, expanding away from the development of the little nation of Belgium to contribute to more ambitious projects such as the development of the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki which were made from Congolese high-quality uranium.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 227.

<sup>26</sup> Nzongola-Ntalaja, 23.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 29.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Aljazeera, "Congo Official in Uranium Scandal," Friday March 9, 2007.

<<http://english.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/4AB66EBF-5ED4-4639-8F34-691B7E9D3B8D.htm>>

The most efficacious method to ensure that the Belgian Congo would yield profits as high as under Leopold entailed giving more autonomy to the companies established shortly before the transfer of power occurred in 1908. Such companies included Union Minière du Haut-Katanga (UMHK), described by Nzongola-Ntalaja as the “the giant mining company and the single most important business enterprise in the Congo’s economy.”<sup>30</sup> Established in 1906, with direct ties to the royal family, this company owned the Shinkolobwe mine that provided uranium for the making of the atomic bombs.<sup>31</sup> Others were involved in mineral and timber exploitation, especially in Katanga, one of the most economically strategic regions of the country where the second largest company after Union Minière, the Compagnie du Chemin de Fer du Bas-Congo au Katanga (BCK) began constructing a railroad to transfer minerals from mining centres to international ports in Congo, Angola and Mozambique.<sup>32</sup> Mineral exploitation was not restricted to Belgian companies, but included British involvement through the company Tanganyika Concessions Limited (TCL) which held 14.5 per cent of shares in the UMHK.<sup>33</sup> 48 per cent of these shares belonged to British banks such as Barclays, Midland, Bearing and Rothschild. American and German interests, while limited, developed later in the form of investments in the colonial company Compagnie du Congo pour le Commerce et l’Industrie (CCCI), established in 1887 for the purpose of constructing the lower Congo railroad.<sup>34</sup>

With the proliferation of these companies the economy was re-directed from rubber extraction to other forms of mineral wealth. Before World War One, rubber and ivory extraction comprised 96 per cent of exports from the Belgian Congo; by 1926, mineral

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<sup>30</sup> Nzongola-Ntalaja, 29. Union Minière came to be the third largest copper producer in the world under Belgian colonialism. Lanning and Mueller, 64.

<sup>31</sup> Nzongola-Ntalaja, 29-30.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 30.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 30.

exports constituted 61 per cent of total exports.<sup>35</sup> Copper production began in 1911, diamond mining in 1913, tin in 1918, and uranium and radium mining in 1922.<sup>36</sup> By 1932 the country had attracted more than 100 million pounds of foreign capital, 56 per cent of which was controlled by the Belgian company Société Générale, which itself controlled Union Minière.<sup>37</sup> Already by 1929 the company Union Minière was producing 140 000 tons of copper per year and copper accounted for 50 per cent of the Congo's exports, 7 per cent of total world copper production.<sup>38</sup> The company was the biggest single employer of Congolese labour, functioning in much the same way as had ABIR during the time of King Leopold. Authors Greg Lanning and Marti Mueller claim that the mining companies which grew progressively stronger in the colonial period acted as independent entities "only tenuously connected to the colonial administration," with Union Minière virtually ruling the copper-rich Katanga province. In total, 61 per cent of capital invested in the Belgian Congo was linked to the development of the country's mineral resources.<sup>39</sup>

Also during Belgian colonial rule, companies representing the interests of other European countries became increasingly involved in extraction activities. Although these companies functioned relatively independently of the colonial administration, their interests were in no way divorced from the financial concerns of the countries where they were based. The early "internationalization" of the Congo through the proliferation of British, German and Belgian companies is testimony to the country's enormous economic potential.<sup>40</sup> One author has argued that this internationalization explains the upheavals which occurred during Congo's independence in 1960 including the political chaos which emerged in Katanga

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<sup>35</sup> Lanning and Mueller, 74.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Lanning and Mueller, 64.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 65.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 71.

<sup>40</sup> Nzongola-Ntalaja, 32.

province when secessionists, Union Minière, and Europeans with capital investments in the mineral-rich province favored the separation of the region from the country at large in order to sustain its autonomy.<sup>41</sup> As the following pages will demonstrate, the multiplication of numerous interests expanded long after colonialism came to an end.

### Scramble After Independence: The Cold War Years and Mobutu

After independence in 1960, the vast territory of the Congo was subject to a new scramble for resources which led to further internationalization of the region. Manning and Mueller claim that the 1950s just prior to independence was the “heyday of mining companies in Africa” when a “great wave of exploration swept across the continent” and mineral companies discovered huge reserves of unexploited bauxite, iron ore, copper and other lucrative resources.<sup>42</sup> American interests in the Congo in particular had become more pronounced following the end of the Second World War which coincided with the rise of America’s military-industrial complex and its determination to assume control of strategic mineral resources.<sup>43</sup> In the escalating tensions of the Cold War, President Dwight Eisenhower, acknowledged in his 1952 presidential campaign the vital importance of the Congo’s position in the international economy, stating that “whoever controls Belgian Congo will control the rest of the continent.”<sup>44</sup> Exaggerating anxieties that the country would incline toward the Communist side in the Cold War struggle for power after its independence from Belgian, and determined to gain access to the country’s mineral wealth, the American government backed the assassination of democratically–elected Prime Minister Patrice

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<sup>41</sup> Auguste Maurel, *Le Congo*: (Paris, 1962); Jermaine O. McCalpin, “Historicity of a Crisis: the Origins of the Congo War,” in *the African Stakes of the Congo War*, Ed John F. Clark, (New York, 2002) 39; Lanning and Mueller, 89.

<sup>42</sup> Lanning and Mueller, 87.

<sup>43</sup> Osita G Afoaku, *Explaining the Failure of Democracy in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: Autocracy and Dissent in an Ambivalent World*, (Lewiston; New York, 2005), 63.

<sup>44</sup> Wambia Dia Wamba, “Open Letter to Americans,” *Congo Crisis*, June 4, 1999  
<<http://www.dac.neu.edu/congocrisis/ltr-americans.html>>

Lumumba and helped install Mobutu Sese Seko as president, one of the most corrupt African leaders who ruled from 1964 to 1997 and eventually drove the country to economic collapse.<sup>45</sup> Assassinating Lumumba was also in the interests of Belgian private interest groups who feared the nationalization of the UMHK under a newly elected democratic government.<sup>46</sup>

The official proclamation of independence in 1960 in no way meant that the country had gained sovereignty over its territory. Even Mobutu's attempts to provide his country with the opportunity to become the "architect of its own destiny," in the early years of independence, by instituting the Bakajika law of 1966 to enable the state to gain control of all land and mineral rights, and by transforming UMHK in 1967 into a nationalized company, Générale des Carrières et des Mines (Gécamines) were met with swift reprisals.<sup>47</sup> The Belgian government immediately imposed an embargo on copper imports from the DRC and sought the cooperation of other European countries in imposing economic sanctions.<sup>48</sup> The result was a compromise which consolidated foreign dominance over the mining industry as Mobutu granted full compensation, management, processing and marketing contracts to a sister company of the UMHK, the Société Générale des Minerais.<sup>49</sup> The latter company was to take care of all the servicing required for the operation of the nationalized company, including employment of personnel, and industrial and commercial management of the company.<sup>50</sup> This incident in the turbulent history of the Congo demonstrates to what extent governing elites in the post-colonial period became simple intermediaries between resources and international mining companies ardent to gain strategic economic control over the

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<sup>45</sup> Author David Gibbs, argues that Soviet involvement in Zaire was brief and overrated as a political threat. David N Gibbs, *the Political Economy of Third World Intervention: Mines, Money and the US policy in the Congo Crisis*, (Chicago, 1991).

<sup>46</sup> Afoaku, 64.

<sup>47</sup> Nzongola-Ntalaja, 147. Lanning and Mueller, 246.

<sup>48</sup> Nzongola-Ntalaja, 147.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 148.

<sup>50</sup> Lanning and Mueller, 248.

region.<sup>51</sup> Throughout the 1970s, American and European companies extracted tens of millions of dollars worth of minerals, the revenues of which were funneled directly into Mobutu's private Swiss bank accounts.<sup>52</sup> The Congo's wealth, as Timothy Longman succinctly states, "helped to prop up the Mobutu regime long after it had lost public support."<sup>53</sup>

The highly lucrative extractive enterprise initiated under Leopold II was not discontinued with the arrival of Congo's independence. The type and process of extraction were altered, but fundamentally, the new pro-Western Congolese government continued to operate "under the old economic and administrative structures."<sup>54</sup> Toward the end of the twentieth century, the Congolese economy was tailored specifically to serve foreign economic interests which had effectively replaced Belgian monopoly over the country. The absence of a strong political culture espousing sovereignty and democracy was testimony to the "political decline" and foreign economic domination which characterized the three decades of Zaire's independence.<sup>55</sup> In 1997, the end of the Mobutu years heralded a new era in the history of the country, a particularly brutal war, and a new president in the form of Laurent Kabila, leader of the rebel groups Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire, (ADFL).<sup>56</sup> The remaining pages are devoted to examining the second Congo war which emerged as a product of the historical precedents described above.

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 96.

<sup>52</sup> Blain Harden, *Africa; Dispatches from a Fragile Continent*, (New York, 1990), 51.

<sup>53</sup> Timothy Longman, "The Complex Reasons for Rwanda's Engagement in the Congo," in *The African Stakes of the Congo War*, Ed John F. Clark, (New York, 2002), 136.

<sup>54</sup> Afoaku, 64.

<sup>55</sup> McCalpin, 46.

<sup>56</sup> Wm Cyrus Reed, "Guerrillas in the Mist," in *African Guerrillas*, Ed. Christopher Clapham, (Oxford, Kampala, Bloomington, 1998), 134.

## II. The Second Congo War; an “Alternative System of Profit”

### Precedents to the War

Although the Second Congo War cannot be properly understood without clarifying the causes and effects of the First Congo War, it is not within the scope of this paper to provide a proper and thorough analysis of the initial war which arose in the aftermath of the 1994 Rwandan genocide, when the Former Government of Rwanda, having fled the country, re-established administrative control over an estimated two million Rwandan refugees within the borders of the DRC.<sup>57</sup> What is noteworthy about the first war is the speed with which the Congolese rebel group ADFL, backed by Uganda, Rwanda and Angola, was able to seize control of the mineral-rich areas of Shaba (formerly Katanga), eastern Zaire, Kasai and Kivu.<sup>58</sup> The ADFL initiated a rebellion in early 1996 and by May 1997, its journey from the eastern peripheral regions of the country to the capital was complete. Mobutu fled to Morocco and Laurent Kabila declared himself president of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, inheriting an external debt of \$14 billion and a formal economy which had shrunk by over 40 per cent from 1988 to 1995.<sup>59</sup>

The rebellion demonstrated that mineral-abundant regions had developed autonomy from Kinshasa, largely as a result of the predominance of mineral extraction of the type described in previous pages, where giant mining consortiums exploited rich mineral fields in disparate regions of the country over the course of a century. The rebellion was also a consequence of state collapse under Mobutu, which enabled a “web of complex power relations” to prevail in peripheral regions in the absence of proper state sovereignty, but this

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<sup>57</sup> Reed, 134.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 146.

<sup>59</sup> McCalpin, 45, Dunn, *Imagining the Congo*, 140.

in turn was provoked and aided by the supremacy of foreign interests long after colonialism had ended.<sup>60</sup>

Interestingly, although Kabila considered himself a revolutionary, liberating the country from the cancerous and stagnating rule of Mobutu, his personal desire to maintain power was no different from Mobutu's, and in the years to come he consolidated rather than dissolved the economic structure in place which gave a free hand to those who wished to continue appropriating the country's resources. If anything, a reciprocal relationship emerged between the rebel leader and foreign exploitative mining companies; Kabila recognized the importance of resource extraction to the success of his insurgency even before taking control of Kinshasa. In April 1997, he allegedly signed contracts with De Beers, a South African diamond conglomerate which for years had enjoyed monopoly access to Congo's diamond fields under Mobutu, and with American Mineral Fields and Canadian-owned Tenke Mining Corporation, the latter eager to gain access to copper and cobalt reserves in Shaba province.<sup>61</sup> Tenke was also given permission to buy diamonds in Kisangani, in return for supplying Kabila with cash and a jet for his private associates.<sup>62</sup>

In addition to the companies, the American government, initially responsible for installing Mobutu in power, was one of the Kabila's staunchest supporters. During the rebellion, an American diplomat and an ambassador frequently visited Kabila when the rebels were preparing to expand their regional insurgency with the aim of overthrowing Mobutu.<sup>63</sup> When Kabila assumed power, the American government, in their unwavering support for both the Rwandan and the new Congolese government, went so far as to distort

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<sup>60</sup> Dunn, *Imagining the Congo*, 140.

<sup>61</sup> Reed, 151; John E Peck, "Re militarizing Africa for Corporate Profit," *Z-Magazine* online, <<http://www.zmag.org/zmag/oct00peck.htm>>; Kevin C Dunn, "A Survival Guide to Kinshasa: Lessons of the Father Passed Down to the Son," in *the African Stakes of the Congo War*, Ed John F. Clark, (New York, 2002) 59.

<sup>62</sup> William Reno, *Warlord Politics and African States*, (London, 1998) 174-275.

<sup>63</sup> Kevin C Dunn, "A Survival Guide to Kinshasa," 58.

the number of refugees still remaining in Zaire, and instructed Kabila not to cooperate with UN investigations of the massacres of Hutu refugees during the ADFL rebellion.<sup>64</sup> This sudden transfer of political support from Mobutu to Kabila on the part of mining companies and Western governments clearly indicates that economic incentives took precedence over concerns with democratic political legitimacy: Western countries supported a kleptocratic state under Mobutu until he was no longer useful after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. Thereafter, a more promising leader emerged who espoused a “free market” approach in favor of the interests of mining companies and Western governments alike.<sup>65</sup>

Soon after taking power, Kabila’s monopolization of power, frequent use of political repression, and final decision to distance himself from the external support of the Ugandan and Rwandan governments that were responsible for his victory in the first place led to an invasion orchestrated by Rwanda and Uganda in eastern Congo.<sup>66</sup> In response, Kabila garnered support from Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe, and convinced the government of the Central African Republic to grant his troops access to its territory.<sup>67</sup> As the war escalated, the vested interests of the intervening countries grew until the war became not only profitable but also necessary for the various participants.

#### Regional Interests: Economic or Political?

Among the participants in the war whose primary motives are said to be political in nature include the governments of Angola, Rwanda and Uganda. It is worth considering the various interpretations which examine political motives for the rebellion, for even if

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<sup>64</sup> Kevin C Dunn, “A Survival Guide to Kinshasa,” 59.

<sup>65</sup> Reno, 176.

<sup>66</sup> Dunn, “A Survival Guide to Kinshasa,” 62.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 63-64.

economic incentives took precedence over political motivations, simplistic analyses limited solely to the economic domain preclude a nuanced understanding of the entire conflict.<sup>68</sup>

Angola entered the war for the same reason it intervened in the 1996-1997 war: to defend itself against Jonas Savimbi's rebel movement, the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) which had suspected ties to Rwanda and Uganda, and to maintain a regime favorable to its interests in Kinshasa.<sup>69</sup> The Angolan government's support for President Laurent Kabila came secondary to its internal political motivations and on two documented occasions, the government welcomed, if not ordered, the removal of Kabila.<sup>70</sup>

It is widely held that Uganda and Rwanda initiated the rebellion with the aim of deposing Kabila and enforcing border security and by August 1998, their rebels had seized control of Goma, Bukavu, Uvira and the lucrative city of Kisangani.<sup>71</sup> However, in the absence of a cohesive political ideology or interest uniting the various anti-Kabila rebels, the Congolese anti-Kabila Movement Rassemblement Congolaise pour la Democratie (RCD) as well as the Uganda-Rwanda alliance fragmented in the early stages of rebellion and the war was prolonged for eight years in a climate which precluded a definitive justification for any declared initial motives.<sup>72</sup> Political fragmentation even occurred within military contingents. In the Ugandan People's Defense Forces (UPDF), Ugandan soldiers were accused of taking sides with Hema communities against Lendu rivals, which alienated the Ugandan army from the Congolese a faction that had formed from the RCD aforementioned. Uganda's failure to

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<sup>68</sup> A thorough analysis of the precise political considerations of each country and the role of the South African government will not be attempted.

<sup>69</sup> Thomas Turner, "Angola's Role in the Congo War," in *the African Stakes of the Congo War*, Ed. John F Clark, (New York, 2002), 75.

<sup>70</sup> These two occasions occurred in January 1998, when the intelligence chiefs of Angola, Rwanda and Uganda discussed the desirability of finding a replacement for Kabila, and in early 2001, just before Laurent Kabila was assassinated. Afoaku, 166; Turner, 75.

<sup>71</sup> Kevin C Dunn, "A Survival Guide to Kinshasa," 63.

<sup>72</sup> Longman, 128-129. For further information on the complexity of the different factions that emerged in the Congo war, please see Afoaku, Chapter 6.

unify the various rebel factions further demonstrates the absence of an overarching aim, and anticipates the carving up of rebel-held territory into “virtual fiefdoms” as each faction tried to take power in eastern Congo.<sup>73</sup>

It is unclear whether the fighting which broke out between the UPDF and the Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA) in August 1999, only one month after the signing of a cease-fire agreement was driven by political or economic motives. Over 600 soldiers and civilians were killed in an incident which political scientist Osita G. Afoaku claims reveals the differences between the two groups over the objectives and strategies of the war.<sup>74</sup> By contrast, Timothy Longman posits that the fighting was fuelled by competition over diamonds being transported through Kisangani, suggesting perhaps that economic and political motives came to be indistinguishable over time.<sup>75</sup> After all, he argues, Rwanda is a “small overpopulated country with almost no natural resources,” making its economic forays questionable to say the least.<sup>76</sup> The tenuous nature of Rwanda’s apparent motives for invading the Congo is reinforced by the fact that Rwandan officials denied extraterritorial intervention in the Congo in the early stages of the war.<sup>77</sup>

Evidence for the extent to which economic incentives determined invasion has been provided in the report, the *UN Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth in the Democratic Republic of Congo*.<sup>78</sup> According to the report, several accounts in Kampala suggest that Ugandan military officials who had served in the first war in the DRC “had a taste of the business potential of the region” and

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<sup>73</sup> Afoaku, 175.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 173.

<sup>75</sup> Longman, 137.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 136.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 130.

<sup>78</sup> United Nations Security Council, *Report of the Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth in the Democratic Republic of Congo*, April 12, 2001, <[http://www.natural-resources.org/minerals/law/docs/pdf/UN\\_NR\\_Exploit\\_DRC\\_2.pdf](http://www.natural-resources.org/minerals/law/docs/pdf/UN_NR_Exploit_DRC_2.pdf)> Hereafter referred to as The UN Panel of Experts report.

had even begun preparations prior to the second war to occupy and import resources from diamond and gold mines located in the east of the country.<sup>79</sup> A witness in the area of Durba claimed that the Ugandan army did not even fight any battles in the gold mining areas, and they were “only here for the gold.”<sup>80</sup> As soon as the war began, eastern territories controlled by Ugandan and Rwandan-backed groups practically became “de facto states,” autonomous from any central governing authority, in a manner reminiscent of the early colonial period where peripheral territories developed separately from the rest of the country under the control of large mining companies.<sup>81</sup>

The remaining countries intervening in the war include Zimbabwe, South Africa and Namibia. Zimbabwe felt justified intervening in defense of the territorial sovereignty of a neighboring country and furthermore had the military capacity to do so, as did Namibia. South Africa did not contribute militarily, and failed to come to Kabila’s defense during the war, but interestingly provided arms to both sides of the conflict and alleged moral support to the anti-Kabila forces.<sup>82</sup>

It is certainly true, as historian Michael Nest argues, that the immediate precedents to the war were in large part political in nature and encompassed a number of issues from Rwandan citizenship rights in the Congo to regime security and ethnic tensions, yet economic incentives cannot be ignored. The well-known “greed versus grievance” concept introduced by former head of the World Bank Paul Collier and developed by several theorists eager to define in concrete terms the motivating factors of rebel insurrections, acknowledges that “greed” for economic resources takes precedence over political grievances. Collier’s theory,

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<sup>79</sup> UN Panel of Experts report, 6.

<sup>80</sup> Human Rights Watch, *The Curse of Gold: Democratic Republic of Congo*, (New York, 2005)16.

<sup>81</sup> Dena Montague and Frida Berrigan, “The Business of War in the Democratic Republic of Congo: Who Benefits?” *Arms Trade Resource Centre* Online, July/August 2001, <<http://www.worldpolicy.org/projects/arms/news/dollarsandsense.html>>

<sup>82</sup> Martin R Rupiya, “Zimbabwe’s Involvement in the Second Congo War,” in *the African Stakes of the Congo War*, 96. Chris Landsberg, “The Impossible Neutrality?” In *the African Stakes of the Congo War*, Ed. John F Clark, (New York, 2002), 174.

while valuable in defining a theoretical framework in which to situate the opposition between the political and the economic factors influencing civil conflicts, is quite simplistic in presenting such a stark distinction between the two motivating factors and undermines both complex causal historical phenomena as well as the human dimension of the suffering of war victims. Nevertheless, it accurately concludes that “circumstances that determine financial viability are potentially important regardless of the motivation for rebellion.”<sup>83</sup> In the Congo war, economic motivations to sustain the war assumed priority over initial political factors as multiple actors found themselves in precarious political positions but absorbed in enormously profitable economic arrangements.<sup>84</sup>

#### African Countries Profiting from War

Access to the DRC’s gold and diamond fields was enormously profitable for both the Ugandan and the Rwandan economy. Given that Uganda has no known diamond production, Ugandan officials were unable to provide data to the UN Panel of Experts on the quantity and profit of diamond exports, yet statistics provided by the Diamond High Council reveal that diamonds were exported from Uganda in the years which coincided with the second Congo war. Rough diamond exports from Uganda increased from 1511.35 carats in 1997 prior to the war, the equivalent of US\$198 302 dollars, to 1 1024.46 carats in 1999, a value of US\$ 1813 500.<sup>85</sup> Likewise, Ugandan niobium exports were zero in 1995, but fetched US\$780 000 in 1999, according to the World Trade Organization.<sup>86</sup> Uganda effectively “became” a diamond and niobium exporting country, with no official evidence to explain how this occurred.

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<sup>83</sup> Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, “On the Incidence of Civil War in Africa,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 2002, 46: 13, <<http://jcr.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/46/1/13>> 14.

<sup>84</sup> Michael Nest, *The Democratic Republic of Congo: Economic Dimensions of War and Peace*, (Boulder, Colorado, 2006), 31

<sup>85</sup> UN Panel of Experts report, 22, Table 2.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, 21.

Officials were able to provide statistics on the export of other minerals, including gold, coltan, tin and cobalt; the glaring discrepancies between the quantity of mineral produced and the quantity exported is alarming. For instance, in 1997, Uganda was producing 1.81 tons of tin and exporting 4.43 tons of tin.<sup>87</sup> In 2005, gold was the third top Ugandan export, after coffee and fish, but domestic production of gold is negligible. Statistics document huge discrepancies between gold production and exports during the Congo war:

Official Ugandan Gold Import, Export and Production, Figures in \$US

Year	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Gold Exports	18,600,000	38,360,000	55,730,000	50,350,000	59,900,000	45,760,000	45,590,000
Gold Imports	0	2,000	3,076,000	890,000	0	2,000	n/a
Local Gold Production	n/a	40,307	477,000	1,412	24,817	23,000	21,000
Discrepancy	18,600,000	38,317,693	52,177,000	49,458,588	59,875,183	45,735,000	45,569,000

Source: Human Rights Watch.<sup>88</sup> From: Ugandan Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Energy and Mineral Development and Central Bank of Uganda. Statistics for 2004 are estimates.

The increase in gold exports evidently increased as the Congo war escalated, reaching a peak of US\$ 59,900 000 in 2002 which constituted a shocking discrepancy of US\$59, 875, 183 between production and export. As can be observed in the table above, official exports began to fall after 2002, the year in which a transitional government was installed in the Congo following the assassination of Laurent Kabila, and the UN peacekeeping forces MONUC were expanded from 5537 international military personnel to 8700.<sup>89</sup>

<sup>87</sup> UN Panel of Experts report, 20, Table 1, from the Ugandan Ministry of Energy and Mineral Development.

<sup>88</sup> Human Rights Watch, *The Curse of Gold*, 108.

<sup>89</sup> The Guardian, "Congo Peace Deal Signed," December 17, 2002, <<http://www.globalpolicy.org/security/issues/congo/2002/1216deal.htm>> MONUC stands for the United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Rwanda, like Uganda, has no known production of diamond, zinc, cobalt, manganese and uranium, but evidence obtained from the World Trade Organization, Belgium, and the Diamond High Council indicate that Rwanda exported a significant quantity of diamonds, receiving profits of \$US 720 425 in 1997, and \$US 1 788 036 in the year 2000.<sup>90</sup> In the same period, Rwanda's coltan exports are said to have doubled and in the years 1999 and 2000 alone, with the Rwandan army allegedly extracted resources in eastern Congo estimated at \$250 million.<sup>91</sup> Statistics on the profits garnered by the countries intervening in defense of Kabila are less extensive than those on the eastern regions of the country where Ugandan and Rwandan-backed groups were carrying out widespread atrocities, possibly because these countries were less invested in the clandestine illicit economy in minerals. Kabila himself gave his allies a share in the wealth of the country, including significant mining concessions to Zimbabwe. It has been documented that between 3000 and 5000 Zimbabwean soldiers were engaged in mining in the Shaba and Kasai Orientale Provinces during the war and Zimbabwe was also engaged in a logging contract to cut down 33 million hectares of trees with estimated profits worth \$US 300 million through the Congolese company SOCEBO.<sup>92</sup> Also since 1998, Angola has maintained a small military presence in oil-rich Bas-Congo.<sup>93</sup> By the time the Lusaka Agreement was signed in 1999 to put an end to bring peace to the Congo, few of the combatants wanted to disengage from a war that had enabled them to profit enormously from the remaining "carcass" of a potentially rich country.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> UN Panel of Experts report, 25.

<sup>91</sup> Gregory Queyranne, "Congo: a Critical Political Economic Analysis of the War in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and its Effects on Women," in *the Terry Project*, University of British Columbia, October 2006-April 2007 <<http://www.terry.ubc.ca/index.php/2006/12/01/congo-a-critical-political-economic-analysis-of-the-war-in-the-democratic-republic-of-congo-and-its-effects-on-women>>

<sup>92</sup> Jackie Cilliers and Mark Malan, "Peacekeeping in the DRC: MONUC and the Road to Peace," Chapter 2, <<http://www.issafrica.org/Pubs/Monographs/No66/CONTENTS.HTML>>

<sup>93</sup> Turner, 75, 77.

<sup>94</sup> Dunn, "A Survival Guide to Kinshasa," 68.

### Perpetuating War: Beyond Regional Involvement

The habitual tendency to define a relationship between “African” issues divorced from a “separate international system”<sup>95</sup> expresses itself, in the case of the second Congo war, in its characterization as “Africa’s First World War.”<sup>96</sup> One of the most serious consequences of ascribing such a definition is that it detracts attention from the global interaction of the many participants without which the continued plunder of mineral resources would not have carried on unchecked. To be sure, certain features of the conflict warrant such a characterization, including the fact that physical extraction of resources took place on African soil, and several Central and Southern African countries were directly involved, not to mention Chad and Sudan. Insisting that the Congo war was primarily an African phenomenon is perhaps justifiable if international involvement occurred in the form of complicity or indifference from international actors or nation states. Yet the continuation of the conflict finds its very origin in the insidious, {albeit indirect}, contribution of Western countries, transnational mining companies and individual actors.

Among the countries that undoubtedly facilitated the continuation of the second Congo conflict is the United States, whose conspicuous historical intervention in the Congo during the Cold War years invariably led to the absence of a functioning democracy and the triumph of a predatory state under Mobutu. Augusta Muchai remarks that that a large percentage of the arms which were in circulation during the Congo war years were not acquired in the past decade, but rather during the Cold War. During the Mobutu years, the US provided \$100 million in military training and \$300 million in weapons to Zaire, the latter

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<sup>95</sup> Ian Taylor and Paul Williams, “Understanding Africa’s Place in World Politics,” in *Africa in International Politics: External Involvement on the Continent*, (London; New York, 2004), 1.

<sup>96</sup> BBC online network, “Africa’s First World War to Dominate Summit,” December 17, 1998  
<<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/237180.stm>>

finding their way to a variety of sources over time through army defectors.<sup>97</sup> Following the end of the Cold War, numerous countries in Eastern Europe including Romania, Slovakia, Belarus, and Bulgaria as well as Russia, North Korea and Brazil were willing to sell their arms for profit, and many found their way into Mobutu's collection.<sup>98</sup> Former colonizers, including France and Belgium also supplied military equipment to the governments of the Great Lakes region, with France providing military training as well as both heavy and light equipment to the Rwandan government in 1990. Shortly after, between 1991 and 1992, over US\$ 6 million worth of arms were sent to the Rwandan government.<sup>99</sup> After the overthrow of Mobutu, the US transferred its military allegiance to Uganda and Rwanda even though the state department had accused both countries of orchestrating widespread human rights abuses.<sup>100</sup>

Western governments that provided weapons to African countries during the Cold War are perhaps only partially responsible for ensuring that such weapons are not used in illegal conflicts, but they are fully responsible for the consequences that ensue from direct assistance during or prior to the war years. It has been documented that the US helped to build the arsenals of eight of the nine governments directly involved in the war, trained the troops fighting on both sides of the conflict, and from 1991-1998, provided more than \$227 million in training and weapons delivery to the continent, all of which was no doubt indispensable to the continuation of the conflict.<sup>101</sup> Muchai demonstrates how the many resolutions undertaken to end the Second Congo conflict in the early years failed to address the contribution of the arms trade. All initiatives, including the Lusaka Agreement signed on

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<sup>97</sup> William D Hartung and Bridget Moix, "Deadly Legacy: US Arms to Africa and the Congo War," *Arms Trade Resource Centre*, January 2000, <<http://www.worldpolicy.org/projects/arms/reports/congo.htm>> Augustu Muchai, "Arms Proliferation and the Congo War," in *The African Stakes of the Congo War*, Ed. John F Clark, (New York, 2002), 190.

<sup>98</sup> Muchai, 189.

<sup>99</sup> Muchai, 190.

<sup>100</sup> Montague and Berrigan.

<sup>101</sup> Hartung and Moix.

27 August 1999 focused on diplomatic, political and even military solutions without directly addressing the issue of arms proliferation, which had occurred over the course of decades through direct transfer of military equipment to all parties involved in the war.<sup>102</sup>

One might argue that the provision of military assistance does not directly implicate the governments and weapons manufacturers in the atrocities perpetrated by rebel groups whose hands the weapons fall into, however, direct military aid was not the only contribution of Western governments to the continuation of the conflict. While weapons manufacturers are worlds away from end users in the Congo, and the purchase of a single weapon often involves several nations, corporations and brokers involved in the transfer of weapons at many different levels, political clout or “soft power” wielded by Western governments can go a long way toward impeding the escalation of conflict.<sup>103</sup> Yet instead of adopting a firm diplomatic stance against the countries involved in the war, the US government had a double standard when addressing the conflict. The United States Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Susan Rice, condemned foreign intervention in the Congo as “unacceptable,” but the government declined to call for the immediate withdrawal of Rwandan and Ugandan troops and instead pressured Kabila to sign the Lusaka Agreement which treated the conflict as a “civil war,”<sup>104</sup> Accordingly, UN peacekeepers were to be stationed along the ceasefire line in the middle of the country rather than at the borders where they could have monitored the withdrawal of foreign troops from the Congo.<sup>105</sup> Not surprisingly, the Lusaka Agreement failed to bring peace to the country and the war was prolonged for several more years.<sup>106</sup> The

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<sup>102</sup> Muchai, 196.

<sup>103</sup> Joseph S Nye Jr, “Propaganda Isn’t the Way: Soft Power,” in *The International Herald Tribune*, (January 2003), <[http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/news/opeds/2003/nye\\_soft\\_power\\_iht\\_011003.htm](http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/news/opeds/2003/nye_soft_power_iht_011003.htm)>

<sup>104</sup> Asad Ismi, “The Western Heart of Darkness: Mineral-Rich Congo Ravaged by Genocide and Western Plunder,” *Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives*, October 2001, <<http://141.117.225.2/~asadismi/congo.html>>

<sup>105</sup> Collette Braekman, “Congo: a War Without Victors,” *Le Monde Diplomatique*, April 2001 <[http://mondediplo.com/2001/04/07congo?var\\_recherche=DRC](http://mondediplo.com/2001/04/07congo?var_recherche=DRC)>

<sup>106</sup> BBC “Congo Peace Talks Fail,” 15 August 2000, <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/881133.stm>>

US was also among a number of Western countries that provided bilateral aid to the Ugandan and Rwandan governments supposedly intended for improvement in sanitation, health, governance and human rights, but which was instead documented in the savings budgets of the two countries, suggesting that these savings were used to finance the war.<sup>107</sup>

International Financial Institutions, often inaccurately perceived as the moral watchdogs of the international political system, likewise contributed to the continuation of the conflict, most notably the International Monetary Fund which declined to take into consideration the uneasy connection between Uganda's improved Balance of Payments and the exploitation of natural resources through illegal means. From 2001 to 2003, the IMF continued to vocalize its praise for what it perceived as Uganda's sound economic policies. In a September 2003 review of Uganda's economic performance, an IMF official expressed the institution's support for Uganda's export-led growth.<sup>108</sup> In 2005, the IMF approved a 100 per cent debt relief initiative for the country, not to relieve the impoverishment of its citizens, but rather because it had "enjoyed robust economic expansion with low rates of inflation for more than five years,"<sup>109</sup> a shocking demonstration of the ease with which the IMF can choose to disregard the connection between economic profit and widespread massacres occurring in the DRC.

### Congo's Dirty War: the Intersection of Legal and Illegal in the Global Economic Structure

The economic dimension of the Congo war which hearkens back to the colonial period and constitutes one of the most insidious and flagrant abuses of power in the country concerns the role of transnational mining companies directly implicated in the war. The

<sup>107</sup> UN Panel of Experts report, 38.

<sup>108</sup> Human Rights Watch, *The Curse of Gold*, 127.

<sup>109</sup> International Monetary Fund, "IMF to Extend 100 Per cent Debt Relief to Uganda Under the Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative," December 23, 2005, <<http://www.imf.org/external/np/sec/pr/2005/pr05305.htm>>

proliferation of these numerous companies recalls the “internationalization” of the country which took place in the era of Belgian colonialism and throughout the mineral exploration activities of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Eighty-five multinational companies operating in the DRC during the war are named in the UN Panel of Experts investigation for violation of the OECD guidelines on multinational enterprises.<sup>110</sup> One of them is a Ugandan-Thai company, DARA-Forest which was denied a forest concession by authorities in Kinshasa, but proceeded with the logging of timber after obtaining permission from the RCD-ML Congolese rebel faction.<sup>111</sup> Governments of the intervening countries granted several mining concessions to powerful multinational enterprises with the aim of financing the war and obtaining arms in return for the profits accruing to the companies, for instance, the Congolese government granted a monopoly over diamonds to the International Diamond Industries which enabled it to purchase arms and military equipment from the Israeli army, with whom the Director of the IDI, Dan Gertler, had “special ties.”<sup>112</sup>

The frequently concealed connection between Western government elites and foreign mining companies enables Western countries to pay lip-service to the issue of resolving foreign conflicts, while quietly sanctioning the illegal activities of these companies whose profits are undoubtedly beneficial to them. Like the operation of mineral extraction companies in the colonial era, these companies function in a remarkably autonomous manner,

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<sup>110</sup> Annex III of the UN Panel of Experts Report, October 2002. The OECD guidelines refer to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, the first international guidelines on corporate social responsibility which provide a government-supported mechanism to monitor corporate behavior. These guidelines, while acknowledging that multinational enterprises need to address the public concerns in host countries, are only general, voluntary guidelines which do not protect against case-specific violations of the law and human rights. The OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, Revision 2000, <[http://www.oecd.org/document/28/0,2340,en\\_2649\\_34889\\_2397532\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1,00.html](http://www.oecd.org/document/28/0,2340,en_2649_34889_2397532_1_1_1_1,00.html)>

<sup>111</sup> UN Panel of Experts report, 10. The RCD-ML is the Congolese Rally for Democracy-Liberation Movement, also known as RCD-Kisangani which was launched in September 1999 and initially backed by Uganda. Human Rights Watch online, “Ituri, Bloodiest Corner of Congo: Who is Who-Armed Political Groups in Ituri (May 2003), <<http://www.hrw.org/campaigns/congo/ituri/armedgroups.htm>>

<sup>112</sup> UN Panel of Experts report, 150.

as there are no legally binding mechanisms in place to regulate their behavior. The UN Panel of Experts lists numerous African individuals, heads of states and rebel groups involved in the extractive industry, but its investigation fails to include the role of Western government elites, leaving its evidence incomplete, and thereby inaccurate. The report by Human Rights Watch, *The Curse of Gold*, which thoroughly investigates the intimate connection between rebels groups and the gold company Anglo-Gold Ashanti, likewise fails to mention the connections between Western governments and mining companies. For instance, Human Rights Watch does not mention that AngloGold Ashanti is partnered with the company Anglo-American owned by the Oppenheimer family as well as with Canadian company Barrick Gold.<sup>113</sup> Barrick Gold operates close to AngloGold Ashanti, in the town of Bunia where the Ugandan People's Defense Forces controlled the mines at intermittent periods during the war.<sup>114</sup> One of Barrick Gold's advisors is former US President George HW Bush and previous directors of the company include Brian Mulroney, the former Prime Minister of Canada and former US Senator Howard Baker.<sup>115</sup> The insidious nature of these economic networks which undermine judicial notions of "legal" and "illegal" become more apparent if one only observes the exchanges which occurred between legally sanctioned mining companies and rebel groups in the Congo.

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<sup>113</sup> Snow and Barouski, "Suffering in the Congo."

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid. In a transnational mining tribunal in December 2006, Barrick Gold was accused of having committed numerous human rights and environmental abuses in Chile, Argentina and Peru and was implicated in a case where 52 artisanal miners were buried alive at Bulyanhulu gold mine in Tanzania. In later years, security operatives working for the company and Tanzanian police allegedly shot villagers in another of Barrick's North Mara gold mine. That the company continues to operate in the DRC demonstrates the appalling lack of regulatory mechanisms in the international system. Mining Watch Canada, "Transnational Mining Tribunal: the Case of Barrick Gold Corporation in Latin America (Chile, Argentina, and Peru), December 2 2006  
<[http://www.miningwatch.ca/index.php?/Barrick/Barrick\\_judgement](http://www.miningwatch.ca/index.php?/Barrick/Barrick_judgement)> Mining Watch Canada, "What Really Happened at the Barrick Gold Mine in Tanzania?" April 16 2002, <[http://www.miningwatch.ca/index.php?/Tanzania\\_en/What\\_Really\\_Happened](http://www.miningwatch.ca/index.php?/Tanzania_en/What_Really_Happened)>; Tracy Glynn, "There is Death in Them Thar' Pits," *The Dominion* online, July 5 2006, <[http://www.dominionpaper.ca/features/2006/07/05/there\\_is\\_d.html](http://www.dominionpaper.ca/features/2006/07/05/there_is_d.html)>

In 2005, Human Rights Watch published a report on the human rights abuses linked to two key gold mining areas in the DRC bordering Uganda: Mongbwalu in Ituri District and Durba in the Haut-Uélé district. From 1998 to 2003, Ugandan soldiers extracted over \$9 million worth of gold from the northeastern districts.<sup>116</sup> Following Uganda's and Rwanda's withdrawal in 2003, local proxies were left behind by both sides, including the Hema Union des Patriotes Congolais (UPC) and the Front des Nationalistes et Intégrationnistes (FNI) which fought over gold-abundant areas, killing thousands of civilians. On November 18<sup>th</sup>, 2002, the UPC attacked Mongbwalu in a 6-day military operation. According to a witness in Mongbwalu, the combatants "took Kasore, a Lendu man in his thirties, from his family, and attacked him with knives and hammers. They killed him and his son (aged about 20) with knives. They cut his son's throat and opened his chest. They cut the tendons on his heels, smashed his head and took out his intestines. The father was slaughtered and burnt."<sup>117</sup> It has been estimated that at least 800 civilians were killed in UPC attacks from late 2002 to early 2003.<sup>118</sup> Like the Hema combatants who indiscriminately targeted all Lendu civilians, the FNI began indiscriminately killing all civilians suspected of having helped the Hema when they took over the areas occupied by the UPC. In May 2003, FNI forces receiving military support from Ugandan soldiers, killed some 500 civilians in a "48-Hour War" and in June, attacked several villages, torturing, burning and finally killing the Hema women that they found.<sup>119</sup>

During this period, one of the largest gold companies in the world, Anglo-Gold Ashanti, which calls itself "a responsible corporate citizen" and claims that it "aims to operate in workplaces that are safe and healthy," sent a company representative to

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<sup>116</sup> HRW, *The Curse of Gold*, 1.

<sup>117</sup> HRW, *The Curse of Gold*, 28.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid*, 31.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid*, 40, 43.

Mongbwalu in May 2002 to make contact with the UPC concerning gold exploration activities.<sup>120</sup> Although its mining contract and official communications were with the government in Kinshasa, the area around Mongbwalu where the mining was to occur was firmly out of the control of the central government. Subsequent to the transfer of power from the UPC to the FNI, between July and September 2003 when the FNI were conducting an ethnic killing campaign where victims had their arms tied, sticks shoved into their rectums and body parts cut off, the company AngloGold Ashanti obtained permission from the FNI to commence gold extraction activities.<sup>121</sup> To protect its employees from militia groups, AngloGold Ashanti employed a private security company, ArmorGroup International.<sup>122</sup> Several allegations have been leveled against these private companies for their tendency to resort to acts of terrorism, sabotage and violence against civilian populations.<sup>123</sup> AngloGold Ashanti is only one among several companies supposedly operating within the law, carrying on enterprises which enrich their own pockets, those of their shareholders, as well as those of the rebels and private security firms carrying out brutal atrocities against civilian populations.

In return for granting concessions to AngloGold Ashanti, the FNI were given benefits of various types, including financial assistance in the form of an \$8000 dollar payment in April 2005 and frequent levies of 6 US cents per kilogram of cargo flown into the airport at Mongbwalu. The company also provided the FNI with logistical, transportation, and housing assistance and, in a shocking demonstration of the nature of their means of operation, urged MONUC to “adopt a conciliatory stance in their dealings” with some of the FNI armed

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid, 66; Anglogold Ashanti online, “About Social Responsibility: Our Commitment,” <<http://www.anglogold.com/Social+Responsibility/About.htm>>

<sup>121</sup> HRW, *The Curse of Gold*, 167.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid, 71.

<sup>123</sup> Mining Watch Canada, “Towards a Spiral of Violence? The Dangers of Privatization of Risk Managements in Africa: Mining Activities and the Risk of Private Security Companies,” Montreal 2000, <[http://www.miningwatch.ca/index.php?/AngloGold\\_Ashanti/Spiral\\_of\\_Violence](http://www.miningwatch.ca/index.php?/AngloGold_Ashanti/Spiral_of_Violence)> 13

groups.<sup>124</sup> Journalists have written that Human Rights Watch did not reveal the most damning evidence they found- that AngloGold Ashanti sent its top lawyers into the country to protect rebel militia leaders.<sup>125</sup> In consequence, the intimate relationship between AngloGold Ashanti and the armed groups increased the latter's prestige in the eyes of the President Kabila and in the area where they operated. As one interviewee ironically remarked, "Ashanti will give dignity to the FNI."<sup>126</sup> The company's readiness to proceed unhindered in its extraction activities was revealed by Vice President of AngloAshanti Charles Carter, who in July 2004 expressed his excitement about the "growth prospects in Central Africa" and the Congo, "potentially a huge gold province."<sup>127</sup> Other allegations implicate Canadian company Anvil Mining in an October 2004 massacre at Kilwa in which the company provided the Congolese army with ground transportation to assist in the military assault of the town and to remove corpses left in the aftermath of the invasion.<sup>128</sup> Clive Newall, the CEO of First Quantum Minerals, the largest shareholder in Anvil Mining, succinctly explained the stance of Canadian mining companies in the DRC, "It's the holy grail of the copper industry. Companies are saying: to hell with the political risk, we just have to be here (in DRC)."<sup>129</sup>

In many ways, the Second Congo war demonstrates that the colonial enterprise of the twentieth century is still flourishing quite successfully, in the form of direct foreign

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<sup>124</sup> HRW, *The Curse of Gold*, 72-74.

<sup>125</sup> Snow and Barouski.

<sup>126</sup> HRW, *The Curse of Gold*, 75.

<sup>127</sup> Business Day, "AngloGold Ashanti Hits Rich Vein," July 29, 2004, <<http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/artikel.php?ID=62830>>

<sup>128</sup> Mining Watch Canada, "Anvil Mining and the Kilwa Massacre, DR Congo: Canadian Company Implicated?" June 16, 2005 <[http://www.miningwatch.ca/index.php?/Anvil/Anvil\\_Mining\\_Kilwa](http://www.miningwatch.ca/index.php?/Anvil/Anvil_Mining_Kilwa)> For further information on the Canadian companies operating in the DRC, please see Mining Watch Canada online, "Appendix B: Mining Investment in Areas of Conflict; the case of the Democratic Republic of Congo" March 6, 2000 <[http://www.miningwatch.ca/index.php?/AngloGold\\_Ashanti/Spiral\\_of\\_Violence](http://www.miningwatch.ca/index.php?/AngloGold_Ashanti/Spiral_of_Violence)>

<sup>129</sup> Paul Kapelus, "AngloGold Ashanti in the Democratic Republic of Congo: Management Challenges and Responses to Operating in a Weak Governance Area," *United Nations Global Compact Learning Forum*, November 2006 <<http://www.aiccafrica.org/PDF%20files/AngloGold.pdf>> The UN Panel of experts also recommended that Anglo-American PLC, Barclays Bank, Standard Chartered Bank and De Beers be investigated for their contribution to the war.

exploitation of the DRC's mineral resources. The indisputable link between rebel groups, mining companies, private security firms and Western governments calls into question tenuous beliefs regarding the "legal" nature of economic transactions in the mineral industry. In a climate of war in which each side is invested in the continuance of war for economic profit, the concept of legality is continually reinterpreted, ignored for convenience purposes or discarded altogether. Yet despite the dangerous outcome of granting mining companies virtually free rein in their economic projects, the fact that these companies are expected to abide by the law means that at the very least, there is a possibility that legal action can be taken against them.

Conversely, the creation of what has been defined as an illicit economy in natural resources during the second Congo war precludes the possibility of adopting legal measures since identifying the culprits is almost impossible. In mineral-lucrative areas where mining concessions have not been granted to mining companies but instead exploited on a smaller scale by the rebel armies themselves, the journey of a mineral on its way to the global market reveals the functioning of more insidious forms of power. In this type of transaction, for instance in the case of gold, rebel groups and armies employ artisanal miners to work in the mines like slaves, beating them if they refuse to work under the deplorable conditions in the mines, or if they fail to deliver the amount of gold demanded. In one case, Ugandan soldiers recklessly directed local miners to mine the pillars of Gorumbwa mine which eventually collapsed killing one hundred miners trapped inside.<sup>130</sup> A network of traders then transports the mineral either from the rebels or from the artisanal miners directly to trading houses located near the Ugandan border whose owners are closely connected to rebel groups. From there the gold is delivered to unauthorized Ugandan traders based in Kampala where the gold became "legalized," which means it is treated as if it were a transit good, registered on

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<sup>130</sup> HRW, *The Curse of Gold*, 18

various customs documents in order to “make” it acceptable on the unregulated global market.<sup>131</sup> Over seventy per cent is then exported to Switzerland, where it is “officially registered as an import.”<sup>132</sup> Some of the gold exported to Switzerland during the war has been purchased by one of the world’s leading refiners of gold, Metalor Technologies SA. The company has repeatedly denied that its goods are connected to criminal networks in the Congo, but given that Uganda has no domestic gold production, it is probable that Metalor’s gold originated in northeastern Congo.<sup>133</sup> With regard to coltan production, a similar massive trafficking enterprise was undertaken; according to UN estimates, as much as 60 to 70 per cent of total coltan production was mined under the direct surveillance of the Rwandan army by late 2002, using methods of forced labour.<sup>134</sup> The coltan was then transported to Rwandan companies, to international trading companies and finally to processing companies in Europe and elsewhere.

In this very complex web of unregulated and undocumented exchanges, the invisible connection between the first and last stage of transactions involving highly mobile mineral resources simply continues to exist within a global economic structure in which the interplay between legal and illegal factors makes the two concepts virtually indistinguishable. The integration of illegal activities into the very structure of the global economy makes the task of seeking justice almost laughable. Even when it comes to redressing the illegal activities of transnational companies and the direct collusion they enjoy with illegal rebel groups outside the control of the central government, one imagines that the only sensible approach would be the application of legally binding mechanisms to mitigate and stem their illegal practices. However, there are no legally binding requirements that can

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid, 106.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid, 113

<sup>133</sup> Ibid, 115.

<sup>134</sup> Denis M Tull, *The Reconfiguration of Political Order in Africa: A Case Study of North Kivu (DRC)*, (Hamburg, 2005), 175.

regulate the activities of mining companies, and at the international level, no political will to directly confront the roots of the conflict. In their final report published in October 2003, the UN Panel of Experts claimed that the cases of the companies allegedly in violation of the OECD guidelines had been “resolved,” without any information on how this decision had been made.<sup>135</sup> As for the UN Organization Mission in the DRC, the organization has not integrated the link between resource exploitation and war in the analysis they use to bring peace to the country. In short, most efforts undertaken at the international level to bring protracted warfare to an end in the DRC have persistently refused to address the economic origins of the problem.

#### The Final Transaction: Anonymous Commodities in the Market Economy

Presiding over the intricate web of economic exchanges in mineral resources is the global market where consumers at the buying end of the transaction remain incognizant of the fact that their cell phones, pagers, computers, and diamond rings have been obtained at the expense of millions of civilian lives. While many advocates of globalization celebrate the rapid advancement in technology which has transpired over only a few decades, they fail to acknowledge that increasingly efficient consumer goods that are the hallmark of today’s industrialized countries have been purchased with a corresponding deterioration of entire nations. The demand for coltan, a mineral used to process tantalum for mobile telephones, nuclear reactors and missile technology, has grown since 1992 at an average of 10 per cent as a result of the growing market in mobile phones and gold consoles.<sup>136</sup> In the year 2000 during the Congo war, world wide consumption of tantalum rose by 38 per cent. One of the causes of the increasing demand for coltan was the popularity of Sony Playstations filled with

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<sup>135</sup> HRW, *The Curse of Gold*, 119.

<sup>136</sup> Tull, 171.

coltan.<sup>137</sup> Sony itself may not use Congolese coltan, but its demand for the mineral, 80 per cent of which is found in the Congo, increased the price, which in turn fuelled conflict over the resource. In late 2000, a deficit in supply of the mineral increased its price to \$365 per pound.<sup>138</sup> Authors Dena Montague and Frida Berrigan reveal that a global shortage of coltan in December 2000 caused a “wave of parental panic” in the US when PlayStation II suddenly became scarce.<sup>139</sup> The sheer absurdity of today’s globalized and highly unequal economic system is summed up in the unexaggerated image of “kids in Congo... being sent down mines to die so that kids in Europe and America could kill imaginary aliens in their living rooms.”<sup>140</sup>

Ironically, Western countries’ attempts to make technological products environmentally friendly by banning lead from the solder used in cell phones and other electronic goods increased the demand for lead-free solder, ninety-five per cent of which consists of tin. In response, the world-wide price of tin was increased by an estimated 150 per cent between August 2002 and May 2004, which in turn intensified the conflict in the DRC.<sup>141</sup> That the invisible hand of the market and consumer demand in Western countries, worlds away from the “civil war” in the Congo can indirectly determine the fate of real human lives begs the question: who is truly responsible for the war in the Democratic Republic of Congo?

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<sup>137</sup> Johann Hari, “Congo’s Tragedy; the War the World Forgot,” in *The Independent* online, May 5 2006, <<http://news.independent.co.uk/world/africa/article362215.ece>>

<sup>138</sup> Tull, 171.

<sup>139</sup> Montague and Berrigan.

<sup>140</sup> Hari.

<sup>141</sup> Stan Cox, “War, Murder, Rape...All for Your Cell Phone,” *Alternet*, September 14, 2006 <<http://www.alternet.org/story/41477/>>

## Conclusion

It is questionable whether attempts by the International Criminal Court to bring to justice the rebel leaders responsible for carrying out widespread atrocities against Congolese civilians have yielded any concrete and long-term outcomes. Most efforts designed to enforce justice in the aftermath of the war have conveniently diverted attention from the integrated nature of the various actors functioning within elaborate economic networks and instead have adopted a narrow and restricted approach to the definition of “war crimes” and “illegal activities.” It is hardly surprising, given that the Congo war is only one outcome of a historical trend of global inequality that touches even the realm of international justice, that Western actors involved in perpetuating the war by providing financial and military assistance to the rebels are immune from prosecution. On April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2007, the Democratic Republic of Congo suspended all new mining deals in order to review the contracts of the companies still operating in the country. One of them is AngloGold Ashanti.<sup>142</sup> Yet given that no legally binding mechanisms exist to curb the illegal operations of transnational mining companies, it is unlikely that the future of the country will be drastically different from a past characterized by continued foreign domination.

The historical precedents to the Congo war, and in particular, the prominence of violence in the country from the time of King Leopold II to the period of recent conflict, preclude the possibility of analyzing the features of war in isolation or of dismissing it as a tragic but not so significant anomaly in the history of the region, a tendency which the mainstream media has consistently encouraged. Instead, a critical and nuanced attitude must be adopted for the purposes of rectifying common misconceptions and simplifications about the region as a whole, and more importantly, for the purposes of understanding not only how

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<sup>142</sup> MONUC, “DRC Suspends All Mining Deals and to Review All Contracts,” April 2, 2007, <<http://www.monuc.org/news.aspx?newsID=14279>>

the second Congo war cannot be characterized as a “civil” or regional war, but also how it embodies the symbiotic relationship between war and resource extraction for profit.<sup>143</sup> This latter feature reveals the true nature of today’s unregulated capitalist economy whose roots have penetrated every region of the world. As film director Hubert Sauper remarks in his statement about the fish industry around Lake Victoria: “I could make the same kind of movie in Sierra Leone, only the fish would be diamonds, in Honduras, bananas, and in Libya, Nigeria or Angola, crude oil.”<sup>144</sup> Likewise, similar comparisons can be made between the Democratic Republic of Congo’s economic war over mineral resources, and Sierra Leone’s and Angola’s civil wars over conflict diamonds. Perhaps the most disquieting truth about the trade in mineral resources is that upon arrival at their final destination in the market of consumer goods and electronic commodities, all traces of their original identity are lost, including the identities of the countless millions who perished to obtain them.

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<sup>143</sup> Tull, 201.

<sup>144</sup> Hubert Sauper, Director’s Statement, *Darwin’s Nightmare*, <<http://www.darwinsnightmare.com/darwin/html/startset.htm>>