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SLAUGHTER FOR SWAG: AN ACCOUNT OF VIOLENCE AND RESOURCE EXPLOITATION IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO WITH STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINABLE PEACE

Larissa Fulop

War in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has become renowned for its devastating incidence of violent atrocities and civilian suffering. Fuelled by its abundance of internationally valued resources, conflict in the DRC has reached unprecedented levels of economic, social, and political strife. Through more equitable resource distribution, productive reintegration efforts, the leveraging of multinational corporations, and government reform, the DRC may begin to recover and stabilize.

The precarious socio-economic circumstance of violence largely fuelled by resource exploitation in Central Africa’s Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is frequently described as humanity’s most hostile devastation since World War II.¹ Competition between various armed factions for control over minerals has been a key feature of the conflict, coupled with inter-ethnic tension over land, citizenship, and political power.² Since Belgium’s 1908 colonial takeover, the DRC’s supreme wealth in natural resources has served the interests of elites and foreign markets to the detriment of the greater part of the Congolese.³ A history of volatile political leadership and cyclic poverty has facilitated the by and large illegal trade of these most sought-after materials between fighting rebel groups and global corporations, funding local arms proliferation on one hand while furnishing the invention and sale of popular technologies in industrialized societies on the

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² Ibid.
other.\textsuperscript{4} Despite gaining widespread international attention in recent years, the DRC has realized only modest progress with respect to sustainable conflict resolution.

This paper analyzes the effect of ever-present inter-ethnic hostility on the life, liberty, and security of the local populace as well as the mutual danger of questionable conflict-metal trade between Congolese warlords and international corporate players. While the illegitimate trade of primary commodities may not have been a primary cause of war, it certainly begot an economic component that has prolonged the conflict by creating incentives for belligerents to maintain a chaotic state for self-interested gain.\textsuperscript{5}

Disarmament, accountability for the trafficking of valuable goods, and ethical governance will ideally advance the ultimate goal of sustainable peace; this paper evaluates both the strengths and shortcomings of past peace-building efforts, elaborates on current regional solutions to violence and crime, and proposes recommendations for integrated social harmony and responsible trade.

The current conflict in the DRC has origins in Rwanda’s 1994 genocide, in which an estimated 800,000 people were murdered owing to rivalry between the minority, ruling Tutsi and majority Hutu peoples.\textsuperscript{6} Complex ethnic strife resulted in the displacement of large numbers of Hutu in the north along with periodic Hutu killings of Tutsi in the south, prompting an influx of refugees into the DRC and other bordering nations.\textsuperscript{7} Hutu militants and key leaders in the Rwandan genocide, known as the FDLR, took refuge in eastern Congo, increasing internal instability and setting the stage for the

\textsuperscript{4} Ibid., 5.
\textsuperscript{5} Yinuo Geng, “Resource Exploitation & Peace-Building in the D.R.C.” \textit{The Toronto Globalist}, 2009.
\textsuperscript{7} Ibid.
First and Second Congo Wars. President Mobutu Sese Seko ordered the Tutsi ethnic group out of his country but was instead overthrown by a coalition of Tutsi and other anti-Mobutu rebels. When Laurent Kabila was installed as president of the DRC in 1997, he promised to alleviate debt and to put an end to the 32-year dictatorship and human rights violations committed under the kleptocracy of his predecessor. In actual fact, Kabila made little progress in the domain of human rights. Additionally, his expulsion of Rwandan militants and refugees brought on the end of the DRC’s amity with Rwanda, a key ally who, along with Uganda, had facilitated Kabila’s rise to power.

Despite this massive Rwandan repatriation, various successor organizations to the Hutu militants, FDLR, and Ugandan forces continue to operate in eastern DRC with economic interests in mineral-rich zones. This eastern region of the DRC furnishes easy access to export routes via towns such as Goma, Bunia and Butembo, bypassing government-held Kinshasa. Minerals can then be illegally exported through Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi, transited through Tanzania and Kenya, processed in Asia, and finally sold in the global marketplace. Conflict today persists mainly in the eastern North-Kivu region between factions seeking resource control and political power despite the deployment of a massive UN peacekeeping mission to monitor a new ceasefire in

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9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
2000 and the withdrawal of Rwandan and Ugandan troops in 2003. Following a transitional government instituted in 2003 to move toward leadership founded on a consensus constitution, Joseph Kabila was democratically elected in 2006. His attentions are focused on finding a peaceful means of ending the civil war through negotiations and agreements with Rwandan and Ugandan-backed rebel groups.

This is not to say, however, that the national army is by any means benign; in a series of reports, Human Rights Watch has documented the killing and rape of the very people it is meant to be protecting. Congolese Tutsi rebel leader Laurent Nkunda, opposed to the FDLR’s continued presence in the DRC, began to clash with the UN-backed Congolese army (FARDC). Nkunda derailed the Goma Peace agreement and the Amani process in 2008 following new fighting between army troops and Nkunda’s CNDP. He was captured during a joint operation between Congolese and Rwandan militaries seeking out Hutu rebels in 2009, and is currently living under ‘house arrest’ in Kigali. Under the new leadership of Bosco Ntaganda, Nkunda’s CNDP has begun to integrate with the national army and is accused of atrocities while fighting under its name. Building peace in the DRC’s troubled regions requires sustained intervention by

19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
a wide range of stakeholders to address aspects of the regional political economy that perpetrate cross-border abuses of the country’s abundant resources. Consequently, the DRC may realize reductions in pervasive sexual violence, a dissipation of antagonism between political divisions, and the disarmament of both rebel and government militias that endorse the conscription of underage fighters.

A glut of warfare tragedy has chronically plagued this Central African nation since the Congo Wars; men, women, and children are routinely subject to torture, plunder, killings, arbitrary arrest, and forced labour. Sexual violence in particular has come to elicit vast international attention due to unprecedented numbers of victims and the brutality with which the attacks are carried out; families are destroyed, communities are decimated, and sexually transmitted diseases are lethally spread. War crimes and crimes against humanity in the DRC have no boundaries. They are committed arbitrarily, notwithstanding factors such as a victim’s ethnic or political affinity with the perpetrator. This tends to be more frequent in armed groups with unclear, parallel, or otherwise dysfunctional accountability and command structures, characteristics apparent in rebel organizations such as the CNDP or Mai Mai, the Congolese armed forces (FARDC), and the security sector alike.

Both rebel groups and the FARDC are guilty of conscripting local children as soldiers. Boys and girls alike are subjected to sexual abuse, forced labour, and drug-
induced corruption.\textsuperscript{26} While many are abducted, others join under duress with the hope of being able to support their families with what little material compensation they might receive.\textsuperscript{27} Deprived of food, medical assistance, and education, these damaged youth are more likely to prosper as rebels in adulthood than by attempting to reintegrate with their former cohabitants, which propagates the distorted idea that violence is rewarding. The abuse, abduction, and displacement of unarmed civilians persists largely as a consequence of sleazy power struggles between legitimate—yet unlawful—and illegitimate authorities. The Congolese have come to terms with the fact that it makes no difference who is in control: “they all come to loot the minerals and kill those who get in their way”.\textsuperscript{28}

From abduction to gang rape and genital mutilation, sexual violence as a product of institutional dysfunction must be understood in the context of hostile civil-military relations rooted in the country’s complex history.\textsuperscript{29} A combination of poor living conditions and modest nationalist support for the armed forces has engendered disrepute for state security personnel.\textsuperscript{30} Government soldiers and security sector officials often defend violence against civilians as a need to redeem respect by “teaching them a lesson” or “punishing” them for their insolence.\textsuperscript{31} On the other hand, a weak justice and penal system in the DRC has sustained a climate of widespread impunity, generating a

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{26} Prendergast, “Can You Hear Congo Now? Cell Phones, Conflict Minerals, and the Worst Sexual Violence in the World.”
\item \textsuperscript{28} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{29} Wakabi, “Sexual Violence Increasing in the Democratic Republic of Congo,” 15.
\item \textsuperscript{30} Bazz and Stern, “Understanding and addressing conflict-related sexual violence: Lessons learned from the Democratic Republic of Congo,” 2.
\item \textsuperscript{31} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
normalization of sexual and other violence against civilians.\textsuperscript{32} This fosters a situation where other violence may not receive adequate attention and resources from the international community, forcing desperate and insolvent women who are not rape victims to present themselves as such in order to gain access to aid services.\textsuperscript{33}

Although talks of sexual violence thus far have espoused an image of the female victim and the male perpetrator, men and boys are often subject to rape, forced to have sex with kin, or are sexually humiliated in public.\textsuperscript{34} The highest percentage of reported male rape victims is 10 percent;\textsuperscript{35} the true figures are likely higher but remain obscured by social stigma. A major problem with this invisibility of men and boys as victims of sexual violence is that they are denied legitimate rights to aid and recognition as survivors. The medical, psychological, and social effects of both sexual violence and other violence are devastating, resulting in the displacement of families or individuals due to shame, injury, or unrelenting fear, which in turn grossly hinders reintegration efforts.\textsuperscript{36} As physical and economic insecurity continue to characterize the lives of the Congolese, comprehensive health and support services ought to be provided to all destitute women, girls, men, and boys, since sexual violence and other violence emanate from the same fundamental issues.

It is no coincidence that some of the gravest and most widespread human rights abuses in the DRC have occurred in regions abundant in natural resources. In terms of untapped mineral wealth estimated at $25-trillion in value, the DRC is perhaps the richest

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\bibitem{33} Bazz and Stern, “Understanding and addressing conflict-related sexual violence: Lessons learned from the Democratic Republic of Congo,” 3.
\bibitem{34} Ibid.
\bibitem{35} Ibid.
\bibitem{36} Wakabi, “Sexual Violence Increasing in the Democratic Republic of Congo,” 16.
\end{thebibliography}
country on Earth. However, these resources are frequently prone to violent exploitation, which finances the conflict at great cost to the local populace. The abovementioned human rights abuses are committed by the same groups responsible for the looting, hoarding, and unwarranted exporting of Congo’s resources, perpetuating an interrelated cycle of violence and insecurity with poverty as a product of exploitation. Corruption in the eastern region has created a power vacuum that facilitates the proliferation of both domestic and migrant rebel groups that compete for control over the mineral trade, often with the support of the local military. These competing militias will rape and sexually abuse in order to drive communities out of contested areas or else as a means of controlling or subjugating those living in the areas they wish to control.

Today, the DRC supplies three to six percent of global tin and is home to about 80 percent of the world’s coltan. Adults and children alike are subject to inhumane mining conditions by powerful rebel groups who threaten life for noncompliance. Semi-formal systems of taxation, the requisitioning of mineral stockpiles, and extortion at mining sites are among some of the tactics used to accrue profit. Coined “blood

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39 Marlow and Akkad, “Bloodstains at our fingertips,” 1.
43 Marlow and Akkad, “Bloodstains at our fingertips,” 1.
diamonds of the digital age,” personal computers and smart phones rely on coltan for their electronic circuitry.46 Thus, the DRC’s resources have been of continued interest to foreign businesses that inadvertently fuel the conflict by providing rebels with independent revenue and a reason to compete over mining zones.47 So long as demand for high tech products increases in industrialized nations, aggressive competition over mineral trade will subsist in Congo.

The prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC), Luis Moreno Ocampo, announced in 2003 that he would closely monitor the situation in the DRC following a referral by President Kabila.48 The ICC has not publicly indicted Laurent Nkunda, but has opened investigations into the actions of his CNDP militia accused of serious human rights abuses during its independent five-year rebellion.49 In January 2009, special representative of the UN Secretary General in the DRC, Alan Doss, decided to link the UN’s overstretched and shorthanded peacekeeping force (MONUC) with anti-FDLR military offensives launched by Kabila (Vircoulon 2010). He argued that joint MONUC-FARDC operations may enhance the reputation of the national army, and that Congolese authorities may endeavour to significantly improve the abusive behaviour of their soldiers in exchange for UN logistical support.50

46 Marlow and Akkad, “Bloodstains at our fingertips,” 1.
Interestingly, the CNDP’s current leader Bosco Ntaganda, a general in the UN-backed FARDC, is also wanted by the ICC for war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in the Ituri region.\(^{51}\) This bittersweet integration of the CNDP with the national army results from the general undesirability of an autonomous rebel militia stronger than the national army thriving in the DRC and monopolizing its mineral resources. However, Congo’s national army has since become increasingly responsible for crimes against humanity and war crimes, as many former CNDP members have been reluctant to give up their anarchic ways.\(^{52}\) The government in Kinshasa has excessively relied on military operations to suppress local rebellions instead of undertaking concerted political efforts and government reforms to more sustainably address problems in the East.\(^{53}\) The joint MONUC-FARDC mission has been largely unsuccessful in eradicating Rwandan militia in the DRC or preventing FDLR reprisals against civilians.\(^{54}\) Ironically, given its efforts in prosecuting the perpetrators of the 1994 genocide, Rwanda has become a safe house for Tutsi criminals (including members of the CNDP) who commit atrocities in the Congo and retreat to Rwanda to evade accountability.\(^{55}\) Furthermore, the inherently weak operational capacity and disrepute of Congolese soldiers makes it very difficult for them to enforce the disarmament of rebel militias and thus ensure the protection of civilians.\(^{56}\) Congolese authorities have disregarded international pleas to


\(^{52}\) Human Rights Watch, “Sexual Violence in Congo: Soldiers Who Rape, Commanders Who Condone.”

\(^{53}\) Vircoulon, “After MONUC, Should MONUSCO Continue to Support Congolese Military Campaigns?”

\(^{54}\) Ibid.

\(^{55}\) Ibid.

\(^{56}\) Baaz and Stern, “Understanding and addressing conflict-related sexual violence: Lessons learned from the Democratic Republic of Congo,” 2.
end impunity and adopt a strict selection policy for those who wish to integrate into the FARDC.\textsuperscript{57} Under such circumstances, a successful collaboration between foreign military personnel and Congolese soldiers is implausible.

To the extent that the underlying causes of the DRC crisis implicate conflict-ridden neighbouring countries, solutions must be regional and, ideally, non-confrontational. Such solutions must exceed ad hoc emergency responses and instead focus on honest, practicable economic ventures and effective governance.\textsuperscript{58} A legitimization of sub-regional mineral trade will ideally compensate those who may risk losing more by disarming than they might gain from carrying on illicitly.\textsuperscript{59} Free trade through formal channels will promote a steadier marketplace consisting of safer economic opportunities for former militants, eradicate the need for hostile claims over mineral rich zones, and ultimately reduce instances of sexual violence as a byproduct of multifaceted corruption. Ex-combatants, once demobilized, require assistance reintegrating and adopting productive roles. Since the DRC’s rampant poverty largely stems from its extractive and outward-oriented economy, the fostering of complementary interregional trade has hitherto been stifled. As an alternative to exporting minerals to Asia for smelting, local processing may rouse a sense of national productivity and create jobs for ex-combatants.\textsuperscript{60} This cooperative strategy may ultimately reduce the propensity

\textsuperscript{57} Vircoulon, “After MONUC, Should MONUSCO Continue to Support Congolese Military Campaigns?”
\textsuperscript{58} Raymond Gilpin, Catherine Morris and Go Funai, “Beyond Emergency Responses in the Democratic Republic of Congo: Regional Solutions for a Regional Conflict,” USIP Peace Briefing, 2009, 1.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 4
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid.
for violent conflict through the strengthening of regional economic and security networks.

The DRC’s political economy of resource extraction is by and large induced by a shortage of shame amongst international corporate players. Consumers are generally ignorant to the widespread use of conflict metals in their daily technologies, so there is limited public pressure for corporate accountability. Requiring companies to report where and how they are buying minerals such as coltan or to engage in fair-trade programs would evidently have the effect of minimizing the profits of a corrupt few who control mineral rich zones by means of terror, abuse, and rape.61 Moreover, companies would be able to advertise their products as conflict-free—a potentially effective marketing strategy.62 America’s Dodd-Frank Act is a step in the right direction.63 It includes a provision requiring Wall Street firms to report to the Securities and Exchange Commission whether they are acquiring minerals from the DRC or contiguous nations along with the measures they have taken to avoid sourcing from regions guilty of mass atrocities.64 Implementing a tagging scheme on individual mines in the DRC is underway although extremely difficult.65 The International Tin Research Institute (ITRI) has found that in addition to being stringently regulated, mines in the DRC are rurally located and tend to lack Internet and electricity—a serious obstruction to efficient data collection.66 The most straightforward solution is for corporations to entirely remove conflict regions from their supply chains; sourcing from more peaceful regions would reassure consumers

61 Marlow and Akkad, “Bloodstains at our fingertips,” 1.
62 Ibid.
63 Ibid.
64 Ibid.
65 Ibid.
66 Ibid.
that their technologies are rape-free. Clean trade initiatives will be both time-consuming and costly, however, requiring a complete procedural overhaul for many corporations. In the grand scheme of disadvantage and inconvenience, the preservation of life, dignity, and welfare in the DRC outweighs any corporate concession.

Violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo has created a humanitarian catastrophe whereby political and militant extremists have exploited the nation’s potential for peace. Addressing impunity by ensuring that perpetrators are held accountable for their crimes at this point is ambitious; the ICC will only be able to charge and arrest the few most responsible once Kabila’s government comes to realize that negotiating with criminals is futile. Leveraging multinational natural resource companies is instead an essential starting point. Under the right contractual agreements, these companies have the greatest incentive to ensure that the DRC’s mineral wealth first and foremost improves the lives of the Congolese. Strong international intervention may help staunch the immediate crisis; however, local communities must have ownership in the peace process for long-term viability. Encouraging a horizontal model of governance via security sector reform is of paramount importance; in Congo this requires a dissipation of resources, successful reintegration efforts, a national peacekeeping force that exists to protect civilians, and a concerted effort to balance security and sustainable development.

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67 Marlow and Akkad, “Bloodstains at our fingertips,” 1.
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