

Coltan Connection to the Conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

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Spring 2008
Honors in International Studies

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Capstone: Coltan Connection to the Conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Introduction:

In the eastern region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo there is a massive conflict occurring, which started in 1998. It has been referred to by many academics as Africa's 'first world war.' There are many factors, levels and players involved. Although the conflict is complex this paper focuses on the importance of the resource coltan. It is generally accepted in academia that resources, such as coltan, have an effect on conflict.¹ Yet, data pertaining to coltan is lacking. The resource is found in a conflict zone and the process of excavating the mineral is difficult to trace from start to the end point of selling to a processing firm. For these reasons this paper will examine the larger theme of resource conflicts with the aims to determine which theory applies to coltan in the DRC most comprehensively, considering the lack of data on coltan itself.

There are three general areas in which resources are talked about in a conflict situation that will be examined in this paper. Broadly, they are environment, political conflict theory and economics. These are general and require dissection. The environment schema arguments determine that there is conflict because of the presence of resources.² The economics perspective, generally, concludes that an economy based on resources, particularly minerals, will be weak and corrupt, instigating grievance and in turn, conflict.³ Finally, the political conflict theory, in terms of this paper, states that conflict occurs in weak states and that often states with abundant

¹ See Indra de Soysa, "Resource Curse: Are Civil Wars driven by Rapacity or Pacify?" Greed and Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil War, Eds. Mats R. Berdal and David Malone. Boulder, USA: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000.

² Moyroud, Celine and John Katunga. "Coltan Exploration in Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)" Scarcity and Surfeit, Eds. Jeremy Lind and Kathryn Sturman Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies, 2002.157-185.

³ de Soysa, Indra. "Resource Curse: Are Civil Wars driven by Rapacity or Pacify?" Greed and Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil War, Eds. Mats R. Berdal and David Malone. Boulder, USA: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000. 125.

resources in Africa have weak political systems-thus leaving room for violence.⁴ These three areas of distinction in the discussion of natural resources align with how coltan is discussed in the DRC.

From the analytical discussion of the three models, it will be clear that coltan plays an important role in the conflict, as it is a rich commodity perpetuating the conflict. Identifying which aspects of the three models best explains the situation in the DRC will contribute to refining the models. Since, generally, all academics agree there is a connection between the resource coltan and the continued conflict.

This paper examines a brief history of the conflict in the first section. The second section will elaborate on coltan, what it consists of and why it is important to the world economy. The next three sections will explain the three theories: environment, economics and political conflict. Next, each of the three examinations of how resources affect conflict will be assessed as the best fit for the situation of coltan in the eastern DRC. Finally, recommendations will be made regarding what is missing in the coltan discussion as well as which political procedures at the international level could assist in improving the circumstances in eastern Congo.

⁴ Vlassenroot, Koen. "Conflict and Militia Formation in Eastern Congo" Violence, Political Culture and Development in Africa. Ed. Kaarsholm. Oxford: James Curry, 2006. 63

Section 1: History of the conflict



The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is located in the center of the African continent. It is surrounded by nine nations: Congo-Brazzaville, Angola, Zambia, Tanzania, Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda, Sudan, and the Central African Republic. The DRC was under Belgian colonial rule before independence in 1960. After various rulers, including Patrice Lumumba, Mobutu Sese Seko took control of the nation in 1965⁵ with western political support. The current conflict

⁵ BBC. "Timeline: Democratic Republic of the Congo." 9 Feb. 2008. 15 Apr 2008.
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/country_profiles/1072684.stm>

started following the overthrow of Mobutu Sese Seko, which occurred in 1997. There are two vastly different stages in the current conflict: the recent civil war from 1999-2002 and the continuing conflict in the eastern region from 2003-present.

Rebellion against Mobutu began in 1996, when the people of the DRC could no longer tolerate the corrupt and brutal dictatorship. The Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire, led by Laurent Kabila, swept across the nation from the eastern border with support from Rwandan and Ugandan allies.⁶ The predominately Banyamulenge⁷ militia took the country with ease, when Mobutu was out of the country, as political unrest and strong anti-Mobutu sentiments were prevalent throughout the nation.⁸ “A majority of the population rallied behind the rebellion in the hope that a victory against the corrupt regime of President Mobutu would usher in a new era of peace and prosperity for all.”⁹ The ease with which the rebels took over also demonstrates that the central government did not have complete control over the territory, which remains true today. In May 1997, Kabila was installed as the President of the new Democratic Republic of the Congo, previously Zaire.¹⁰ With the overthrow of Mobutu, the country entered a transitional phase.

However, Rwanda again interfered when it financially backed another rebel group the following summer to overthrow Kabila. The DRC’s neighbors came to the aide of Kabila to

⁶ Montague, Dena. “Stolen Goods: Coltan and the Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo.” SAIS Review. 22.1 (2002). 103-118.

⁷ The Banyamulenge are literally “those coming from the Mulenge.” The Banyamulenge people are Tutsi-settlers in the South Kivu province of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. There is much dilemma surrounding these people as they border the DRC, Rwanda and Burundi and have a debated identity. The identity crisis of this group has influenced not only the conflict in the DRC, but also in Rwanda and Burundi. Although the roots of the Banyamulenge are disputed, it is generally accepted in academia that these peoples arrived to the South Kivu area in the late 19th century. Vlassenroot, Koen. “Citizenship, Identity Formation & Conflict in South Kivu: The Case of the Banyamulenge.” *Review of African Political Economy*. Sep. - Dec., 2002, 29 (93/94) pp. 499-515

⁸ Clark, John Ed. “The African Stakes of the Congo War.” Palgrave Macmillian. New York. 2004.

⁹ Mwanasali, Musifiky. “The View from Below.” *Greed and Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil Wars*. Eds. Mats Berdal, and David M. Malone. Boulder, USA: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000. P141.

¹⁰ BBC. “Timeline: Democratic Republic of the Congo.” 9 Feb. 2008. 3 April 2008.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/country_profiles/1072684.stm>

assist in fending the rebels off. Hence, Africa's first world war; Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe sent support.¹¹ The rebels gained control of the east, but failed to conquer the country or Kabila. The two dominant rebel groups are the Congolese Liberation Movement (MLC) and the Rally for Congolese Democracy (RCD). The first is supported by Uganda and the latter by Rwanda.

In 1999, a peace accord was signed by the six countries and the two main rebel groups. The UN entered the scene in 2000 with a 5,500 strong peacekeeping force, hoping to monitor the cease-fire. Regardless, fighting continued in the eastern region. Kabila was assassinated in 2001 and his son Joseph Kabila promptly took over the political power structure. However, in 2002, various peace agreements were signed throughout the year which (virtually) ended the civil war. An interim government was in place, new elections were organized and the constitution was re-examined. Some of the peace agreements involved Uganda and Rwanda committing to removing their troops from the DRC. This was supposed to occur by 2003. The first phase of the conflict was over.

The current phase of continued conflict overlaps with the peace and development stages following the five year civil war. The government created a new constitution in May 2005¹² and in 2006, the first free and fair elections took place on June 18th. Fighting increased just before the elections in the Eastern region. However, the government, with assistance from the UN, increased the efforts to capture weapons from non-government forces so that the elections could occur as scheduled. As the capitol democratized, the eastern region faced the social upheavals of war. "In most of the eastern Congo, the economy has collapsed, health care is virtually non-existent, and many children lack access to schools."¹³ Because of the poor situation and other

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Carlson, Anthony. "AFRICA: Mineral Wealth: The Cry from the DRC. *Harvard International Review*. Cambridge. Summer 2006. 28(2); pg 6

¹³ Newbury, Catherine. "States at War: Confronting Conflict in Africa." *African Studies Review*. 45(1) April 2002. p. 11

grievances, various rebel groups continue to vie for power over the resources located in the eastern region. Some groups are supported by outsiders, and again Rwanda and Uganda are the key countries involved as they border the eastern region, which harbors the violence and unrest.

At the beginning of 2007, there was political unrest in the capitol. The east remains unstable and to respond to these situations “the Security Council renewed the mandate of the 17,000-strong UN peacekeeping mission in May 2007.”¹⁴ The situation remains volatile. However, at the beginning of 2008 a peace pact was signed between the government and the rebels in the east to end all forms of conflict.¹⁵

There are many players involved in the conflict in eastern DRC which deserve mentioning. The various rebel factions include, but are not limited to the Alliance of the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo (AFDL), Mouvement de Liberation du Congo (MLC),¹⁶ Rassemblement Congolais pour la Democratie (RCD)¹⁷ Forces de Résistance Patriotique d'Ituri (Patriotic Resistance Forces of Ituri, or FRPI)¹⁸ Union des Patriotes Congolais (Union of Congolese Patriots, UPC)¹⁹ Other players are the Rwandan Army, led by President Kagame and the Ugandan Army, led by President Museveni. Finally, the Congolese Army, led by President Kabila and UN forces under MONUC, the United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Throughout the recent years of fighting, the DRC has received international attention surrounding human rights abuses. It continues to be renowned for the unprecedented levels of

¹⁴ Nadira, Laljii. “The Resource Curse Revised: Conflict and Coltan in the Congo.” *Harvard International Review*. Cambridge. Fall 2007. Vol. 29. Iss. 3, pg 34-38

¹⁵ BBC. “Timeline: Democratic Republic of the Congo.” 9 Feb. 2008. 3 April 2008.
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/country_profiles/1072684.stm>

¹⁶ Berdal, Mats and David M. Malone, eds. “Greed and Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil Wars.” Mwanasali, Musifiky. “The View from Below.” P.142.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Deibert, Michael. “Congo-Kinshasa: Cautious Calm Settles Over War-Scarred Ituri Region” *AllAfrica.com*. 17 Apr 2008. 17 Apr 2008. < <http://allafrica.com/stories/200804180001.html>>

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

sexual crimes and mass rapes used as a method of conflict. It is estimated that over 5 million people have died and less than 1% of the deaths occurred from outright warfare. This emphasizes both how the lack of development and the instability in the region are in fact a death sentence. In order for the quality of life to improve, the fighting must stop and the government must be able to display control over the entire territory, something that has never occurred in the history of the nation.

2: What is Coltan?

As the previous section mentioned, the DRC is resource-rich; besides large reserves of coltan there are plentiful amounts of diamonds, gold, copper, and colbalt. Colbalt is predominately located in the south eastern region, and diamonds in the west. Coltan is found in the two Kivu provinces of the northeastern region of the nation, close to the borders of Uganda and Rwanda., where the majority of the recent conflict is occurring. “Africa houses 80% of the world’s coltan, the vast majority of which is thought to be located in the eastern provinces of the DRC.”²⁰

The scientific term for coltan is columbium-tantalite. The mineral is collected off the ground and mined heavily in some areas. The coltan is then sold to processing companies to get broken down into tantalum. Tantalum is one of the hardest metals²¹ and can handle the highest heating levels. “The electronics industry and the aerospace industry consume approximately 75 percent of globally produced tantalum.”²² Tantalum is one of the most sought after components

²⁰ Nadira, Laljii. “The Resource Curse Revised: Conflict and Coltan in the Congo.” *Harvard International Review*. Cambridge. Fall 2007. 29(3) pg 34-38

²¹ Helmenstein, Dr. Anne Marie “Chemistry: Tantalum Facts.” 2008. Mar 2008.
<<http://chemistry.about.com/od/elementfacts/a/tantalum.htm>>

²² Montague, Dena. “Stolen Goods: Coltan and the Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo.” *SAIS Review*. 22.1 (2002). 103-118.

in the modern, electronic global society. This is why coltan is so precious-not for itself in rock form, but for the processed outcome of tantalum.

Tantalum is used in cell phones, computers, VCRs, video game systems, as well as machinery used in health services and nuclear reactors. The simple things that make the modern world go round have pieces of tantalum in them. The technology boom in the late 1990's created a heightened need for this precious metal and, in turn, coltan prices sky-rocketed. "Between 1990 and 1999, sales of tantalum capacitors used in the electronics industry for cellular phones, pagers, PCs, and automotive electronics increased by 300 percent."²³ The correlation with the technology boom and the increased conflict in the DRC is not unnoticed by scholars. The role of coltan as a continuation factor in the conflict is argued by Montague. "International competition for scarce resources in general, and for coltan in particular, is a key factor in the lack of state stability and the continuation of war in the DRC."²⁴ Laljii agrees by stating, "With the 2001 technology bust and with the newly-elected Alliance for the Presidential Majority (AMP) government, coltan has initiated fewer battles."²⁵ There is an assumption in this statement that coltan has previously initiated battles. The purpose of these quotes is to recognize that coltan has a role in the conflict, what this role consists of will be discussed in the following sections.

A dilemma in attempts to ascertain this role, is the unanswered question of how coltan moves out of a conflict ridden region to the international markets? Montague notes that "Congolese coltan in effect reaches the market unnoticed and unhindered."²⁶ The mineral is mined, sold to a middle-man, and then another, and then another, until it is out of the country, associated with a legitimate company and then sold to a processing company. The number of middle-men, and their position of power, remains unknown. What is known is that coltan is

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Nadira, op. cit. pg 34-38

²⁶ Montague Op. cit.

leaving the country as Uganda and Rwanda have both increased their coltan output since the start of the conflict. The overall ability to trace coltan is impossible as long as the conflict continues. It is accepted in the industry that “Once the coltan is sold onto international markets it is impossible to trace it from the end product back to the mines.”²⁷ Despite this, many companies claim that their coltan is from legitimate places, excluding the DRC.

The main consumers should be mentioned as they have an interest in the future of the coltan industry. Unsurprisingly, “The United States, Japan and Western Europe are the largest consumers of tantalum.”²⁸ The most research has been done on the United States’ position on coltan. Montague states that, “The US considers tantalum a ‘critical’ mineral.”²⁹ Laljii’s research concurs, stating “The US government extensively hoards stores of this mineral, and the US Department of Defense classifies coltan as a strategic mineral.”³⁰ Considering the position of the consumers and their vested importance in the mineral is key when observing international efforts.

Finally, the current situation in the coltan industry is often compared to the diamond industry before the Kimberly Process. I will return to this issue at the end of the paper when I discuss possible efforts to regulate the trade in coltan. A process similar to the Kimberly Process could hinder the conflict in the DRC where the coltan reserves are located.

Section 3: Environment

²⁷ Montague, Dena. “Stolen Goods: Coltan and the Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo.” SAIS Review. 22.1 (2002). 103-118.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Nadira, Laljii. “The Resource Curse Revised: Conflict and Coltan in the Congo.” *Harvard International Review*. Cambridge. Fall 2007. Vol. 29. Iss. 3, pg 34-38

The term environment in conflict studies refers to the natural resources in the area. When discussing natural resources in the developing world it is unavoidable to talk about the resource curse. The resource curse theory assumes that because there is a resource, conflict will follow.

Nadira Lalji describes the resource curse as a more complex entity. “Resource-rich countries are less wealthy and less competently governed than those lacking in natural resources.”³¹ Her notion establishes that the lack of governance in resource rich countries increases strife within a community and in turn, potentially leads to conflict. However, in most cases, including the DRC which she closely examines in her article “The Resource Curse Revised: Conflict and Coltan in the Congo,” “abundant resources alone did not lead to war.”³² Again, environment plays a role, but does not comprehensively explain the role of coltan in the DRC. More, it confirms that the resource has a role within the continuation of the conflict.

Dena Montague supports the basic concept of the resource curse stating, “States that depend on mineral exports are among the most troubled states in the world today.”³³ In correlation with Lalji she continues on to explain that these countries, like the DRC, “suffer from exceptionally slow rates of economic growth; their government tend to be weak and undemocratic; and they more frequently suffer from civil wars than resource poor states.”³⁴ From the field, and authors such as Lalji and Montague, it is clear that the theory of “resource curse” must consider more factors than the environment alone.

Some academics stray from this common perception. Catherine Newbury, in her assessment of modern conflict in Africa, comments on valuable commodities, such as diamonds, gold and coltan. She observes that “the commodities themselves provide an incentive for war,

³¹ Nadira Op. cit. p.34

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Montague. Op cit.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

and their commercialization yields the resources that fund it.”³⁵ She specifically points to the DRC conflict as one that emulates this idea. Although she is speaking of valuable resources, Newbury is taking into consideration the economic markets as the resources are being discussed in terms of commodities rather than natural resources. This is beyond the environment and incorporates economic aspects-again not satisfying the idea that environment is the sole role coltan plays in the DRC conflict.

Michael Ross best sums up the relationship between resources and conflict in his article “How Do Natural Resources Influence Civil War? Evidence From Thirteen Cases.” He points out problems with the assumption that natural resources affect civil wars, such as the reverse being true when civil wars make countries resource dependent, etc. His conclusion is that there is “significant correlation between resource dependence and civil war, even though neither can cause the other.”³⁶ This analysis of natural resources continues on to examine causal mechanisms towards conflict, heavily incorporating the impact of resources on economic systems and in turn, conflict.

Many authors argue that resources influence conflict. However, having a resource alone can not cause conflict, though the impact can be overwhelming. Therefore, the environment alone fails to explain the conflict in the DRC, but coltan, and the coltan trade, make it more likely. The next section incorporates ideas of the resource curse when it examines economic influences on conflicts.

Section 4: Economics

³⁵ Newbury, Catherine. “States at War: Confronting Conflict in Africa.” *African Studies Review*. Vol 45, No. 1. April 2002. p. 8

³⁶ Ross, Michael C. “How Do Natural Resources Influence Civil War? Evidence from Thirteen Cases.” *International Organization*. Vol 58, No 1. (Winter 2004) p. 36

Economics can greatly affect conflict in various ways and academics argue differently. The DRC has plentiful resources which affect the economy of the nation. As determined in the previous section natural resources and the resource curse cannot be examined alone, but with-in the economic context.

Lalji embraces this argument claiming that the resource curse (environment) ultimately affects the economic systems.

“The resource curse gives reason for the empirical correlation between resource-rich countries and reduced investment in human capital, increased domestic political corruption, and perilous reductions in economic diversification. The ultimate result of these outcomes is the stunted long-term economic growth of an ostensibly fortunate nation.”³⁷

Newbury does the same thing in the way she argues the influence of resources in the second half of her article, stating that “the commodities themselves provide an incentive for war, and their commercialization yields the resources that fund it”³⁸ Resources are involved through economic systems in instigating and prolonging war and conflict. This argument voids the concept of “environment” in the previous section from standing on its own further complicating the situation. It embraces the impact of the mineral from the environment on the economic system, and this relationship is the one worthy of analysis. This section focuses on the idea of the resource’s influence on economic systems and the coinciding theories which reveals sources of conflict.

A purely economic theory is greed and grievance, made famous by Collier and Hoeffler.³⁹ This theory argues that rebels are inspired by greed and/or grievance to start a conflict. The model, referred to as the CH model, uses proxy variables to predict conflict. These proxy variables range from the GDP growth to the ethnic demography of a nation. The model breaks

³⁷ Nadira. Op. cit.

³⁸ Newbury. Op Cit. p. 8

³⁹ de Soysa, op. cit. p. 115.

down and presents data within each aspect: greed and grievance. There have been multiple versions of the Collier-Hoeffler Model over the years; however this paper analyzes an early model as it inspired so many reactions within the field. A few variables from these two early models deserve observations within the context of the DRC.

While studying grievance rebellion there are three considerations in the model: inter-group hatred, political exclusion and vengeance.⁴⁰ Although there is much inter-ethnic rivalry and tension within the country and the region,⁴¹ this is a difficult topic to measure in terms of a proxy variable, which is a main critique of the model. Not considering outside influences, pressures and the history of the groups involved makes this an incomplete variable.

History is considered in the third grievance variable-vengeance. However, this proxy is determined by whether or not there has been previous violence in the country and how long since the last conflict. While encompassing historical patterns in this variable, the aspect of historical hatred leading to vengeance does not take into account the various reasons for the previous conflict-only that conflict has previously occurred and that it is occurring again because of social tensions. This variable should take into account that when violence ends, social systems remain disrupted and weapons of war are bountiful leaving opportunity for violence to occur again, on top of the social considerations of tensions. This proxy variable is also incomplete.

In terms of grievance, lack of development is not properly considered. Political exclusion acknowledges that there may be a victim group, but this is defined as those with less access to democracy.⁴² The proxy variable continues that the poor may be marginalized because they do not have access to resources as the rich do, leading to political exclusion, and in turn, conflict.

⁴⁰ Collier, Paul and Anke Hoeffler. "Greed and Grievance in Civil War." Oxford. 13 March 2002. p.13. 10 April 2008. <<http://www.csae.ox.ac.uk/workingpapers/pdfs/2002-01text.pdf>>

⁴¹ See John Clark "The African Stakes of the Congo War." New York, NY: Palgrave Mcamillan, 2002.

⁴² Collier, Paul and Anke Hoeffler. Op. Cit. p. 14

Moving on to the greed model, which examines the economic opportunity to instigate conflict: the main variables are taxation by the government, durable peace, commodity exports, mountainous terrain and social fractionalization.⁴³ To continue, “a model in which greed causes initial conflict; conflict causes some effect such as the accumulation of rebellion-specific capital, and this causes further conflict.”⁴⁴ Properly examining the history of previous peace, “The remaining explanatory variables are thus per capita GDP, primary commodity exports, population, and the number of months since the previous conflict.”⁴⁵

The CH greed model is summed up by the authors themselves: “On the literal greed interpretation the extortion of primary commodity exports will occur where it is profitable, and the organizations which perpetrate this extortion will need to take the form of a rebellion.”⁴⁶ The greed model is preferred over the grievance model, but still does not completely predict or explain conflict. Yet there are still critiques, a prominent one being that the proxy variables are not always clear.⁴⁷

Overall, the authors argue that the grievance model does not give much indication of a conflict occurring or not, while the greed model is presented as a positive model to determine whether or not conflict will occur.⁴⁸ Therefore, unable to reject one for the other, Collier and Hoeffler combine effective aspects of both models.⁴⁹ The combined model focuses on two major proxies: commodity exports and the number of young males in secondary school. “While male enrolment may proxy the opportunity cost of joining a rebel movement, it may also proxy other effects of income and education.”⁵⁰ These concluding factors of importance in the model do fit

⁴³ Collier, Paul and Anke Hoeffler. Op. Cit. p. 10

⁴⁴ Collier, Paul and Anke Hoeffler. . Op. Cit. p. 18

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Collier, Paul and Anke Hoeffler. Op. Cit. p. 7

⁴⁷ Class notes. “Conflict in Africa.” Professor Susan Shepler. American University. 26 Sept. 2007.

⁴⁸ Collier, Paul and Anke Hoeffler. Op Cit. p. 1

⁴⁹ Collier, Paul and Anke Hoeffler. Op. Cit. p. 21

⁵⁰ Collier, Paul and Anke Hoeffler. Op. Cit. p. 23

the situation in the DRC; however these two cannot explain the conflict and could not have predicted it alone. Therefore, the model, though incomplete, sheds light onto the concept of greed and grievance.

From the CH Model, other authors have embraced the idea of greed and grievance and have produced various supportive research as well as new ideas on the topic. De Soysa conducts research which “support[s] the findings of Collier.”⁵¹ The idea of grievance leading to conflict is expanded upon. De Soysa states that, “endogenous technical change does not occur in resource-rich countries because these societies become dependent on natural resources and fail to innovate.”⁵² This lack of innovation implies that poverty and unequal resource distribution prevails which constitutes grievance.

Observing the other side, Laljii comments that “greed exacerbates the negligence of an incompetent state and thereby leads to war.”⁵³ This statement intertwines an aspect of grievance as well. In most cases a conflict is started out of grievance but continues out of greed. In terms of the DRC it is more difficult to examine whether greed or grievance instigated the insurgencies, as many of the players are bound to international influences, particularly Uganda and Rwanda. To use Rwanda as an example, the financial backing of the rebels is inspired by greed for access to resources. The rebels themselves have grievances with the government and other ethnic and political groups, thus benefiting from the economic relationship with the outside influence.

Michael Ross supports this argument, stating that “Resource wealth tends to increase the duration of civil wars when it provides funding to the weaker side.”⁵⁴ Insinuating that the rebels use of the illegal coltan trade is increasing the duration of the war as the rebels are weaker than the government and the crucial support through trade relations with Uganda and Rwanda is

⁵¹ de Soysa, Indra. Op. Cit. p. 124.

⁵² de Soysa, Indra. Op. Cit. p. 120.

⁵³ Nadira, Laljii. Op. Cit.

⁵⁴ Ross, Michael C. Op. Cit. p. 43

prolonging peace. Ross also determines that “Resource wealth tends to increase the duration of civil war by offering combatants a financial incentive to oppose a peace agreement.”⁵⁵ These hypotheses apply to the situation in the DRC. To continue with the Rwanda example of supporting the RCL, the RCL is obviously a weaker player in comparison to the government as well as the international intervention in support of the government by fellow African nations. Also, the peace agreements have failed in the past as the trade and movement of resources has continued during the conflict, maintaining the rebels’ financial capabilities to wage violence. Ross focuses on these methods of greed, as he remains unconvinced of the concept of grievance presented by Collier and Hoeffler and other authors, stating, “there is no evidence of a looting mechanism, and little or no evidence of grievance mechanism.”⁵⁶

Mwanasali’s article “The View from Below” looks at the conflict and economics in the eastern Congo. While other arguments thus far within the economic arena have focused on mechanisms, Mwanasali observes the impact of international economic systems. His major point is that, “This vast network of informal trade linked the eastern part of the Congo directly to the markets in eastern and southern Africa, and several others beyond.”⁵⁷ It is the trafficking of minerals and resources through the regional neighbors that makes for a strong *informal* trade route out of the eastern DRC which benefited greatly from the conflict. This is because the conflict made it easier for the Congolese, Rwandan and Ugandan parties involved to get the coltan out of the DRC without disturbing proper federal economic systems. Therefore, the fact that the economic systems in place were informal greatly assisted the movement of the coltan out into international trade routes and thus perpetuating the conflict.

⁵⁵ Ross, Michael C. Op. Cit. p. 44

⁵⁶ Ross, Michael C. Op. Cit. p. 52

⁵⁷ Mwanasali, Musifiky. “The View from Below.” Greed and Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil Wars. Eds. Mats Berdal, and David M. Malone. Boulder, USA: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000. p.140.

In terms of economics in the eastern DRC, there are plenty of grievances, but those with them are too weak politically. So those with some power are moved by greed for income from the coltan to continue the conflict in eastern DRC. Although greed carries the majority of cause of conflict within economics the next section on political conflict theory demonstrates that there are plenty of grievances in the DRC influencing this war.

Section 5: Political Conflict Theory

Political conflict theory incorporates aspects of the previous two theories. Montague ties the three together within the context of the DRC.

“Trade in Congolese coltan remains illegal, since it is conducted with illegitimate groups. As such, it violates the right of nations to permanent sovereignty, and their capacity to implement economic development to benefit its citizens, as guaranteed by UN Resolution of 1803.”⁵⁸

The resource contributes to political discourse thus affecting the economic and political systems previously in place. De Soysa furthers the connection between the environment and politics stating, “From the environmental security perspective, ecological transformation alters the socio-political fabric of society, disrupting productive relationships and ultimately adversely affecting established constraints on and mechanisms of social peace.”⁵⁹ Although there are apparent connections, this section will specifically examine political motivations of rebel groups, characteristics of weak states and their susceptibility to conflict, as well as the impact of regional politics on the conflict in the DRC and the resource coltan.

Rebellions cannot occur without large numbers of supporters to carry out the violent and illegal activities. In the DRC, “The term Mayi-Mayi covers a variety of groups including well-defined and structured groups with a clear political agenda and looser gangs of ‘social bandits’,

⁵⁸ Montague, Dena. Op. Cit. p. 34

⁵⁹ De Soysa, Indra. Op. Cit. p.117

using the title as a cover for predation upon the local rural population.”⁶⁰ The rebels attempt to appeal to the young masses of men not in school. Vlassenroot comments on Jourdan, “young combatants use violence to their own profit, in order to renegotiate and improve their social status.”⁶¹ Therefore, “violent practices have a political value because they manifest a will to undermine the social order, promoting at the same time new forms of organization.”⁶² Since there is a lack of social infrastructure, including schools, in eastern DRC there is space for young people to become involved in the conflict. There are viable reasons that young people continue to join the fighting and illegal activities the rebellions support. These include the economic incentives as well as having basic human needs of food and shelter met by a rebel organization because the government is too weak to support communities.

Violent patterns can also stem from political identities. Rebel groups rise and faction based on political beliefs. Militia recruitment is, arguably, based on ethnic identity in order to create cohesion among the ranks. Vlassenroot comments, “militias have created new, basic values and beliefs and provided members with renewed identities,”⁶³ creating their own political structure. However, this is not a very strong argument, as rebel groups arise with various purposes during different periods within the time frame of the conflict. Nonetheless, Vlassenroot continues:

“While marginalization and exclusion are the main causes for the existence of and enrolment into militias, the bitter result is that militias have helped to reinforce the view that violence is a legitimate strategy of defense or for creating change, as well as a strategy for identity making and of improving an individual’s social position.”⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Vlassenroot, Koen. “Conflict and Militia Formation in Eastern Congo” Violence, Political Culture and Development in Africa. Ed. Kaarsholm. Oxford: James Curry, 2006. 59.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

Therefore, entrance into militias satisfies the need to conceptualize one's social position and identity within insecure social standards in a conflicted community. If the area was more stable, the likelihood of recruitment into rebel organizations that offer young men social status and economic opportunities would decrease. This demonstrates that there are weak political and social institutions in areas where recruitment is prevalent, such as in the eastern DRC.

As a whole, the DRC is a weak state unable to completely protect the people of the country as well as the nation's economic resources and political sovereignty. Out of 177 countries, the DRC ranks 168 in the Human Development Index by the United Nations Development Programme.⁶⁵ Freedom House elaborates on characteristics of a weak nation, stating that in the DRC, "Corruption is rampant throughout the country, particularly in the mining sector. In 2005-2006, between 60 and 80 percent of customs revenue was estimated to have been embezzled"⁶⁶ Consequently, being a weak state further denies the citizens of the country their economic rights, which include benefiting from the country's resources and therefore refuses the nation, as a state and her people, true political sovereignty. This, among other political grievances, creates the need for people to raise arms against a government.

Weak states often face such criticisms and violence from the people. Vlassenroot discusses weak states explaining that "violence has become the only tool to give meaning to the social environment."⁶⁷ He continues, detailing that when there is "rebellion as a reaction to marginalization, exclusion and as an alternative to despair," pure political grievance has contributed to violence occurring. In addition, "the absence of any political space to express contention, the discourse of violence remains the sole legitimate expression of desire to bring

⁶⁵ United Nations Development Programme. "2007/2008 Human Development Index rankings." 2008. 18 Apr 2008. < <http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/>>

⁶⁶ Freedom House. "Country Report: The Democratic Republic of the Congo." 2007. 18 Apr 2008. <<http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2007&country=7308>>

⁶⁷ Vlassenroot, Koen. Op. Cit. p. 63

about structural change.”⁶⁸ When there is no space for discourse of grievances through the governmental bureaucracy, people present their arguments to the government through armed conflict. As there is not a lot of development in the eastern Congo (access to healthcare, education, and basic infrastructure provided by the government), the government lacks accountability, and in turn acknowledgment by the people as an authority. These grievances, which arguably have been in effect since independence or earlier for the people of the DRC, particularly the eastern region, give some reason with this analysis as to why fighting has occurred and continues in the DRC.

Other academics contribute to this line of analysis focusing their arguments on the instability of institutions in weak states. Reno concurs with Vlassenroot’s arguments, stating that “Further privatization of political power is this likely in states that are already institutionally weak and in which rule is highly personalized.”⁶⁹ The DRC during the Mobutu years would easily be described as highly personalized and institutionally weak. “Mobutu centralized and personalized his control of the Congolese state. Foreign companies and local citizens became dependent on Mobutu and the cronies of the ruling regime to make progress.”⁷⁰ The article continues, explaining that “Mobutu never attempted to build a well functioning state, nor did he want to foster a productive private sector or a vociferous civil society.”⁷¹ The negative history and legacy of Mobutu’s regime on the nation left the country weak and predisposed to further abuse by new leaders and influences from the region.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* p. 59

⁶⁹ Reno, William. “Warlord Politics and African States.” Boulder, CO; Lynne Rienner. 1999. p.15.

⁷⁰ Dijkzeul, Dennis. “Healing governance? Four health NGOs in war-torn Eastern Congo: the most that health organizations can hope for is to contribute indirectly to better governance. But they can continue to save lives. (Strong and weak states: cases of governance)” *Journal of International Affairs*. 22 Sept 2003. 18 Apr 2008. <http://goliath.ecnext.com/coms2/summary_0199-3392919_ITM>

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

Reno continues the same argument emphasizing that “the inability to perform sovereign duties risks the collapse of political authority into anarchy and the constant strife of warlordism.”⁷² As the government was unable to control and protect the people of the DRC, particularly the Kivus, warlordism is able to ensue. Furthermore, the “invasion of informal political networks into ever- wider spheres of economic activity is a ‘criminalization of the state.’”⁷³ The political networks of warlordism and lack of government institution, as well as authority, impacted the economic systems. This leaves room for rebel groups to expose their political methods of recruitment and violence in eastern DRC to deepen their pockets. De Soysa points out that:

“the results of empirical analyses that find a strong positive connection between natural resource abundance and conflict may in fact be capturing the grievance effects generated by the perverse sociopolitical conditions associated with the distorting effects of reliance on convenient resource streams.”⁷⁴

In the DRC, the economic systems were so easily abused because there were no corresponding political systems to support or legitimize them on the national or international level.

The international politics of the region greatly impact the situation in eastern DRC. Reno observes Joel Migdal’s theory of “‘politics of survival’ in which the pursuit of stability and security undermines the pursuit of legitimacy through the promotion of economic development.”⁷⁵ Reno comments that this mode of politics may push a new leader to go to drastic political measures to attract money from the international community.⁷⁶ However, this is dangerous as more violent action may be the reaction of the dissenters, as was the case with Kabila. After rising to power and changing things up, his backers lost interest and desired a more

⁷² Reno, William. Op. Cit.. p.16.

⁷³ *Ibid.* p. 22.

⁷⁴ de Soysa, Indra. Op. cit. p.121

⁷⁵ Reno, William. Op. Cit. p.35.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

loyal and detailed lap-dog in power; hence, the assassination of Kabila shortly after ascending to power.

Heavy international influence can bring a country together. Newbury points out that “Nationalist sentiments are strong in Congo, for two reasons: the legacy of the Mobutu era, and the war, which is seen as externally instigated.”⁷⁷ Rwanda and Uganda, as separate political entities, are blamed for the previous and current conflicts, profoundly adding international political tension to the situation. “Both Rwanda and Uganda have created companies with close government and military ties to facilitate the extraction of resources.”⁷⁸ These countries cannot define their relations as economic alone, as the politics of each nation influence each other and the conflict at hand. Montague details that Uganda’s support of the UPDF greatly affects power politics in the DRC, as “Their [UPDF] trade revenue from Congolese resources in rebel-held territory has only served to undermine the power of the Congolese central government.”⁷⁹ Reno expands this example to a more general stance that “Regional shifts in the scramble for markets that can be converted to political resources are also occurring in Africa.”⁸⁰ Inferring the power over some resources, such as coltan in the DRC, is equal to political power in certain situations. Vlassenroot’s argument coincides with Reno and Montague and incorporates violence, he states that “Local economic interests have become linked to a much larger political context leading to further militarization of local society.”⁸¹ The transfer of economic wealth into political power not only affects the national political systems, or lack thereof, and the international power politics, but also the propensity for violence in these situations.

⁷⁷ Newbury, Catherine. “States at War: Confronting Conflict in Africa.” *African Studies Review*. Vol 45, No. 1. April 2002. p. 12

⁷⁸ Montague, Dena. “Stolen Goods: Coltan and the Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo.” *SAIS Review*. 22.1 (2002). 103-118.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Reno, William. Op. Cit. p. 29.

⁸¹ Vlassenroot, Koen. “Conflict and Militia Formation in Eastern Congo” Violence, Political Culture and Development in Africa. Ed. Kaarsholm. Oxford: James Curry, 2006. 62

As a weak nation, the DRC is in a grave situation as the lack of institutional capability encourages the recruitment of militias to the rebel movement and the interference from resource hungry neighbors. On a positive note, Catherine Newbury argues that as “Herbst suggests that a historical experience of war strengthens the state.”⁸² Therefore, the “Democratic Republic of Congo is not so disastrous because, in the long run, one can expect that a stronger, more consolidated state will result.”⁸³ Tragically, a strong, consolidated state is unrealistic due to the fact that although the country is not at civil war; the previous wars have made the country more prone to conflict, weak institutions and informal, illegal economic systems. This conflict is unfortunately Africa’s first world war and the casualties continue, at about 1,000 people a day.⁸⁴ Until there is lasting peace, disarmament of the eastern DRC, and economic benefits to the people of the nation from the plentiful resources, such as coltan, there is little hope for a consolidated state.

Section 6: Recommendations

There is very little concrete evidence and information on the movement of illegally mined coltan out of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Knowing this pattern would allow for further analysis on the impact of this resource on the conflict in the DRC, as well as the economic and political systems involved in the trade. Therefore, it is recommended that future research projects be focused on coltan in the DRC.

The ideal research project to recommend would consist of tracing the coltan from the man who picks it up off the ground to a (the) middleman (men), to the buyer to the processing

⁸² Newbury, Catherine. “States at War: Confronting Conflict in Africa.” *African Studies Review*. Vol 45, No. 1. April 2002. p. 6

⁸³ *Ibid.* p.7

⁸⁴ Freedom House. “Country Report: The Democratic Republic of the Congo.” 2007. 18 Apr 2008.
<<http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2007&country=7308>>

plant to the company. This would involve a researcher traveling to the DRC and literally following the path a piece of coltan ventures on before reaching a tantalum processing plant. After arriving to the Kivu region in eastern DRC, an unclaimed and illegal coltan mine would be located. It should be noted that properly owned mines should also be consulted and interviewed, but that an illegal mine would more effectively demonstrate the impact on violence as it out of the realm of government regulated economics.

Once at the illegal mine, the people on the ground would be interviewed in order to get a base sample of a miner community. Then one miner would be approached and paid to let the researcher(s) to go with them to the next stage. This is just a probable situation, as it is unclear how this exactly works due to no interviews. Therefore, from this time on, it is pointless to detail how a researcher should go about obtaining information and travel through the region. The main goal would be to stay with one piece of coltan, or one load and follow it to an international processing company; detailing the modes and methods of travel, trade, payment and players. Though informative, this possible research project is unlikely to occur in the given, modern state of the eastern DRC. It is too dangerous and uncertain at this time for a foreigner to travel around, and between, the various outlined countries and players. Also, it would be a very costly procedure as traveling around would require multiple bribes through the corrupt systems, as well as payment for protection.

Although this is an ideal research project to outline the system, there are other research options that are more tangible. Focusing on certain nodes within the process, each would present a piece of the puzzle and there are many ways to achieve this goal. A research project based out of Kinshasa, for example, could track the legal mining companies and their expected output. By having an estimate of legal coltan coming out of the DRC, there is room for statistical research to

be done. These estimates could be examined in terms of other legal coltan production throughout the world and then compared with the amount of tantalum being processed among plants in the global economy, as most processing plants are in developing nations with strict international laws. This project could easily be conducted in the capital of the DRC and presents less a less dangerous situation for researchers.

Another research project could focus solely on mining companies. It would be best to analyze one mining company with similar qualities to other mining companies. This could take place in the DRC or in a neighboring country. Understanding and analyzing the mining process in a legal context would allow for future comparisons to the illegal process. It is also assumed that there would be a certain level of corruption within the legal mining companies. This would demonstrate the problematic state of the economic system.

Many possible research projects could potentially be conducted in eastern DRC in non-violent places in the two Kivus. This of course would depend greatly on the progression of the peace process that continues in the DRC and where exactly the research would take place. However, if possible, a researcher could stay with a mining community in the DRC, most likely near a legal mine or near a UN protected area. By observing the quality of life in a mining community, there could be correlations made between natural resource extraction and the effects of war on a community. The quality of life in this context would include access to clean water, shelter, economic income and education, as well as other indicators referred to in this paper as pertinent to the conflict. The research would involve interviewing miners and their families and the status of the children in terms of potential futures-will they go to school or join a rebel political faction?

Another interesting research project could be the evaluation of international reaction to this conflict in general, or lack thereof. Many developed nations have passed humanitarian bills to assist with the situation, including the United States and the United Kingdom, yet the situation has persisted. Why is this? A research project in this vein would include examining the bills passed in foreign nations (including African nations), the implementation of said bills, the outputs and the outcomes. It would go on to examine the effect of involvement of the international community within the current peace process.

Correspondingly, there could also be a research project on the reaction of international corporations to the suggested correlation between coltan and the conflict in the DRC. This occurred momentarily when the United Nations report was released that supported a relationship between the natural resources and the conflict in the DRC in early 2002. The reactions of the tantalum-using multinational corporations, particularly cell phone companies, demonstrated the distance the companies placed between themselves and the situation. However, the response was minimal compared to other resource campaigns. Analyzing this reaction would shed light on the international consideration of the conflict in the corporate world and the outcome would be able to determine whether or not those of the global economy, beyond the states and international organizations involved, accept that there is a relationship between coltan and the conflict in the DRC.

Finally, it is also important to focus attention and recommendations on other possibilities beyond academia. Examining other effective courses of action pertaining to conflict and resources, the ideal example is that of blood diamonds and the Kimberly Process. An international awareness campaign produced positive change and altered the international diamond trade. Blood diamonds are a global issued acknowledged by the American and

European publics. As the people of the United States, Western Europe and Japan are the largest consumers of tantalum, a product of coltan; it is only appropriate that an international awareness campaign focus on making this conflict and issue a household issue, as blood diamonds arguably are in the developed world.

In order to outline an international awareness campaign strategy, the process in which the Kimberly Process was established should be observed. The Kimberly Process is an agreement finalized in November 2002, between various nations and companies on the terms with which diamonds are traded.⁸⁵ The awareness campaign began by humanitarian organizations focusing attention on De Beers, a large diamond corporation, and the conflict in Angola.⁸⁶ As De Beers did not want to lose profits, the company immediately made public that diamonds would only be purchased from conflict free zones. The UN sanctioned diamonds in conflict zones and by May 2000 many countries involved in the diamond industry, as well as companies and non-governmental organizations agreed to work together and create a method of international certification.⁸⁷ The outcomes of the agreed upon process have had positive affects as the countries can now benefit from trade income without encouraging violence. Brooks and Noland commented in their article on development and diamonds that, “the UN peacekeeping operations in Liberia and the DRC may be succeeding precisely because the KPCS [Kimberly Process] has reduced the revenues of those trafficking in conflict diamonds, thus depriving the fire of oxygen.”⁸⁸ A similar process for coltan would greatly benefit the DRC, depriving the eastern region of fuel for fighting.

⁸⁵ Noland, Marcus and Brooks Spector. “The Stuff of Legends: Diamonds and Development in southern Africa.” *Business Leadership South Africa*. November 2006. 16 March 2008. P.28
<http://www.businessleadership.org.za/documents/BLSA_OP_Diamonds_final.pdf>

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* p.27

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* p. 28

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* p.30

There are a few immediate dilemmas when comparing the Kimberly process with a possible campaign for coltan. There is not one single mining company or tantalum processing company to focus attention on. Having one company, as De Beers in the diamond industry, made it easy for the awareness campaign to focus responsibility and attention that would potentially damage a company and demand immediate action. This is not possible for a coltan campaign.

Also, diamonds are easy for people to conceptualize and there is a high desire for diamonds in the western world. Coltan looks like a piece of lava rock and is unappealing to the eye. It is a difficult process to explain in a simple manner; pieces of cell phones, laptops, and most other modern technologies are made from tantalum, which is a processed form of the mineral coltan, which is primarily located in the DRC. Portraying this relationship in visuals would be the first of many challenges in creating an international awareness campaign, yet there are many possible solutions worth exploring.

Conclusion:

This paper has presented a history of the conflict in the DRC and how the violent past has led to current conflict. Within the context of this conflict, the precious mineral coltan has played an important role. This assumed relationship was examined within three academic realms; the environment, economics and political conflict. Each section posed viable explanations for the relationship and that it does indeed exist. However, in order to best examine the connection between coltan and the conflict in the DRC, a comprehensive approach is necessary. This is because variables and mechanisms from each section present a worthy argument. Addressing each worthy argument involves considering all three sections when analyzing coltan in the DRC.

This paper also demonstrated that a comparison to the Kimberly Process is valid; however a new version will be required to better fit the specific tensions and characteristics of the conflict in the DRC, as well as the industry surrounding this precious mineral. Further research is necessary to better comprehend the complexities of the conflict in the DRC and the role of coltan. Different nodes within the process should be examined individually to shed light on each step of the process and in turn expose the comprehensive role of coltan through the economic and political systems that move the resource out of the DRC, perpetuating the conflict.

Finally, other African nations, the international community and international organizations need to recognize the devastation of this conflict. The fact that 5.5 million people have died mostly preventable deaths since 1998 is unacceptable. Considering about 6 million Jews were killed during the Holocaust and that 5.5 million is about twice the population of Los Angeles, California; why do so few people know about this situation? The deaths continue and they are preventable. It is necessary for the international community and neighbors to assist with the conflict; by supporting the government and/or the United Nations to assist the people of the DRC. Clean water, malaria nets, malaria medication, women's programs, and nutrition are a few of the many projects the international community is successfully implementing elsewhere in the world, even on the continent of Africa already.

The continued conflict and its never-ending casualties should send out the signal for a call to action across the globe. Just as many are answering their cell phones to stay connected, they must answer a more important call; one that recognizes the connection of coltan to this devastating conflict and therefore, connects the conflict to their everyday lives. This connection cannot be ignored, neither can the ever-growing number of victims in the DRC. The overarching purpose of this paper has been to highlight this connection and encourage further research that

will observe the relationship between coltan, the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and cell phones in the pockets of the world community.

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