Making a Killing: Criminality & Coping in the Kivu War Economy

Stephen Jackson

Over the last four years, the eastern Kivu provinces of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have seen the precipitous rise and fall of a lucrative economy based on artisanal mining of tantalum ore. In some ways building on older patterns of survivalist economics in Congo, it also represents a radical mutation of livelihood strategies responding to an economy profoundly destroyed by colonial and post-colonial neglect and greed, and more recently by five years of vicious war. That war has itself capitalised on the country’s vast mineral wealth, progressively becoming ‘economised’, in that profits increasingly motivate the violence, and violence increasingly makes profits possible for all belligerents.

This article details the tantalum commodity chain from its base in the forests and uplands of the Kivus to global markets. Through an exploration of popular rumour about economic activity it also traces how the war has radically altered conventional Congolese attitudes to the survivalist tradition of ‘fending for yourself’, from perceptions of the heroic to perceptions of criminal domination by ‘foreigners’ and ‘Congolese traitors’. Yet if there is criminal gain from tantalum on the part of Congolese and foreign actors, tantalum mining has also become a critical mode of survival for many at the grassroots. International action against the ‘war economy’ in the Congo must therefore be careful to punish the real villains.

Au cours des quatre dernières années, les provinces orientales du Kivu (R.D. Congo) ont connu l’essor précipité -suivi de la chute brutale – d’une économie lucrative reposant sur l’extraction artisanale de minerai de tantale (Coltan).

Bien qu’il se superpose à certains égards aux réseaux et modèles ancien d’économie ‘de survie’, ce phénomène éphémère ne traduit pas moins une mutation radicale sur le plan des stratégies de subsistance adoptées par la population congolaise en réponse à une économie profondément ravagée par la négligence et la gloutonnerie du pouvoir (colonial et post-colonial) et, plus récemment, par cinq années de guerre violente.

L’objectif initial de ces guerres n’était pas explicitement économique; constatant que leurs efforts guerriers étaient dans l’impasse, les belligérants – des congolais et, en majeure partie, leurs ‘voisins’ – se sont plutôt repliés sur leur positions respectives en capitalisant de manière introvertie sur l’immense richesse minière du Congo. Bref, le conflit a acquis progressivement un caractère ‘économique’, dans la mesure où les profits générés par l’industrie extractive ont motivé de plus en plus la violence et où cette dernière a offert aux belligérants davantage d’opportunités de générer des profits.

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Si les protagonistes du conflit ont recours à la violence, c'est autant pour assurer l'accès aux gisements miniers que pour piller les stocks constitués par d'autres; de même, des alliances commerciales inattendues - mais néanmoins profitables - ont été conclues entre factions, ceci en dépit des rapports d'inimité qu'elles entretiennent officiellement.

L'article examine en détail les effets de cette économie de guerre sur les moyens d'existence du peuple. Il en ressort que la 'fièvre du Coltan' a déclenché une dollarisation rapide de l'économie rurale, accompagnée d'une distorsion économique et d'une déstabilisation des prix des produits et des revenus de l'agriculture. Pendant les deux années que dure le boom, l'inflation frappe encore plus durement les campagnes que les zones urbaines. La région connaît un exode massif de jeunes gens qui abandonnent leurs occupations agricoles pour se consacrer à l'extraction minière, et en subit les conséquences aux niveaux économique, social et - finalement en fin de compte - politique. De nombreuses activités économiques secondaires, telles la prostitution, la vente d'alcool et le petit commerce fleurissent autour des sites miniers. De même, une frange touche entrepreneurielle d'intermédiaires, opérant au départ de manière indépendante, s'insert dans la chaîne de production.

Pendant ce temps, guidés par des intérêts individuels ou collectifs, les autorités de la RDC et leurs commanditaires rwandais engrangent des millions de dollars par an, fruit du prélèvement de licences d'exploitation et de taxes, ainsi que de leur implication directe dans la chaîne de production et de vente du minerais.

À l'aube de l'année 2001, la chute - tout aussi soudaine - du prix du tantale (qui retrouve sa valeur antérieure sur le marché global) a le même effet désastreux: le choc se ressent immédiatement à la base, alors que les ouvriers mineurs ne trouvent plus ni travail, ni marchés où écouter le produit de leur labeur. Tandis que certains retournent chez eux et se remettent à cultiver, les autres choisissent de poursuivre la 'chasse aux dollars' par d'autres moyens et viennent notamment gonfler les rangs de milices qui terrorisent le Kivu.

Cet article détaille la chaîne de production du tantale, depuis son extraction en forêt et dans les hauts-plateaux du Kivu jusqu'à sa négociation sur le marché mondial, et trace un portrait dynamique du phénomène cycle de croissance et de faillite d'un secteur d'activité.

De plus, en explorant les rumeurs populaires ayant trait à l'activité économique, il montre également à quel point la guerre a altéré de manière radicale l'attitude adoptée antérieurement par les congolais, dans l'esprit du mot d'ordre présidentiel: 'Débrouillez-vous!' Les perceptions relatives à l'homéoeconomicus sont ainsi passées de l'image de héros déployant des trésors d'ingéniosité pour subvenir aux besoins de sa famille à celle du citoyen 'agé', subissant une domination criminelle orchestrée par des 'étrangers' et des 'traitres à la Nation'.

C'est en renversant les figures nominales usuelles que la rumeur populaire circulant au Kivu s'insurge contre ce vol éhonté du patrimoine national, et l'étiquette de 'crime économique'. De même, alors que la faculté typiquement congolaise 'd'acheter ou de vendre quoi que ce soit' était autrefois célèbre, le Kivu connaît aujourd'hui une circulation fréquente de tracts anonymes maudissant ceux qui 'vendent la terre de nos ancêtres'. En sus du pillage, voire du 'viol' du patrimoine national (les richesses de 'Mère Congo') et de son éparrpillement par-delà les frontières, ces tracts fusgent le 'projet criminel' qui, en dernière analyse, contribue à affecter l'intégrité territoriale de l'ensemble du Congo.

En mettant surtout en cause les 'Rwandais', soit une catégorie indistincte amalgamant détenteurs de la nationalité rwandaise (en particulier des militaires) et locuteurs du Kinyarwanda, ces accusations exacerbent le sentiment de haine qu'éprouvent les congolais à l'égard d'un groupe déjà passablement marginalisé.
Enfin, si des intermédiaires congolais et des acteurs étrangers tirent effectivement un profit 'criminel' de l'exploitation du tantale, l'extraction de ce minéral est devenu un mode critique de survie pour une part importante de la population. Il est en conséquence utile nécessaire que les pressions exercées à l'échelon international contre l'économie de guerre que connaît le Congo veillent à punir les véritables coupables.

‘Our Riches are Being Looted!’

In his Christmas 1999 address, the late Msgr. Kataliko, controversial Catholic Bishop of Bukavu (capital of South Kivu Province, on the DR Congo’s eastern frontiers with Rwanda) preached that:

The Congolese people are obliged to resist, because our riches are being looted by foreign powers with the complicity of a Congolese elite.¹

The Bishop was immediately expelled by the Rwandan-backed Rassemblement Congolais pour la Democratie (RCD) rebels, then and now in control of the Kivus. A string of anonymous tracts followed, amplifying his words, demanding boycott of 'Rwandan'–run businesses, non-payment of taxes, and cessation of economic activities like mineral exploitation which 'only serve to kill Congolese'. They denounced a profoundly economic 'lust' to 'dismember' the Kivus on the part of Rwanda, Uganda and their allies in the war since 1998. One 1999 tract accused the USA of:

helping the international bandits from Rwanda, Uganda, and some sons of the D.R. Congo to rape the country and loot Tantalum and Niobium minerals from Eastern D.R. Congo to be used in the US computer industry.

Two related epithets for the Kivu provinces,² employed equally by academics and local actors, evoke the connections between violence and profit this paper explores. The first, 'la poudrière' (the powder keg), suggests a region where rebellion and violence are frequent, touched off by the merest spark of resentment (Mugisho, 1998; Willame, 1998). The second the 'far-west' (Wild West) of Africa (Lumbi, 2000; cf. De Boeck, 1999 on Africa's 'Klondike'), suggests a lawless, mineral-rich frontier zone, long a locus of rapid wealth accumulation through smuggling to and from former Zaire (Vwakyanakazi, 1991; Callaghan, 1984), embodying the wiles of what the Congolese call 'Système D' – the informal economics of survival through inventively 'fending for yourself' (se débrouiller).

But if 'fending for yourself' on the margins of legality in the DRC has long been seen as heroic (De Boeck, 1999), this paper suggests a profound recent alteration in popular attitudes to one major sector of Système D in the Kivus: that of artisanal mineral exploitation, specifically that of tantalum. This radical shift has come about because of the increasingly intimate relationship between dominance of mineral extraction and the course of the bloody war in the DRC which has so far claimed more than 2.5 million lives (International Rescue Committee, 2001). Keen's twist on the well-known Clausewitzian maxim that today, 'war ... is a continuation of economics by other means' (Keen, 1998). In the Kivus, mineral wealth is exchanged for drugs and guns (International Commission of Inquiry, 1998) as well as considerable personal and collective gain, elevating the violence in a vicious circle; profits increasingly motivate the violence, violence makes the profits possible.
Analysts have remained uncertain about applying the moralising categories of 'illegality' and 'criminality' to 'informal' economic activity in Africa (Bayart, Ellis and Hibou, 1999; De Boeck, 1996; MacGaffey, 1986, 1991; MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga, 2000; Vwakyankazi, 1991). However, war in the Kivus has reversed how Kivutiens themselves speak of extractive economics in their province. The resentment of economic 'lust' on the part of Rwanda - or some Rwandans - underlying the present dismemberment of the Congo, has led rumour to label exploitation of the Kivu's mineral wealth as, itself, 'criminal', seeing the riches of the Congo as having been 'looted', annexed and recolonised by foreign powers with assistance from Congolesan 'traitors'.

**Situating the Kivus**

The long, slow rotting from within of Mobutu's Zaire permitted the Kivus to build a degree of political and economic autonomy during the 1980s and 1990s (Streifeler, 1994). However, ethnic polarisation in the Kivus was on the rise, first with the 'Inter-ethnic War' of 1993 - fuelled by Presidential divide-and-rule politics, local rivalries for customary leadership and growing resentment against elite monopolisation of international aid flows (Zex-Kongo, 1999) - and then with the knock-on effects of the 1994 Genocide in neighbouring Rwanda. Two national 'wars of liberation' quickly followed, both rooted in the Kivus' convoluted mixture of communal violence, political machination, raw sensitivity about borders and contested national identities, the freeze/thaw, on-again off-again actions of aid, and, not least, the enormous mineral and agricultural wealth of the provinces. In the first, starting from the Kivus in 1995/1997, Mobutu was overthrown by the Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Congo/Zaire (AFDL), a hastily assembled alliance of groupings 'led' by successor President, Laurent Désiré Kabila. Even before Kabila reached Kinshasa, foreign mineral concerns concluded lucrative mining concessions with him, financing his climb to power and consolidating their position to profit from it (Willame, 1999).

A year later, a new rebel movement, the RCD erupted again from the Kivus, backed by Kabila's former allies, Uganda and Rwanda. With Zimbabwe, Angola, Chad and Namibia weighing in on the Kabila side (the late Laurent Kabila having been assassinated and replaced, quasi-monarchically, by his son Joseph), the fighting stalled in an effective and bloody quadripartite partitioning of the country: Ugandan-controlled, Ugandan-aligned, Rwandan-controlled and Kabila-controlled. Despite mounting popular resistance to RCD rule (seen by many Kivutiens as 'puppets' for the Rwandan government), the Kivus remain a rebel stronghold. From this position, the abortive rebellion has, in effect, become the vehicle through which elite networks reap the harvest of Kivutien mineral wealth unhindered. The level of daily violence remains enormous, as the various contending powers juggle insincere negotiation with deplorable violence.

**'Système D'**

Mobutu's Zaire had a guiding principle: 'Débrouillez-Vous!' ('fend for yourselves'). Economic activity outside the formal, legal sphere was already significant at independence, particularly in the Kivus (Streifeler, 1994; MacGaffey, 1991). However, Zaire's collapse under Mobutu and the thoroughgoing 'criminalisation' of the post-independence state itself (Schatzberg, 1988; Bayart, Ellis and Hibou, 1999) forced tremendous inventiveness about making-do. With typically sardonic wit, Zaireans coined a rich wealth of names for this: 'Article Quinze', the satirical
‘fifteenth’ article of the constitution; also ‘Débrouillardise’ or simply Système D. Describing everyday survival strategies, Congolese will often say ‘nous vivons mystérieusement’ (‘we live mysteriously’), ‘nous vivons dans l’air’ (‘we live in the air’).

Système D is enormously various: young men photocopy by the sheet on street corners; trader women smuggle spirits, perfume, tobacco or mere milk across borders; people buy manioc flour in bulk and hawk it to neighbours; young men migrate from their fields to scratch for diamonds on the Angolan/Congolese border or for gold, tin or, most recently, tantalum in the Kivus. Congo-Zaïre’s so-called ‘second’ economy so eclipses the official ‘first’ that De Boeck is justified in asking what use is ‘distinguishing between formal and informal or parallel economies when the informal has become the common and the formal has almost disappeared?’ (1996:91). Congolese economics radically destabilises all categorical polarities – first/second, real/surreal (MacGaffey, 1991), formal/informal (De Boeck, 1996), official/unofficial, legal/illegal (Hibou, 1999:80), criminal/legitimate – a subset of the larger ‘crisis of meaning’ in postcolonial Congo in which the boundaries between fact and fiction, substance and appearance, signifier and signified ‘have imploded or are subverted’ (De Boeck, 1996:92).

The highly ambiguous and complex relationship between Système D and the Zaïrean state – resistance/collusion – underlines the worthlessness of such polarities. One genesis story has Mobutu winkingly baptising ‘débrouillardise’ himself, urging the population to ‘fend for yourselves!’ in a 1970s political speech. His sly encouragement of economic activity outside official circuits created a safety valve for discontent, encouraging Congolese to identify coping mechanisms which kept them too busy ‘to offer an overt threat to the state’ (MacGaffey, 1991:37).

Meanwhile, Mobutu’s injunction gave licence for everyone from lowliest state functionary to those at the apex of power in the Présidence to engage rapaciously in Bayart’s ‘politics of the belly’: ‘accumulation of wealth through political power’ (Bayart, Ellis and Hibou, 1999:8; Bayart, 1993). But Mobutu’s state was Janus-faced, operating through a ‘dialectic of oppression’ in which the power alternately smiles, snarls (Schatzberg, 1988:1) and predominantly winks (see Webner, 1996; Mmbembe, 1992). The President encouraged Système D, but also ringingly denounced it, as he notoriously did in a November 1977 oration, as ‘le mal Zaïrois’ (the Zaïrean disease): ‘everything is for sale, everything is bought in our country’ (Callaghy, 1984:190). Such post-colonial ambivalence was instrumental and strategic, mimicking Mobutu’s patronial political style, which alternated grace and favour with coercion and punishment (Schatzberg, 1988; Chabal and Daloz, 1999).

Ordinary Congolese engagement with Système D has been just as ambiguous, exhibiting ‘connivance’ and the ‘myriad ways in which ordinary people bridle, trick, and actually toy with power instead of confronting it directly’ (Mmbembe, 1992:22). On one hand, informal economic activity afforded economic survival and an apparent partial escape from heavy-handed officialdom. People increasingly penetrated ‘spaces previously occupied by the imploding state and the regime’ (De Boeck, 1996:97). On the other, Système D also meant exposure to the light fingers and needy pocket books of state functionaries: unremittingly unpaid, but empowered to gatekeep economic activity, often accompanied by violence. ‘Nous vivons mystérieusement’ can also be read as ironic commentary on the Janus-state’s ability to appear atrophied and yet for its actors to remain profoundly, cruelly relevant in the lives of street hawkers, smugglers, market women.
Commentators have remained, on balance, optimistic about the room-for-manoeuvre that Système D offered Congolese. It has been celebrated as an arena for economic survival, but also for embryonic class resistance or neo-bourgeois emergence (MacGaffey, 1991:10); for self-empowering women ‘evading male control’ (MacGaffey, 1988); for ‘development without the state’ (Streifeler, 1994:63); and for trickster entrepreneurship (Bayart, Ellis and Hibou, 1999) in which cunning is accentuated as social value and the pursuit of prestigious lifestyles and elevated status as aesthetic (Bayart, 1993; Bayart, Ellis and Hibou, 1999; Mbembe, 1992; Werbner, 1996; De Boeck, 1999), frequently a transnational one (MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga, 2000; White, 2000). In sum, Système D has been seen as a space of new politico-cultural as well as economic possibility, one in which ‘people are taking matters into their own hands’ (MacGaffey, 1991:39) and where the quest for status, superiority, self-identity and ‘savoir-vivre’ (De Boeck, 1999:192-196) rework long-standing cultural tropes of resourcefulness and guile. This narrative of increasing state withdrawal from intervention in economic and administrative affairs describes the Kivus from particularly early on. Nzoli, a senior Kivutien civil society figure told me in 1999:

You should realise that we don’t look west (towards the capital, Kinshasa) here, and we haven’t for some time ... Like it or not – and many don’t particularly like it these days ... we look east (towards Rwanda and Uganda).

Commentators concur: Kivu has long been isolated, somewhere the state’s writ ceased to run (Callaghan, 1984:187); where extreme, accelerating inaccessibility catalysed smuggling networks (Streifeler, 1994:66); a region amongst the most ungovernable in Congo even before Mobutu (Willame, 1997:46). By the mid-1990s, the Zaïrean state had long since become ‘nothing more than a decorative trompe-l’oeil which poorly concealed its paralysis’ (Braeckman, 1999:36).

Due to prolonged, increasing isolation in the Kivus, ‘débrouillez-vous!’ became understood as an injunction to get by without the state, to engage in ‘self-development’ through constructing not only ‘parallel’ economic livelihoods but even parallel infrastructural and welfare support mechanisms (Streifeler, 1994). Système D came to be seen as legitimate not only for the individual but for the Kivus as a whole. ‘Non-state’ economic activity in the Kivus, ‘even if it appears to deprive the state of precious resources, … returns them to society in many ways’ (Vwakyanakazi, 1991:69).

Needless to say, the Kivus were never entirely ‘non-state’. For one thing, a small number of Kivutien Rwandophones played prominent roles in Mobutu’s early governments and were material beneficiaries of his later policies of economic ‘Zaïreanisation’? But the broad narrative of the Kivus’ disconnection from the rest of Zaïre and their long-term economic linkage to Rwanda, Uganda and on to the Gulf States and even the Far East (MacGaffey 1991; Bayart, Ellis and Hibou, 1999) is undeniable. Further, whatever the realities, Kivutien perceptions of Système D through the eighties and nineties were of an arena of escape from the predatory dialectics of Mobutu’s regime.

‘Coltan Fever’ & the Tantalum Commodity Chain

With the advent of civil war in the Congo these attitudes have profoundly altered. Once seen as heroic entrepreneurs, those who excavate for mineral wealth in the RCD-controlled eastern half of the war-partitioned DRC are now depicted in underground discourse as complicit with ‘economic crime’ by ‘foreign bandits’. What follows here
is a case study of this change, traced through the rise and fall in the political economy of 'coltan': tantalum ore which for the last years of the 1990s was the object of a feverish 'gold rush' in the Kivus.

An extremely heavy and moderately rare metal found in the Kivus in the form of 'coltan' (colombo tantalite) mixed with 'cassiterite' (tin oxide ore), tantalum finds its uses in rocketry, satellite engineering armaments and, particularly mobile phone manufacture. As a result, the world price for tantalum increased precipitously (almost ten-fold) over recent years before crashing just as precipitously at the beginning of 2001:

![Tantalum: World Price Movements 1996-2001](image_url)

Cassiterite has been mined in the Kivus for decades (Vwakyanakazi, 1991:62) along with gold, diamonds, tungsten, cobalt and other precious minerals. Despite long-term awareness of considerable tantalum reserves – Lumbi (2000:7) estimates 450,000 metric tonnes in the DRC. Until ten years ago tantalum's presence in the Kivus was largely ignored until advances in technology coupled with an escalating world price made it enormously profitable to separate from other metals. Subsequently, two successive wars in the Kivus made tantalum exploitation possible as never before.

Tantalum ore is mined by hand in a number of zones in the Kivus: the upland pastures of the Masisi and Kalehe, and in Maniema and Walikale, in the eastern verges of the great equatorial rain forest that carpets Congo's centre. In late 2000, during the boom period, I journeyed to Walikale with my colleague Juma to see 'coltan fever' for myself. In Walikale Centre, young men carrying wok-like metal pans on their heads were setting off on the three day's march into the forests to scratch out the ore with hand tools and pan it. So great was the exodus from the fields to the forests that a serious knock-on effect on food insecurity was noted (Institut POLE, 2001). Juma told me:

about 90 per cent of the young men are doing this now. You hear about a hill with deposits and off you go to negotiate with the owner, a local chief, to pay a percentage to him. Of course, with the forest areas so cut off from everyone, no road and all, the exploiteurs are completely at the mercy of the buyers.
Little money was making it back to the town of Walikale. The few vehicles in town were rusted jalopies. But small planes would arrive twice a day to upload valuable sacks of raw ore.

The exploiteurs were spending two to three weeks in the forest slowly scrabbling together a kilo or so of ore to sell. Some then walked back to the market in Walikale Centre to sell there. Others remained, swapping coltan for goods and services brought to the forest by intermediaries.

Jean, a motorbike taximan worked as an intermediary, based in Walikale. Getting into coltan requires magot, financial resources, he told me. Jean began taxi driving for an uncle with a vehicle idle in town. With the profits, and some more his uncle gave him, he got hold of a parcelle of land and grew some manioc and vegetables. Trekking into the forest, he swapped this produce with exploiteurs for coltan. Selling that on again in Walikale Centre, he bought an old motorbike and started as a moto-taxi. After a while, he sold that motorbike and bought more coltan - this time about US$500 worth. With this he bought a metric tonne of manioc flour in Bukavu and brought it back to the forest where he exchanged it for $1,500 worth of coltan. With the proceeds he bought the new motorbike with which he transported me around Walikale. He intended to go back to the coltan fields 'as soon as possible: next week if I can!'

Violette was an intermediary at the next level. A prosperous-looking woman, we met boarding the small cargo plane ferrying us from Walikale to her home town, Bukavu, with more than a metric tonne of coltan and cassiterite packed in neat, tiny and impressively heavy white sacs. Violette's mother was Rwandan, her father Congolese: Violette considers herself Congolese, but said that because she is 'morphologically Rwandan-looking' she has 'a lot of trouble about this in Congo, particularly at present'. She began as a coltan intermediary after her husband, also Rwando-Congolese, was killed by an angry anti-Rwandan crowd in Kinshasa in the early days of the 'First Liberation War'.

Violette would regularly fly to Walikale with a large financial stake assembled from friends, neighbours and investors. She needed a large stake because her margin was small, buying in Walikale market at about $25 a kilo, paying $1.50 per kilo air transport and some further kickbacks, before trying to sell in Bukavu at about $30 a kilo at the commercial comptoirs. Unfortunately, the final price varied with the ore's quality and density, only accurately assessed with expensive spectrometry machines: 'the Rwandans have recently installed such a machine in Walikale but I won't use it because it deliberately under-values the ore!' As a result, Violette would guess at the true value of the ore on offer. Just before I met her she had lost $4,000, but she hoped this time to clear that debt, returning with 500kg on a capital outlay of about $12,500 borrowed from friends and colleagues. Reflecting on her life, Violette echoed the spirit of 'débrouillez-vous!':

'It's a pleasure when you make some profit, to know that you have done this yourself, even if you put your life in danger always. Even if the war ended and the president tried to put a stop to this commerce, I would find a way to continue!'

The other intermediaries, Violette said, are all from the Bashi ethnic group around Bukavu. The Bashis, historically, are considered culturally and linguistically 'close' to Rwanda, even if precolonially at war with the Rwandan state (Newbury, 1989; 1992). Though Congolese, they are seen as foreigners and 'almost Rwandans' by local people in Walikale, their control of intermediary trade resented. The taint of 'foreignness'
and quasi-Rwandanness they carry adds to the general, building resentment towards things ‘Rwandan’ in the Kivus.

In 2000, intermediaries I talked with estimated two-thirds of the ore being mined in the Kivus exited straight to Rwanda by plane for processing and export, while one-third was being purchased, analysed and processed at commercial comptoirs in Bukavu and Goma. These comptoirs are the final Central African link in the commodity chain. Large numbers of Congolese workers laboriously crush, wash, separate and grade the ore. A small laboratory assays purity levels, determining the price to the preceding layer of intermediaries (the comptoirs in Goma operate as a cartel with fixed purchase prices geared to purity levels). The coltan and cassiterite are separated and packed in oil drums, ready for export and final sale on the international market — buyers in London, Brussels and Amsterdam are the predominant destination, but increasingly on the internet one can find cryptic advertisements posted to bulletin boards such as the ‘Embassy Network’:

_I want to buy larger [sic] amounts of coltan if you can offer at very good price very urgently (Recherche grande quantité de coltan a prix bas tres urgent [sic])._

**Coltan’s Linkages to the War Economy**

Enormously lucrative, coltan is intimately linked to the ‘economy of war’ (Le Billon, 2000) in the Kivus. Ahmed, a middle-aged expatriate hydraulic engineer, ran one of ten or so comptoirs in Goma operating during 2000. He confirmed what Kivutien popular opinion strongly resents: even if the comptoirs have a highly international mix of financial interests behind them, all the comptoirs in Goma are Rwandan-connected, whether in terms of representation or ownership:

_The US comptoir is protected by Rwandans, the Egyptian one is associated with Rwandans, and the German one has Rwandans employed there. You can say the same for all of them! ... The Tutsi in the Masisi are exploiting the stuff there and shipping it straight to Rwanda or through their brokers in Goma on to Rwanda. This part of the Congo is just being treated like a Rwandan company!_

The substance of these findings, if not quite their tone, was later echoed in the controversial UN Panel of Inquiry Final Report on ‘Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources’ (UN Panel of Inquiry, 2001). As the following table, based on official Rwandan statistics (almost certainly underestimates), suggests, Rwandan ‘production’ of tin, tantalum, gold and diamonds rose suddenly in 1997, the year that Rwandan troops were first deployed on Congolese soil. The figures have continued to

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Gold Production (kg)</th>
<th>Cassiterite Production (tons)</th>
<th>Coltan Production (tons)</th>
<th>Diamond Exports (US$)</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>247</td>
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<td>1998</td>
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<td>2000</td>
<td>10</td>
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_Sources:_ Coltan, cassiterite and gold figures derived from Rwandan Official Statistics (No. 227/01/10/MIN); diamond figures from the Diamond High Council (All figures originally appeared in the UN Panel of Inquiry Report, 2001. All 2000 figures are to October).
rise with the second war from 1998 to the present. Rwanda is not known to possess any of these four minerals on its own territory in any quantity.

For tantalum, the UN Report is very specific:

Most of the coltan extracted by civilians and prisoners is sold to intermediaries (civilians or soldiers) who in turn sell it to comptoirs, some of which are controlled by the Rwandan military. The quasi-totality of this coltan is sent to Kigali, and generally stored in facilities owned by the Government (UN Panel of Inquiry, 2001: paragraph 129).

In fact, for a brief period between the end of 2000 and early 2001, the link between the RCD/Rwandan military and the coltan business was more intimate still. On 25 November 2000, the RCD imposed a strict monopoly on coltan buying and selling, replacing the comptoir system. Control of the monopoly was assigned to SOMIGL (Société Minière des Grands Lacs). Two of the four SOMIGL partners were from RCD/Goma itself. A third, Madame Aziza Gulamali is a half-Burunondo-Congolese, half-Asian businesswoman from Bukavu. Her always-controversial career has included management of the Sportsman cigarette factory, controller of two comptoirs in Goma and Bukavu, and major financial backer of the (Hutu) Front pour la Défense de la Démocratie (FDD) rebels in Burundi led by Léonard Nyangoma. Her selection by the (Tutsi-aligned) Rassemblement Congolais pour le Démocratie (RCD) raised eyebrows in the Great Lakes and added weight to the view that Rwanda’s interests in eastern Congo had less and less to do with political security imperatives and more and more with profit. The SOMIGL monopoly did not endure, however, being peremptorily abandoned in April 2001. Bonaventure, a Coltan dealer in Burundi, explained:

She [Gulamali] had said she was going to pay a million dollars a month in taxes, I think, to the rebel government. And that was a lot of money, so she wanted to reduce the price to pay to the diggers, to the people who bring it, and they did not appreciate that, so instead of selling at a low price, they would go and sell it to Kigali or wherever ... They smuggled it! The people who decide upon giving Madame Gulamali the monopoly, they are the rebel big shots, because they have ‘eaten’ something, gotten something, whatever, but then the actual people who have to enforce it are the small soldiers by the roadside, on the borders, who have to make sure that the coltan doesn’t go out of the Congo. And those guys are hungry, so hey! You pass with your 100 kilos, you give them $50 and they say ‘Ciao!’

From the RCD perspective such smuggling was ‘illegal’, contravening their ‘legal’ establishment of SOMIGL. However, very few Congolese accepted the ‘legality’ of the monopoly decree itself, seeing the RCD’s presence and its ‘criminal’ economic exploitation of the Kivus as the fundamental ‘illegality’. With the monopoly’s abandonment, arrangements returned to the status quo ante, with everyone from lowly diggers to comptoirs paying operating fees to the RCD.

What was the total value of the coltan trade at the height of the boom? What proportion accrued to Rwandan and RCD accounts? Finally, can the assertion that this trade fuelled the war in the DRC be sustained? During my visit to Ahmed’s comptoir, a shipment of 96 oil drums at 750kg per drum was readied for departure. This comptoir moved a similar quantity about every ten days. Annually, the comptoir grossed about $4.2m, with another three doing similar business. Along with a number of smaller comptoirs, this makes for a total of about US$30m annually. Ahmed estimated twice as much coltan left directly for Rwanda as passes through Kivutien hands. Rwanda admits to coltan exports of 122 and 83 tonnes in 1999 and 2000 respectively. However, other estimates suggest the Rwandan army, through Rwanda
Metals, exported 100 MT a month over an eighteen-month period (UN Panel of Inquiry, 2001: paragraph 130). At an average world price of approximately $200 per kilo during this period, this makes almost $17 million a month in profit assuming that the coltan was bought for $30 per kilo from intermediaries such as Violette.

In 2000, Ahmed’s comptoir paid RCD authorities $7,500 for its operating licence, with an additional 0.75 per cent net to the Department of Mines and 7 per cent to the Office of Control in ‘customs duties’, both under RCD direction. With the addition of ‘overtime’ and other costs for these two departments which the comptoir is obliged to underwrite, direct payments to RCD-controlled services ran at about 10 per cent, or an estimated $3m per year. Post-SOMIGL, comptoir licence fees increased to between $15,000 and $40,000 a year, with intermediary licences at several hundred dollars apiece (arrangements for diggers remain somewhat ad hoc with local authorities and chiefs). In addition, all comptoirs depend on Rwandan banks for cash dollars, who charge a commission of 3.75 per cent and are in a position to manipulate the exchange rate to their advantage.

A number of investigations link the coltan trade to the highest levels of Rwandan and Ugandan political circles (Lumbi, 2000; Institut POLE, 2001; UN Panel of Inquiry, 2001). And, as Ahmed argued,

> that's just the coltan and the cassiterite. What about the coffee, the diamonds, the gold? What are they doing with the tungsten as well? The coffee [also a top smuggling item] is really top quality, particularly the arabica, even though it was a bad year for the price outside. So they are making a lot of money!

One can add the cobalt, the rubies and semi-precious stones that Violette displayed, the tropical hardwoods, the coffee, tea, papaine (tropical plant derivative) and all the other commodities of which Kivutien rumour incessantly whispers. There is a perniciously symbiotic relationship between the economic activity and the violence: Lumbi (2000:4) calls the Kivus a ‘vast hub where traffickers in diamonds, drug-money launderers and arms-dealers meet’. The UN Panel of Inquiry is equally blunt:

> Here lies the vicious circle of the war. Coltan has permitted the Rwandan army to sustain its presence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The army has provided protection and security to the individuals and companies extracting the mineral. These have made money which is shared with the army, which in turn continues to provide the enabling environment to continue the exploitation.

Violence provides the mechanism for the economic exploitation of the Kivus by elites at home and in neighbouring Rwanda. In turn, part of the massive economic profits underwrites the military operations. The rest of the profits are spirited out of the country: the RCD, in the four years it has held power, has not supported even basic health or education to the Kivutien population. Poverty, morbidity and mortality for ordinary Kivutiens have risen enormously. Amnesty International has repeatedly asserted that in the Kivus ‘under the pretext of fighting their opponents, all parties to the conflict are killing, looting and extorting on a massive scale and subjecting the entire population to terror and misery’ (Amnesty International, 2000). All the while, multi-million dollar trans-border flows have continued.
Economics of War & Mutations in Economic Livelihoods

Congo exemplifies an increasingly common trend: the economisation of conflict. It would be too much to assert that the two successive rebellions began with explicitly economic motives. The belligerents had expressed political goals, whatever one thinks of them. However, since its outbreak, the second conflict has become successively more and more economic in its scope, means and ends. In contrast to the recent totalising analytical trend – ‘conflicts are more likely to be caused by economic opportunities than by grievance’ (Collier, 2000:91) – by ‘economisation’ of conflict I mean a process through which conflicts progressively reorient from their original goals towards profit, and conflict actors capitalise ever increasingly on the economic opportunities that war has opened up. Meanwhile, for ordinary Congolese, one of the many devastating impacts of an ‘economised’ war has been profound mutation in livelihood strategies already imperilled after decades of neglect and abuse under Mobutu.

Visible examples have emerged during the conflict in the Kivus of political and military imperatives subsumed to economic ones. The RCD’s split into separate ‘Rwandan’ and ‘Ugandan’ wings owed as much to mineral deposits as to ideology. The same can be said of clashes between Rwandan and Ugandan troops, RCD rebels and Mayi-Mayi militias, in and around mineral areas. The fight to control Congo as a whole has given way to military strategies on the part of all actors to dominate the natural resources, whether minerals such as those in the Kivus ‘coltan belt’ (UN Panel of Inquiry Final Report, 2001: paras. 173-180) or Kinshasa’s shady military-commercial alliance with the Zimbabwean Army to exploit ‘the world’s largest logging concession’, almost 33 million hectares of Congolese hardwood forest (Global Witness, 2002). A ‘win-win’ situation for all belligerents (UN Panel of Inquiry Final Report, 2001: paragraph 218) has emerged in which politically perverse but economically rational alliances are forged. Mayi-Mayi militias and RCD rebels, political enemies, nonetheless collude to mutual economic advantage, accessing weapons from the same dealers and selling coltan to the same comptoirs. It is in more than one sense, then, that Rwandan President Kagame described this as ‘a self-financing war’.

How have ordinary Kivutens’ livelihoods changed in response? First, while urban areas have long been dollarised, ‘coltan fever’ rapidly did the same as well to many relatively remote rural areas:

*It’s been dollarisation completely [up around the coltan areas] - and without reference to the market; 300 CF per dollar, a beer sold for $3 etc. When you have dollarisation there is always a rise in prices and there is a gravitation of all kinds of other activities towards the mines* (Michel, local researcher, Goma).

Coltan areas saw rapid growth in prostitution, brewing and shebeens, and petty commerce of all varieties around the dollar economy. Localised environmental impacts, such as mudslides, have been devastating to lives and livelihoods (Institut POLE, 2001). Traditional agricultural trading patterns reversed: Kibabi, an area in Masisi previously known for its supply of beans to the provincial capital of Goma, became a major coltan centre. Beans journeyed to Goma markets from southern areas instead, traded on at inflated prices to Kibabi for consumption by coltan miners and others. At the height of coltan fever, a sharp decline in food security in the Masisi was felt as young men quit agricultural production to chase dollars. The following chart indicates enormous inflation in dollar terms for manioc, another staple, over a
two year period (in Congolese francs, the effect was dramatically worse: hyperinflation saw prices rise from 20 CF to 1772 CF between January 1999 and March 2001 in Goma). Still more strikingly, 2000, during which tantalum's world price soared and 'coltan fever' raged, saw manioc's dollar price in the rural market of Sake, Masisi overtake the price in Goma. Since manioc is normally grown across the Kivus, this strongly suggests that production of manioc in the Masisi had fallen sharply with the explosion in coltan and was being imported to normally productive areas.

After the Fall ...

All this was before tantalum crashed in early 2001 as precipitously as it had risen a little over a year before. Global demand contracted with the global economic downturn beginning in early 2001 and accelerated by 11 September. Meanwhile, supply side conditions eased at the same time through forward contracts concluded between the Sons of Gwalia – a significant Australian tantalum producer – and major market players. The price shock was immediately felt all the way down the commodity chain, with drastic effect in rural areas of the Kivus. First, the contraction in the margin between producer prices and the international market forced many intermediaries to the wall. By April 2001, Bonaventure in Burundi was telling me:

No, I'm not getting almost anything from the DRC at the present ... The Congolese ... fight on the price, they need a big price which I can't pay. I've got my prices which I want to apply, they come with crazy prices; hey, I want you to pay $120!, which I can't. ... There are some traders that come from Congo that ... want to sell to me at a high profit. But crossing the border and all that, they pay so much money and bribes and I prefer not to deal with them any more ... Let's say they are people from Bukavu; those from Bukavu are people who buy coltan from Walikale ... and you know very well that there are no roads in Congo so you gotta fly to go and get it, pay for your flight, pay for your cargo, bring it to Bukavu, then from Bukavu you put it in a car, bring it to Bujumbura, at the border you have to pay bribes and all, it gets expensive ... I can't make the price the Congolese intermediaries are looking for, and so I don't buy from Congo any more.

![Manioc Price Trends](image)

**Source:** Data Analysis: dollar prices calculated on the basis of fortnightly exchange rate collected by FAO/ Goma in the same markets. Trend curves fitted using exponential trend estimation with $R^2$ values as indicated.
By 2002, Violette from Bukavu had gone out of business altogether:

Even my neighbour, the comptoir, has closed. I gave up shortly after I saw you – I think I made, perhaps, two more trips. I lost $13,000 dollars when the price collapsed ... when the Australians pushed out their product. The business continues, but it is only the Rwandan government that buys now. Even the diggers are giving up because they can't make a profit at the price that is being imposed.

Aside from intermediaries squeezed out of the commodity chain, Violette also hints at an enforced 'rationalisation' of production begun even before the global price fall. Increasingly, diggers in rural areas were being employed by players to operate mines for them. In areas close to urban centres these continue to be largely private actors – richer farmers and local business people. In more remote, less secure areas, military actors – both RCD and the diffuse militias operating loosely under the title Mayi-Mayi – dominate production, purchasing, or target mines for violent attack (A.S.P.D., 2001). On guarantee of anonymity, several human rights organisations in Goma also confirmed in 2001/2002 that forced labour is being used by Rwandan troops to mine tantalum under their control. The increasing involvement of the Rwandan army in primary extraction has driven out many diggers who earlier entered the market entrepreneurially. One local NGO described the 'rationalisation' very forcefully:

To begin with, when coltan was starting to boom, this had a good impact for the peasants because they could both dig and sell, and get a little something. But now that the military have taken the monopoly to buy ... So the peasants can no longer sell to anyone else ... The bulk of the intermediaries have disappeared and there has been a real crunch where the diggers now come into contact directly with the military buyers. The buyer organises the diggers, he takes them to a particular part of the forest, he pays their taxes for them, takes their coltan, gives them some kind of a receipt, takes the stuff saying 'I will test it in Bukavu and let you know'. Then he comes back and just dictates to them: 'You had 10 per cent, you had 15 per cent etc.' In the past the buyer or the seller might lose through not knowing the quality of the product. But now it is really the buyer who has all the advantage because he knows very precisely the quality but the seller has no idea.

What has been the impact of this 'rationalisation' on local economies?

Now in Kibabi, the price of coltan has really fallen and people are starting to abandon it again ... There is a system of control now and it is not everybody that can get involved whereas before there was a laissez-aller, everybody could get involved. Now, if you don't have the paperwork you can't do it. So those who abandoned agriculture, after the drop in prices, they are starting up again in agriculture (Pierre, local NGO official)

Not every youth simply returns to agriculture, however:

The taste for dollars has definitely arrived and coltan has also promoted banditry. Once it really started then the militias would definitely target you as a business person, a seller, a digger and so on. If you were involved in coltan it was certainly assumed that you would have dollars. This would include Mongoles,20 Interahamwe, Mayi-Mayi, local defence, even the army. Certainly, Hutu militias would attack Hutu people involved in coltan. The same soldiers who guard the population during the day attack the population during the night and then the Interahamwe or the Mongoles also get the blame (Director of a local NGO).

Ferdinand, another NGO official, described the limited options unemployed miners now have:
With the fall in the price of coltan, some people have gone back to agricultural production. Some, however, who already had gained some money have tried to set up as merchants in soap, clothes etc. which they try to sell in the rural areas. But also we are in a territoire which is high-risk, and so there would be quite a few cases of people joining the militias at this point. Because at the beginning there was some evidence of it happening in the other direction: people leaving the militias to get involved in coltan …

But many still dig for coltan. In April 2002, in Kishanga mine in the Masisi, more than thirty young men were arduously working the same heavily excavated riverbed that ran through what remained of their fields. In groups of four they dug and sluiced the stony earth to extract dull, dark grey tantalum ore. One group of four men I spoke to reckoned they might collectively extract 2kg a day. These days, they would sell that for about $5 per kilo compared with $8 a kilo in the past. Now or then, this amounts to little more than a subsistence wage. Asked whether the coltan price fall would mean a return to agriculture, the chief of the village said:

We can’t go back to the way things were before coltan, because before we had cows and goats, but since the war there have been none. Each family used to have maybe 15 cows. Now we have none.

So devastated have rural economies become, so eroded are people’s survival margins, that some of Kivus’ markets now open not in the mornings, as traditionally, but in the evenings, to give people time during the day to earn some money. For many diggers, even after the crash in price and the rationalisation of production, coltan remains the only survival strategy in response to a local economy profoundly destroyed by war.

Criminality vs. Coping in the War Economy

Kivutiens see foreign interests driving the present violent RCD occupation of the Kivus. That they further view these interests as motivated by profit has, as I suggested earlier, complicated how Système D is viewed, introducing a tension between those whose basic economic survival depends upon such activity and those with the (relative) luxury to protest against it. In particular, where mineral exploitation was formerly seen as the acme of Système D’s survivalist wiles, now there is huge resentment against its control by Rwanda and Rwandans and its underwriting of the war. The news magazine Référence Plus (2000) quoted an unnamed Kivutien thus: ‘The Rwandans are looting from us, they are stealing our riches from us and we are left with nothing!’ A popular tract reproached Kivutien merchants that ‘the money you are putting in the banks only serves to kill your children, your brothers!’

While academic debates about terms like ‘illegality’ and ‘criminalised’ for economic activities in Congo continue, the popular discourse of resistance uses these very terms itself to describe the war economy. Anonymous tracts persistently speak of ‘criminal’ Rwandan actions, of their ‘criminal’ plan or project’, and denounce Rwanda’s ‘economic crimes’. They view mineral exploitation as a gendered violence towards the rich resources of Mother Congo, ‘raping’ and ‘dismembering’ the national patrimony across borders and ultimately collaborating in the dismemberment of the Congo as a territorial entity itself. Illustrating this new ‘illegitimacy’, Kivutien rumour picks up but inverts the older tropes of Système D. When exhibited by Congolese in the Système D of the past, trickery is celebrated as wile, guile and skill in playing the system. But in the Kivus today, trickery and duplicity are the motifs that rumour relates to the ‘true/hidden nature’ of the Tutsi/Rwandan, a nature which causes these poisonous tracts to demand that ‘IT’S NOW OR NEVER THAT YOU GO
BACK TO WHERE YOU CAME FROM!23 Where the Congolese ability to ‘buy and sell anything’ was celebrated in Système D, the tracts now consistently denounce the ‘cursed sellers’ of ‘our ancestors’ land’ who collude in ‘economic crimes’ and ‘criminal projects’. The tracts are suffused with fear and disgust for selling and buying: ‘the traditional chiefs ... have been bought’; certain chiefs ‘who are well known, are seen around, mobile phones in their hands, lavishly maintained by Rwanda’. Scores of ‘shady’ (or ‘maggoty’) merchants (commerçants verieux) have been purchased already in a catalogue of loathing for those ‘selling’ the Congolese birthright.

Those Congolese involved, directly or indirectly, in extractive economic activity are threatened with reprisal, ordered ‘no longer to export to these countries the products of our country: coltan, gold, cassiterite, wood, palm oil, manioc flour, vegetables etc.’ All air companies involved in the shipment of ore or other contraband are threatened to ‘close your doors: last warning and mise en garde’.

In sum, rumour aims to intimidate and police an economy seen as profoundly ‘criminalised’ through its domination by Rwanda. In this respect, its revulsion for ‘coltan fever’ has been not dissimilar to the strong international calls for embargo against tantalum exports from Central Africa because of their intimate connection with the war (UN Panel of Inquiry, 2001: para. 221). But both are insufficiently nuanced to the harsh realities of life in the Congolese war economy. Elites, both Congolese and foreign, have made and continue to make a killing from the war’s ‘vicious circle’ through which tantalum, timber and all the other war commodities are exploited through military control itself financed from these illegal profits. At the same time, however, the economic capacity to cope of large numbers of ordinary Congolese itself depends more crucially than ever on involvement in ‘illegal’ or marginal economics.

The following conclusions must thus be reached. First, international reactions to the war economy in the Congo cannot be based on overly simple calls to boycott particular commodities without great risk of harm to already critically exposed rural livelihoods. Second, instead, the short term goal must be a delinking of extractive economics from both the financing and the objectives of all parties to the war. Third, longer term, responsible economic governance for Congo’s enormous economic resources must be guaranteed explicitly within the framework of any overall peace settlement for this divided country. Finally, and meanwhile, the international community should keep careful watch on the rising and explosive tide of ethnic resentment towards Congo’s rwandophone communities. As an examination of Congolese rumour demonstrates, this resentment, simmering in the Kivus over the last four decades, has risen proportionately to the popular sense of Congolese grievance that their ‘riches are being looted’. As too much experience in Central Africa and elsewhere in the world has indicated, ‘greed’ and ‘grievance’ (Berdal and Malone, 2000) compounded together make for a violently explosive mix.

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Endnotes

1. ‘Le peuple congolais est obligé de resister parce que nos richesses sont pillées par des puissances étranères avec la complicité d’une élite congolaise’.

2. Though subdivided administratively into three ‘provincettes’, North Kivu, South Kivu and Maniema, I will use the term ‘Kivus’ here to refer to the larger geographic space around Lake Kivu — one of Central Africa’s ‘Great Lakes’ — that borders onto Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi.

3. The Ugandans effectively control territory under the wing of the RCD ‘Aile Ilunga’. However they are also closely aligned to the MLC forces led by Jean-Pierre Bemba, a former Mobutiste who controls much of North-Western Congo at the time of writing.

4. In 1964, just five years after independence, according to McGaffey (1986), 10 to 12 million carats of diamonds — some 81 per cent of official production, were being exported illegally from Congo.

5. Underlining its economic and cultural centrality, Pepe Kalle, one of Zaire’s biggest music stars, satirised this instinct in his 1985 hit ‘Article 15, beta libanga’. From the lyrics: ‘Qu’on soit jeune ou vieux / On est tous un face à une même réalité: la vie difficile / Le cauchemar quotidien / Que faire, sinon se référer à l’Article 15 / Débrouillez-vous pour vivre / À Kinshasa’.

6. In this regard, see particularly the UN Panel of Inquiry’s difficulties finding a workable definition of ‘illegality’ (2001: paragraph 15).

7. It also raises much broader questions about the relationship between such dualistic categories and structures of power globally, which go beyond the scope of this paper.

8. It is important here to underline, as Bayart repeatedly does in his discussion of ‘la politique du ventre’ and elsewhere, that there is nothing unique to Africa about corruption. Collectively, however, Bayart, Ellis and Hibou (1999:xvi) do suggest that over the longue durée, there may have emerged a uniquely African style of corruption. This is one which is adept at extracting rents from a position of independence rather than of dominance — whether this has been in the context of the slave trade, colonialism or indeed of development assistance. Making ends meet from a subaltern position demands and calls into being an aesthetic of trickery and what Chabal (1996:46) appositely styles the ‘Caliban syndrome’ through which ‘Africans have learned to speak the language we [in the West] want or need to hear’.

9. The programme of ‘nationalisation’ of mineral wealth and colonial agricultural plantations which, as Hibou notes (1999:71), in fact resulted in one of the most sudden and extensive transfers of such assets to the President’s cronies.

10. Due to the highly fragmented nature of the global market in tantalum, indicative average prices are, in fact, extremely difficult to calculate. The figures presented here are roughly determined averages based on raw figures drawn from the US Geological Survey (USGS), Mineral Commodity Summaries, February 2000, and a further interview with USGS staff which, itself, drew from spot prices in: Metal Bulletin, Ryan’s Notes, and Platt’s Metals Week. While the figures themselves must be treated as inexact therefore (some sources reported a spot price high at end 2000 of US$365), the underlying trend of a precipitous ten-fold price increase during 2000, and ensuing fall almost to the status quo ante is not in doubt.

11. The ten or so commercial ‘syndicates’ which are the sanctioned buyers of the mineral ore. Comptoirs purchasing a variety of minerals were legalised by Mobutu during his ‘economic liberalisation’ phase (see Vwakyanganakazi, 1991).

12. Newbury (1989, 1992) shows just how interlinked (but never politically unitary) Rwandan and Kivutien historical trajectories have been. That Bashi are seen as ‘foreign’ by the Nyanga in Walikale illustrates a prevalent Kivutien mechanism through which local interethnic rivalries (here Nyanga/Bashi) become conflated with stereotypical culture bloc (‘forest culture’ versus ‘lake culture’) and national (Rwandan / Congolese) identity dichotomies all too frequently and violently. In turn, the stakes in these rivalries are often further elevated through resentments...
towards ‘trader’ ethnicities such as the Nande in North Kivu (Streiffeler, 1994) or the Bashi from South Kivu.

13. This estimate – and it can only be an estimate, under the circumstances – was provided to me by anumber of informants left anonymous here. The UN Panel of Inquiry Report (2001: paragraph 130) argues similarly: ‘Most of the coltan extracted by civilians and prisoners is sold to intermediaries (civilians or soldiers) who in turn sell it to comptoirs, some of which are controlled by the Rwandan military. The quasi-totality of this coltan is sent to Kigali, and generally stored in facilities owned by the Government. A good portion goes to Rwanda Metals and the rest is exported directly by some professionals.’

14. The calculations here closely follow those of the UN Panel of Inquiry Report (UN Panel of Inquiry, 2001: paragraph 130). However, the figure that they use, of S$200 per kilo on average, appears a little high by contrast with the figures presented in the graph earlier in this paper. The discrepancy is likely to be accounted for if the level of purity of the ore is factored in: in the earlier graph 60 per cent purity; in the UN calculations, higher, after further refinement.

15. Amongst the many factors, being precise about amounts and values is almost impossible. As much coltan is exported as cassiterite (the two are almost indistinguishable to the layperson) in order to evade heavier customs duties.

16. The present research did not reveal what extent the two-thirds of the ore leaving directly for Rwanda for processing is subject to the same impositions.

17. ‘… un trafic intense des ressources minières (le diamant et l'Or essentiellement) qui génère non seulement les moyens importants pour financer la guerre mais qui procure aussi de juteux profits aux Officiers supérieurs ainsi qu'aux hommes d'affaires ougandais et rwandais impliqués dans ce trafic’ (Lumbi, 2000a). This claim is followed-up with lists of individuals and companies, international and local, alleged to be involved in various aspects of war-related trade.

18. Evidence in fact shows the degree to which Rwanda’s war expenditure in the DRC far outstrips the official budgetary provision made for defence in the national accounts (UN Panel of Inquiry, paragraph 109).

19. Kivutiens speak of the trading of beans to Kibabi with the same kind of astonishment as might greet the export of sand to the Sahara.

20. Congolese Hutu militias.

21. ‘Les rwandais nous pillent, nous volent nos richesses, et nous, nous n'avons rien!’

22. ‘Les sous que vous faites entrer en banque ne servent que de tuer vos enfants, vos frères’.

23. ‘C’EST LE MOMENT OU JAMAIS QUE VOUS RENTREZ D’OU VOUS ETES VENUS!’ (Capitalised in the original tract).

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