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# A World Playground: Congolese People Sacrificed for International Games and Profits

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She wore a light blue headscarf, like most of the women at this camp for internally displaced people (IDPs). They were given out to the Congolese people, along with baseball caps for the men, during the presidential elections of 2006. On it is pictures of president Kabila and the slogan: bonne gouvernance—"good governance"— in French.

Yet all Venansia Habimana, a displaced woman in the North Kivu province of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), had to say was that she wished her government would create peace. She said it was promised to them during that campaign, and she wanted to return to her home.

"To be here is to miss what you do, but we all need to be safe," Habimana said to a single white journalist in a square wood frame no larger than a port-a-potty, covered with blue and white United Nations tarps. Habimana spoke to the journalist in 2007, before the recent wave of fighting forced additional hundreds of thousands of people to flee.

Homeless and income-less, people at the camps lived uncomfortably. There was little space, diets were unbalanced, and there was no way to work or occupy them each day. IDPs are unwelcome in surrounding communities where they try to rebuild a life. They are ostracized for fear they will take the few jobs available and, most depressing to them, they are forced to pay extortionate fees to bury friends and family that die at the camp.

Given the heightened hostilities—and the permanent state of war that has devastated millions of Congolese lives over the past two years alone—Habimana is probably now listed among the unnamed and soon-to-be-forgotten dead.

Safari Majune was an IDP representative elected by the others. He said that while people longed to return to their own land, the biggest problem was that there is not enough food for everyone at the camp. Famine and malnutrition, coupled with malaria and tuberculosis, means high death rates. More than 1000 people have daily died in Eastern Congo for over a decade now and there have been over 1,000,000 IDPs in the North Kivu region alone, for years.

Majune is one of many who, in 2007, had been at the IDP camp for over a year, and another human being likely to become a meaningless statistic in the long, bloody war in Congo.

This camp was in Rutshuru, just outside the "safety zone" designated by the United Nations Observers Mission in Congo (MONUC). There were over 4,250 children, men and women at the one camp in 2007. They lived in banana leaf domes that look like small, brown, camping tents.

With IDPs crowded and scratching at the UN tarps to see the white “mazungu,” hoping to talk to her or to get some food or money, Habimana told her story. It is an all too familiar story for IDP women all over Eastern Congo. A week earlier she had been walking on foot to her village near the border of Uganda, about 24 kilometers (11 miles) away.

“I have been looking for food and I met some soldiers and they took me,” she said. “They were four but only two raped me.”

Habimana claimed her attackers were government troops, the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of Congo, called FARDC. After some time, she said, she regained enough strength and walked to the road where people found her and helped her back to the camp. Once she arrived, others helped her find enough money to pay for a motorcycle taxi to the hospital. There they gave her medication and instructions to return once the medication was done to test for infections, like HIV/AIDS. She was still taking the medication when she spoke and said she worried that the soldiers who raped her were infected.

The camp in Rutshuru was one of three in a 15 km radius according to Bruno Matsundo, director of the non-profit Centre of Intervention, Social Promotion and Partner Participation (CIPSOPA), a non-government organization (NGO) that was coordinating the three camps.

Everyone in the Rutshuru area and in the main border town with Rwanda, called Goma, speaks about the rights to home, land and—more than anything—a stable country to live in.

Latest reports say the insecurity has reached unproportional heights. Most of the villagers and IDPs from this Rutshuru region have recently flooded into Goma—walking on foot, carrying what they can. Meanwhile the former “safety zone” demarcated by MONUC has disintegrated.

The Indian UN forces within Goma are doing little to prevent murders and pillages now happening in the city. Rwandan rebel rockets destroyed two MONUC armored vehicles on October 26, wounding several peacekeepers. There have been talks of MONUC abandoning the region completely and a recently appointed MONUC commander— Lieutenant General Vicente Diaz de Villegas y Herreria of Spain—resigned after only three weeks of duty.

**Hell on Earth**

For people not already living there, Eastern Congo is a place almost unreachable and, according to many, even less desirable to arrive in. Most international news reporters describe Goma as “Hell on earth.”

The people who do reach Goma tend to fit into four main categories.

First, there are rich businesspersons and the aid organization types who circulate to and from Europe and America, back and forth between the big business offices in capital cities like Kinshasa (DRC), Nairobi (Kenya), Kampala (Uganda) and Kigali (Rwanda). The businesspersons are involved in minerals, aviation, timber, petroleum, weaponry and other international commerce.

Then there are the poor, displaced people who walk the dangerous and dense forests from Uganda, Burundi or Rwanda, fleeing one unsafe and impoverished situation for another.

Third come the passport-stamp seeking Western tourists that brag at cafes and Traveler’s

Lodges in Kigali and Kampala about how they crossed the border and spent an afternoon in the “Heart of Darkness.”

Last are the journalists and human rights activists who chat with local people and try to find the most bloated belly for a photo opportunity.

Goma is the eastern “capital” of the DRC and is a drastic change from Rwanda’s border resort town, Gisenyi. After the volcanic eruption in 2002 the city is black and dirty, and everywhere is covered in volcanic rock—except for the big hotels, restaurants and expatriate houses on the shore of Lake Kivu. Most buildings in town were incinerated. Some were salvaged but the original second floor is now the first, sitting on the black charred-rock ground where hot lava flowed through the house.

Goma is in the province of North Kivu and is highly patrolled by MONUC forces in Armoured Personnel Carriers (APCs) and jeeps mounted with machine-guns. An old colonial building stands in the centre of town as MONUC’s hospital. Walking past the hospital is a part of daily life for most people in the town. They see the high walls, laced with barbed wire and sand bag lookouts on top of each corner. A gun barrel pokes out from the stacks of sandbags and a camouflage hat pokes out from above; only MONUC personnel are allowed in.

United Nations tanks patrol Goma today due to the recent military thrust where Rwandan-backed rebels threatened to take the city. The locals are unhappy with the United Nations forces—and aware of the minimal protection offered by the MONUC peacekeepers—and have repeatedly protested by hurling rocks at APCs and secure UN compounds.

Because of geography and economics, the eastern border provinces of North Kivu, Orientale and South Kivu have direct influence over all the DRC. They are full of militia, minerals, AID workers and wildlife conservation professionals, and starving refugees.

Whomever you ask, the main problem for the DRC is the same: too many influences from too many exterior countries. They all have big guns and little care for the people trying to live there. While all agree on the problem, everyone blames someone else and no one takes responsibility. The highly paid foreign professionals won’t say anything on the record, but they all admit to the obvious contradictions.

The main players are Rwanda, Uganda, MONUC and the United Nations (with countless international partners), and North American and European humanitarian organizations. But it isn’t as simple as pointing to one of these. They are all intertwined with the ethnically fueled militia groups and big business from the USA, Europe and China.

Vital Katembo is a Congolese socialite and conservation professional who lived for years in Goma and has worked for the United Nations Development Program and, until recently, for the Congolese Institute for the Conservation of Nature (ICCN). Katembo knows whom you need to know if you want to push through the constant conspiracy mill, and, most importantly, if you want to keep yourself alive.  He points to Rwanda and humanitarian aid organizations for the continuing strife of the DRC, especially in the mineral-rich east.

“I have seen massive humanitarian interventions. I will not say that they have done much or are doing much. It is difficult to define who is deciding their agenda,” Katembo argues. Katembo has seen many of the biggest humanitarian, human rights and relief groups come and go from the DRC, and the former Zaire, through many political transitions, always

working with each new man in power.

He points out that many organizations have been here over 15 years now, and he questions their efficiency, if nothing else, asking how they can still be dealing with an emergency. For him, the reasoning seems pure logic, “having the chaos also allows them to have the jobs, and they [humanitarian aid organizations] will do whatever they can to keep it going. They are the masters of the chaos. I have never seen an assessment of what is achieved,” he summarizes.

Vital Katembo offered this insight in Goma in 2007 but soon afterwards he was fired from ICCN, threatened, forced to run for his life and go into hiding after openly denouncing international humanitarian organizations operating in Eastern Congo.

Humanitarian aid in the eastern Congo provinces is an octopus whose tentacles reach far and wide. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) serves to “mobilize and coordinate effective and principled humanitarian action in partnership with national and international actors.” This is according to their mission statement, which hangs opposite a wall of cubbyhole mailboxes in the front office in Goma.

Nestor Yombo-Djema, Senior Liaison Officer with OCHA, explained that OCHA coordinates 126 organizations, including 10 United Nations agencies and 50 international NGOs, and scores of donor, state and national NGOs. OCHA also works with Congolese governmental officials and donors.

Even with all of this AID infrastructure, poverty, malnutrition and human rights abuses run rampant—not to mention the permanent state of war and millions of internally displaced people, half of which are in North Kivu, according to OCHA’s 2007 Humanitarian Action Plan. And that was produced before the waves of fighting that displaced an additional 143,000 people in October 2007, and the additional hundreds of thousands displaced in 2008.

By mid-October 2007, some 500,000 to 1.2 million people were internally displaced in Eastern Congo; with 33,000 newly displaced Congolese people fleeing North Kivu on October 25. Ugandan military had forcibly occupied parts of Orientale Province, while a militia highly suspected of being supported by Rwanda was fighting FARDC troops in North Kivu. On October 25 last year, Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon issued a statement of “deep concern” citing “surging sexual violence and a hike in the number of civilians uprooted due to fighting.”

One year and hundreds of thousands of dead people later—things have only gotten worse.

The 2007 OCHA budget, alone, was $US 686,591,107, “roughly the same level as in 2006,” with an additional $40,000,000 infusion announced by MONUC in October 2007. The final 2008 budget for the World Food Program in DRC was $426,878,043, with 56% of all food resources designated for North Kivu.

**Developing Inefficiency**

Kisangani is a town just north west of Goma in the province of Orientale. It is where Jean Dupont (name changed to protect his career as an international consultant) worked from 2003 to 2005. For 11 months of that time, he worked for Chemonics International Inc, an American company that helps donors define and implement programs; the biggest Chemonics client, when he was with them, was USAID.

Dupont talks about his experience with Chemonics as a reality check to what humanitarian work really is. “Before going, you think: people give $100 and that one hundred dollars goes to someone, somewhere, to make them happy. And that’s not the way it happens.”

Dupont sheds some light on why so many humanitarian organizations in DRC—and it is the same in most of Africa—develop nothing much more than inefficiency, waste and a small profit.

He sympathizes with the fact that Africa may be poor, but it is not cheap. Workers and companies expect to be paid well if they are to perform well. The constant reality of people—local and expatriate—putting money in their own pockets is also an element.

But in many situations, where money isn’t a heavy constraint, like with the wealthy USAID, the biggest difficulty is ineffective and inappropriate programming.

Humanitarian work has put itself in a trap, Dupont explains. “We were forced to do crappy projects to show we were spending money,” he says. Spending money to get more money, funding allocations in general, and underlying politics are the problems Dupont experienced and witnessed with the humanitarian sector in the DRC.

He mentions one large project with USAID in October of 2004. The idea was to rehabilitate some student housing in Kisangani and it was assigned by USAID after student uprisings and politically motivated protests. It was one political party using students to pressure another, as Dupont puts it. He says, building decent housing for the students was USAID’s way of intervening in political actions.

“My colleagues and I were trying to point out…it wasn’t the best way…to buy students,” Dupont recounts. “What USAID proposed was not good but we had to say yes, because it is their money in the end.”

The plans for construction ran as proposed. Dupont still thinks about why the students would agree to be instruments of the party, but the answer to questions like these are never that uplifting. “If I only knew, it would have been possible to do something about it,” he exhales. That would be true humanitarian work.

“Still, there is some good stuff,” Dupont attempts to reassure. “It’s not all bad.”

He mentions a railway project he worked on with USAID and many other organizations, including the UN, in 2004. Dupont explains it was a fabulous local project to rehabilitate 137 kms of railway and infrastructure through the jungle between two major cities.

Dupont says that when the international organizations got involved, people who had been working without pay for many years were happy to be rebuilding transportation and taking home a salary.

“People were really working to develop something,” but Dupont’s enthusiasm stays curt when admitting the project was still very political. He recounts how the governor of the area and the Belgian Ambassador made a ceremonious launch of the new railway; days later the real participants cut the ribbon without a camera crew.

The railway rehabilitation was one of 26 projects Dupont did with Chemonics and was part of

very few that he felt okay about doing. For the most part he says, “the projects were not what I want to do as a humanitarian professional.”

The President of the North Kivu Civil Society, Thomas d’Aquin Muiti, laughed when recounting a list of international initiatives that were inefficient, to say the least.

“There are NGOs that come here with preconceived projects that don’t meet the problems here. One NGO came and built houses for pygmies and the pygmies would not enter the houses. They slept against the walls outside,” chuckles Muiti. “They [NGOs] bring bicycles and they [Congolese] sell them straight away because it does not meet their needs.”

Muiti also stresses that international NGOs do not build things to last: they come, implement a project, and leave. Accountable to no one, “capacity building” is the latest catch phrase most organizations use to sell proposals and win grants.

Local NGOs have problems too, he assures. Either they lack the finances or are unable to manage them. Many projects and organizations are developed after the cheque arrives and little happens except the opening, and draining, of a bank account.

HEAL Africa is an example of humanitarian aide actually working. HEAL Africa was developed by Jo and Lynn Lucy, a Congolese orthopedic surgeon and a British project manager who have been living in the DRC for 36 years.

Beginning as “DOCS,” a medical and surgical training initiative in 1995, HEAL Africa soon expanded and engaged in social and community health as well as physical.

One of its biggest projects is fistula surgery, a restoration procedure for women that repairs tears and holes in the vaginal wall, bladder or uterus. Symptoms are mainly the inability to prevent leaking of urine or bile—conditions that led to ostracization from the community.

The cause of such damage is usually only one of two things: childbirth in poor conditions, or a traumatic and violent sexual encounter, mainly rape. When the surgery first became a specialty of the expanding HEAL Africa mission, 80% of the cases were a result of rape, and most of these are due to the many militaries operating in Eastern Congo.

Either way, the women have been ousted from their communities and, fortunately, they have made it to a HEAL Africa facility. Over 1000 of these surgeries were completed by 2003 and in 2007, there were over 120 women still waiting for their turn. The main hospital compound in Goma is overflowing. Emergency, makeshift UNHCR tents are bursting with women. Across the street is a whole other compound with two, single floor buildings packed with women who have had the surgery and are recovering or waiting for a second attempt on the damage that is just too severe.

As well, there is an apartment compound outside of town full with women, post-surgery, who are unable to return to their communities for fear of social stigma or insecurity.

The fistula surgeries performed at HEAL Africa are such a success, not because of pure numbers alone, but also because of the well-rounded approach taken. Women are given counselling, job training and a small amount of economic support before leaving.

HEAL Africa is one of few triumphs in an overflowing pool of unsuccessful and inefficient humanitarian aid.

**You Are A Rwandan Now**

More people complain about the huge, international non-government organizations (NGOs) perpetuating the naivety of rushed, unstudied and ill-developed programs than they do about the smaller NGOs who generally have fewer resources to work with. Because the scale is larger, the consequences are much more severe.

Along the lakeside in Goma is the compound for the UN initiative for Disarmament, Demobilisation, Repatriation, Reinstallation and Reinsertion (DDRRR). It is set up exactly like an army base with toweled soldiers walking around, shaving their chins. Directly on the right, through the security gates, is a group of tents where everything happens. The DDRRR has been a massive project to disarm and reintegrate soldiers.

“This is a transit hotel,” explains Ramone, the official in charge who requested his full name not be used. “We’re basically just a taxi here, in a difficult area; in a politically sensitive atmosphere.”

He says the calls usually come at night or on a market day when it is easiest for soldiers to escape. A small team jumps in an armored vehicle and picks up whoever has run away from their militia group. The project responds to the high rate of kidnapping of men and boys for forced labour and combat with rebel groups; they deal mostly with child soldiers.

“All the raping, killing, stealing, burning houses, that’s what we deal with. You know that movie Blood Diamond, the part where they get the boy near the end?” Ramone asks. “That’s what I do.”

Every Tuesday and Friday, all the deserters and escapees are driven to the Rwandan side of the border for 6-8 weeks of training, “where all these ‘rebels’ become officially Rwandese again,” mocks Ramone.

He speaks bluntly and honestly about the promotional propaganda for Rwanda and the UN that the DDRRR is committed to through leaflets, filmed interviews and the United Nation’s radio network, Radio Okapi.

But Ramone jokes about the main concern. Many times these ‘rebels’ that are put through DDRRR training and receive Rwandan citizenship certificates were recruited or kidnapped at young ages and from places outside Rwanda. Many by forces like the Democratic Forces of the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), the group reportedly containing original members of the Interahamwe militia who are continually accused of perpetrating genocide in Rwanda in 1994. It is widely confirmed that FDLR cooperate with both Rwandan rebels and FARDC forces in the plunder of Congo’s resources.

When put back into Rwanda, Ramone says, these escapees are assured safety by the Rwandese government, but are not welcomed back into the country socially.

Forced repatriation contradicts international law and invites gross human rights abuses. Further violating international law, in this case, forced returnees were sometimes never Rwandan patriots to begin with.

Eighteen year-old Emmanuel Sebuhinja was taken by force after living for five years as an orphan in the North Kivu town of Walikale. He spent a year hauling baggage, cooking and fetching water for the Mai Mai militia, a long-standing Congolese militia that fights against

foreign influences and soldiers in Congo. The Mai Mai consider Rwanda to be their main problem.

Each time Sebuhinja tried to escape he was beaten. After one such attempt, he and four others were beat so badly three died; he and the other survivor were sentenced. When the soldiers left to fight, shortly after, he escaped into the forest and eventually made it back to Walikale.

Picking up money from a friend, he moved on, walking alone and only at night to Karuba, in the next province. It was here he thought he could finally carry on with his life. Instead, he encountered soldiers of another militia, General Laurent Nkunda's men.

"They took my money and clothes and everything I had," Sebuhinja says. "After that, UNHCR took me here."

Sebuhinja says he is Rwandan but fled to the Congo, in 1994, when he was 13 years old. He considers that he grew up in Congo and while he says he does want to go to Rwanda, he doesn't know anyone there, and all of his family has died or was killed.

"I am afraid of going there because I don't know what will happen there. I have no family. I don't know how I shall be living in Rwanda," Sebuhinja says rationally. His voice quickens and raises when he adds that he was never a soldier, he never fought or shot a gun, but the UNHCR wrote that he did on their list when they picked him up, despite his objections.

"UNHCR told me even if I just touched a gun for a second, I am a soldier," he cried. "If in Rwanda they think I was a soldier before, it will be dangerous for me."

Another escapee was from General Laurent Nkunda's group. He was the only boy who refused to say anything and even denied his affiliation to General Nkunda.

Nkunda is one of the key men in the DRC right now. He is affiliated with everything that is causing any disturbance: he is the leader of a militia that rebelled against the Congo government's FARDC, later agreeing to create a half mixed brigade with them, causing only more confusion and conflict. As if by design, it wasn't long before the mixed brigades dissolved completely.

Most people believe Rwanda backs him and, behind them, many international actors including powerful groups from the United States. It is said that Nkunda even boasts the born-again Christian patch he wears on his fatigues as a badge of solidarity with President Bush and many other American Christians.

Even Human Rights Watch—historically biased in favor of the current Rwanda government—has reported that General Nkunda is backed by Rwanda. Nkunda also recruits soldiers, both children and adults, from Rwanda. These recruits also turn up later amongst the many Nkunda deserters.

Though Nkunda's Rwandan affiliation has yet to be officially admitted it is drawn on tribal lines. He is a Congolese Tutsi, known widely as Banyamulenge (in South Kivu) or Rwandaphones (people who speak KinyaRwanda). His sympathizers, mainly Congolese or Rwandan Tutsi, recite the narrative of his only wish to bring his parents from a hard life in refugee camps to a secure plot of land in Congo; a supposed promise from President Kabila.

Nkunda is seen as the main threat by MONUC and the main cause of insecurity in eastern DRC, but MONUC has made no effort to drive out the Nkunda insurgency. He is also situated in and around the most potent mines and mineral deposits in the country.

Rebel troops led by Nkunda took the town of Rutshuru on October 28, 2008, and by October 29, 2008, Nkunda's forces had stopped their military advance just short of Goma, where Nkunda announced a unilateral ceasefire. The rebels announced they would take Goma in the next few days. Goma is home to more than 500,000 people, including scores of thousands of people displaced by earlier fighting.

With the massive atrocities committed during the advances of Nkunda's army, hundreds of thousands of people are newly displaced, inside Congo and out, to Rwanda, Burundi and Uganda.

**The Thinner the Nose, the Smarter the Man**

In Kigali, the capital of Rwanda, Ignatius Rwiyemaho Kabagambe was the Managing Director of The New Times in 2007, the only English speaking and daily newspaper in the country, owned and run by the state. He is also a first cousin with President Paul Kagame.

The oppression that Rwandaphones face in Congo from Congolese citizens and organized groups like the Mai Mai is very real and well known; Kabagambe admits that they would be treated differently in Rwanda than other nationals.

"They are brothers and we feel for them. We would accept them as Congolese with Rwandese origin," he explains, pointing out their physical and cultural likeness. He talked around the details of his cousin; President Paul Kagame's support for Nkunda, admitting only that moral support is extended from his country, Rwanda.

The region of Eastern Congo is a perfect example of colonial lines being drawn arbitrarily through ancient ethnographic zones. Tribes were divided by colonial powers into what are now Eastern Congo, Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi. All the while assigning foreign law and deciding rights, colonizers continued to move these lines according to papers signed in Europe.

Dieudonne Amani is a 24 year-old Rwandaphone who has felt the lasting consequences of arbitrary colonial rule. The problem, he explains, is that Rwandaphones are not accepted as true Congolese and are ostracized within the DRC because they are the same tribe and culture as those congregated mainly in Rwanda. Yet Rwanda, he claims, also rejects them. They are people without a homeland, claims Amani, who are systemically persecuted by the Congolese government, by militia groups and by Rwanda.

"There are people sent by the authorities to investigate people's origin," he says. "Rwandaphones are a minority, non-Rwandaphones are majority. They wish to please the majority."

The reason why other tribes do not like Rwandaphones, Amani claims, is a mixture of sculpted modern political mind and envy.

"I think Hutus are not as educated as Tutsi. If Hutus are not educated it is not the fault of Tutsi or anyone else, it is because they are stupid," Amani says boldly. "For 34 years they had control of their country (Rwanda), what were they doing? Tutsi refugee's sent their

children to be educated. People say Tutsi are just as intelligent as the white man," Amani pontificated with his index finger jutting into the air.

These claims are extreme and, in parts, ignorant of colonial leaderships' structuring of education and employment systems along tribal lines, favouring Tutsis. Unfortunately, this argument of Tutsi being better managerially with money, government and development is heard often, repeated even by international expatriates. It is an explanation used commonly to justify and explain Rwanda's post-1994 transformation to an international business port of Africa, and it ignores important facts, like Rwanda's militarism and exploitation of Congo.

Modeste Makabuza Ngoga is a very powerful man in Goma. Officially, he is the director general of Jambo Safari, a company that claims to take white foreigners gorilla trekking. Complete with airport access, Jambo Safari looks like a cover-up for Makabuza's minerals dealings in Eastern DRC—perhaps the most volatile and rich mineral trade arena in the world.

Makabuza is also a Rwandaphone who shares Mr. Amani's arguments about persecution. Both stand in strong support of Laurent Nkunda, claiming him as good representation for their kind and cause. Also like Amani, Makabuza preaches ancient and historical tribal and colonial history to explain divine-like rights and tribal division. As well, his argument gets politically dense the closer it comes to the present situation. Claims like President Kabila having agreements with the French government to arm and support the Interahamwe and the Forces for the Democratic Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), to sustain them and keep them killing Tutsis. He claims that Kabila was elected by the white man and is the bad guy in the situation for not withholding his promise to Nkunda of bringing Nkunda's family to Congo.

**The General and His Labyrinthe**

"Kabila asked Nkunda to help him with war. Nkunda made the deal so his parents in refugee camps in Rwanda could come live in the hills. Kabila broke his promise," Makabuza retells. "All Nkunda wants is his family to stop starving in refugee camps and come here. I am happy Nkunda is there with the same face [as me] but I am not alright with everything he is doing."

The reason Makabuza withholds support for everything Nkunda does is because it is bad for business.

Nkunda has control over vast mining territories in North Kivu, including the Lueshe mine, just outside of Rutshuru, which he uses as a rear base for his soldiers. Powerful officials in the surrounding area reinforce Nkunda's control. For example, Nkunda occupies the main area in Masisi province, just south of the mine, and his cronies run the town of Rutshuru. Soloman Nkujima, chief of the town Kiwanja—just outside the mine—was with Nkunda before settling there and is still a senior manager of Nkunda's party, the National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP).

In 2007 Makabuza assured the Lueshe mine was not working. It's pyrochlore and ferro-niobium cannot be refined in Africa due to lack of adequate technology, he insists. But even if it was possible, he argues that he cannot sell it, thanks to the western nickname of blood mineral.

"It's called blood minerals because governments say when rebel soldiers are on the hill

[Lueshe mine], it means you are financing them," Makabuza details his business woes while drawing his fingers across the wooden top of his office desk. "When they produce pyrochlore they want to sell it in the international market but no one will buy it because it is called blood minerals."

"Minerals are all over the world and all over the world people put guns to other peoples' heads for those minerals, but only in Africa do they nickname them blood minerals," claims Makabuza.

His final shot goes to the 'white man' and the inequality he claims he, as an African, will always face in the international market no matter what mineral he has in his hand. He says calling something a 'blood mineral' only worsens the problem because it prevents Africans from making money equally. Instead, it is taken under the table by the white man who then reaps the profits.

Makabuza is right when he says mineral sales are dependant on the international market. Nowhere in Africa are the products of such minerals enjoyed: MRI machines, home and leisure electronics like cell phones, DVD players, stereos, video games, mP3 players, eye glasses, heat resistant materials, jet engines, stainless steel, some medicines, aerospace and defense products, nanotechnology, communications, and biotechnological applications. It is an understatement to say that the minerals of North and South Kivu—niobium, tantalum, ferro-niobium, cassiterite and coltan—are in high demand internationally. Whoever controls the Kivu provinces controls the potential of more money and influence than some of the wealthiest countries, combined.

The company that controls the Lueshe niobium mines is the Mineral Society of Kivu (SOMIKIVU), a company formed in 1982 between the German company GfE Nuremberg (Gesellschaft fuer Elektrometallurgie GmbH) and the former Republic of Zaire (former name of the DRC). Since then, names have been changed and the agreement redrafted. GfE Nuremberg owns 70% of SOMIKIVU, but ownership is disputed because the company was not drafted with the current DRC government.

Lueshe mine is one of only three niobium mines in the world—in Brazil, Canada and DRC (Lueshe)—and it is intentionally kept closed to artificially induce "scarcity." All three niobium deposits are controlled by a company named Arraxa, owned by the U.S. company Metallurg Inc. of New York: GfE Nuremberg is a 100% subsidiary. Metallurg Inc. is itself a subsidiary of Mettalurg Holdings of Pennsylvania—one of many companies in the investment portfolio of Safeguard International Investment Fund of Philadelphia (PA), Frankfurt and Paris.

"It is a very big mine, the potential of it is huge," said David Bensusan, a European and Rwandan based minerals trader and past C.E.O. of Eurotrade International, in a 2007 interview. Bensusan refuted the idea that the Germans are keeping Lueshe closed to control the prices. "It is closed because there is an argument of who owns it and it's in an area where the fighting is taking place. The issue is security."

Professor Kisangani, the vice governor of North Kivu, explains eastern Congo's mineral trafficking situation through the analogy of an unhappy child. He expresses that Congolese nationals were historically upset and began illegitimate international trade (mostly with weaponry and minerals). A 'window' or 'open door' into the country and it's minerals was completely broken off with these unhappy children of the DRC and the Congolese wars, from 1996 to present, involving Namibia, Rwanda, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Sudan, Libya, Tanzania,

Burundi, South Africa and Angola, at least, with Western powers allied with or behind these.

“It’s mostly hearsay, nobody can give a truthful account of what happened,” David Bensusan looks back to what is considered the actual time of war, despite the fact it has continued on. The Congo was obviously raped of its raw materials, he adds. That element took Bensusan to a much lower note as he warned of the volatile state Eastern DRC was in. “It’s sliding back into a major war. It needs to be developed. I think the way is through minerals, but it needs to be done properly.”

The suggestion that no one can give a truthful account of what happened mirrors the western media’s perpetual obfuscation of the realities in Congo: while the people involved are easily named, and while many remain active in plundering Congo today, the decades of exploitation (1960-1996) prior to the current era of perpetual warfare are always dismissed with the invocation of a single word: Mobutu. The suggestion of full sovereignty and control of the mineral wealth of the DRC is one that many share, however. Mainly Congolese people, including Vital Katembo.

Professor Kisangani’s analogy of unhappy children soon turns into “mafia” and rebel militias who are still climbing in the open doors and windows. “And those people are supported by other people in the world, who can give them guns to trouble our country,” Kisangani says.

Diplomatic relations is the answer, he urges, mentioning that the DRC is trying to control the traffic of its minerals and make money off them. The problem he says, is that slipping through the window and door is easier.

Vice Governor Kisangani is confidant that if the government had the means, the situation could be controlled. “They are hungry and not strong enough,” he says of the DRC military forces and government. “Rich countries are supporting guys in the forest [militias], but they could intervene and tell armies and MONUC to leave.”

There are over 100,000 FARDC soldiers that need paychecks and too many managers and generals who loot. He says there is no way to pay them all, and therefore command them all.

And yet the Democratic Republic of Congo has the world’s purest and largest deposits of strategic minerals, including gold, coltan, niobium, cobalt, heterogenite, columbite (columbium-tantalite or coltan), copper and iron. Heterogenite exports coming out of Congo are alone valued at between $260 million (at $20/lb.) and $408 million (at $30/lb.) every month. That’s between 3.1 and 4.9 billion dollars a year. Diamonds account for another billion dollars annually. Oil has been pumping off the Atlantic Coast for decades, but now oil and gas deposits are being exploited from the great lakes border region—Lake Kivu (methane gas) and Lake Albert (oil)—and deep in the province of Equateur. And then there are the dark rainforest woods that sell by the thousands monthly for around $6000 to $12000 per log.

Without getting paid—unless looting and raping can be considered a paycheck, which they are—FARDC soldiers are still extremely patriotic. The Congolese soldiers—quick to be blamed by international experts, NGOs and western media—are also the victims of a rapacious international commerce that has descended on Congo.

“I love my country. I must protect my country, from all forces that can aggress my country,”

said Major Chicko Tshitambue of FARDC's "Charlie Brigade."

"The fighting here in the East is just to protect the leadership in Rwanda," said Chicko. "I think Nkunda is told by Rwanda. But Nkunda is a small man, he can't do anything. He's afraid of Major Chicko."

Chicko ended his monologue of national pride, hubris and international intimidation by resting his pumping fists and writing his email address and, beneath this, the words: "Mercenary/Private Military => contact." Chicko wants to be a mercenary and he imagined the white journalist he was talking to could make it all happen. (Nothing of the whereabouts or status of Major Chicko has been heard since the journalist departed Congo.)

The sad part is that Major Chicko would be better off fighting for a private militia company, meaning he would make more money at the very least. Mercenaries in Africa and especially the DRC are the most successful and efficient international organizations running. According to Vital Katembo, MONUC is one of the least efficient.

"They are a part of the whole game: no chaos equals no jobs. They have all the military skills but some have been advising those in the bush; they are helping Nkunda," Katembo says.

While these allegations have not been proven, MONUC's track record does not sit well with the Congolese people.

M'Hande Ladjouzi was once the chief of office for MONUC in North Kivu. Two members of the Civil Society, including president Thomas d'Aquin Muiti and a current employee of MONUC (who wishes to remain unnamed) who was already working there while Ladjouzi was, confirmed the rumours.

"It was at the level of conflict with Rwanda and the FDLR," began Muiti. It is said Ladjouzi had a Rwandan girlfriend. Whether he actually had a girlfriend of Rwandese origin is unimportant. The term is slang: Rwandan interests were reportedly bribing Ladjouzi.

When the Civil Society approached MONUC with reports and testimony of Rwandese soldiers committing atrocities on Congolese people, Ladjouzi turned them away and sent reports to headquarters in Kinshasa that the allegations were untrue. After much lobbying by the North Kivu Civil Society, the UN eventually moved Ladjouzi to Kinshasa.

MONUC's record continues to be stained. "We have met one soldier of MONUC that violated a young girl," says Muiti. The Civil Society asked to take him to court in France and, according to Muiti, they did. But there are numerous other allegations that MONUC officials, both civilians and soldiers, have raped Congolese women.

MONUC's media relations office also released press clippings reporting scandal from the Pakistani battalion of MONUC in the Orientale province. It reports soldiers trading guns for gold with militia leaders.

In May 2007 angry villagers in Kanyola, South Kivu, attacked UN officials and MONUC troops who arrived after at least 18 villagers were massacred. "There were barricades on the roads. There were angry crowds. Kids were throwing stones. They had to make a U-turn," said one U.N. official, who asked not to be identified.

On October 2008, civilians in Goma and other places attacked MONUC troops and UN compounds; there are credible reports that MONUC troops shot and killed some civilians. Many civilian protests against the MONUC mission, and the MONUC retaliations, occur out of sight and without any media reporting.

Most every Congolese citizen will agree that the reason for the instability in Congo is the international influence within their borders. Some point their finger at mineral trafficking. Some point to tribal and historical 'facts'. Others, like Vital Katembo, claim it is obvious that people are doing harm when they are not achieving what they claim to work for—speaking of the humanitarian aid and conservation sectors—especially when they have the needed resources to accomplish their missions.

No matter where you point your finger or for what reason, the DRC is an international playground filled with extremely dangerous toys and irresponsible playmates. Many times, knowing where to point is simply based on how dangerous it is to point that way.

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