"The Rape of a Nation"

By Marcus Bleasdale

- Zone Franche - Pillage des ressources naturelles -

Mediastorm, Février 2008 - The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is home to the deadliest war in the world today. An estimated 5.4 million people have died since 1998, the largest death toll since the Second World War, according to the International Rescue Committee (IRC).

IRC reports that as many as 45,000 people die each month in the Congo. Most deaths are due to easily preventable and curable conditions, such as malaria, diarrhea, pneumonia, malnutrition, and neonatal problems and are byproducts of a collapsed healthcare system and a devastated economy.

The people living in the mining towns of eastern Congo are among the worst off. Militia groups and government forces battle on a daily basis for control of the mineral-rich areas where they can exploit gold, coltan, cassiterite and diamonds.

After successive waves of fighting and ten years of war, there are no hospitals, few roads and limited NGO and UN presence because it is too dangerous to work in many of these regions. The West's desire for minerals and gems has contributed to a fundamental breakdown in the social structure

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Bonded workers crush rocks in Mongbwalu, eastern Congo. Whole families work in slave conditions for warlords, controlling huge amounts of land, where gold is extracted to finance their military campaigns



Artisinal gold miners in Wasta, northeastern Congo. Most of these miners are combatants who have controlled mineral-rich areas and are profiting from their exploitation. This pit was excavated over nine months by hand



Gold miners pack up in the evening to return to their camp



A child gold miner in Watsa, northeastern Congo



Diamond dealers buy stones in Mbuji-Mayi, Congo's diamond centre. Many dealers become pastors in order to use religious influence to convince their congregation to join the diamond trade. Approximately three million people live in the diamond town, where most agriculture has ceased and been replaced by the diamond rush



Gold miners rush back to their camp during a downpour



Rebel forces with the National Council for the Defense of the People (CNDP) advance towards Goma after clashes with government troops. The CNDP claim it was fighting to protect the Tutsi minority in eastern Congo



Government troops shelter from the rain after a night of battles against CNDP rebels, who shot and killed two government soldiers



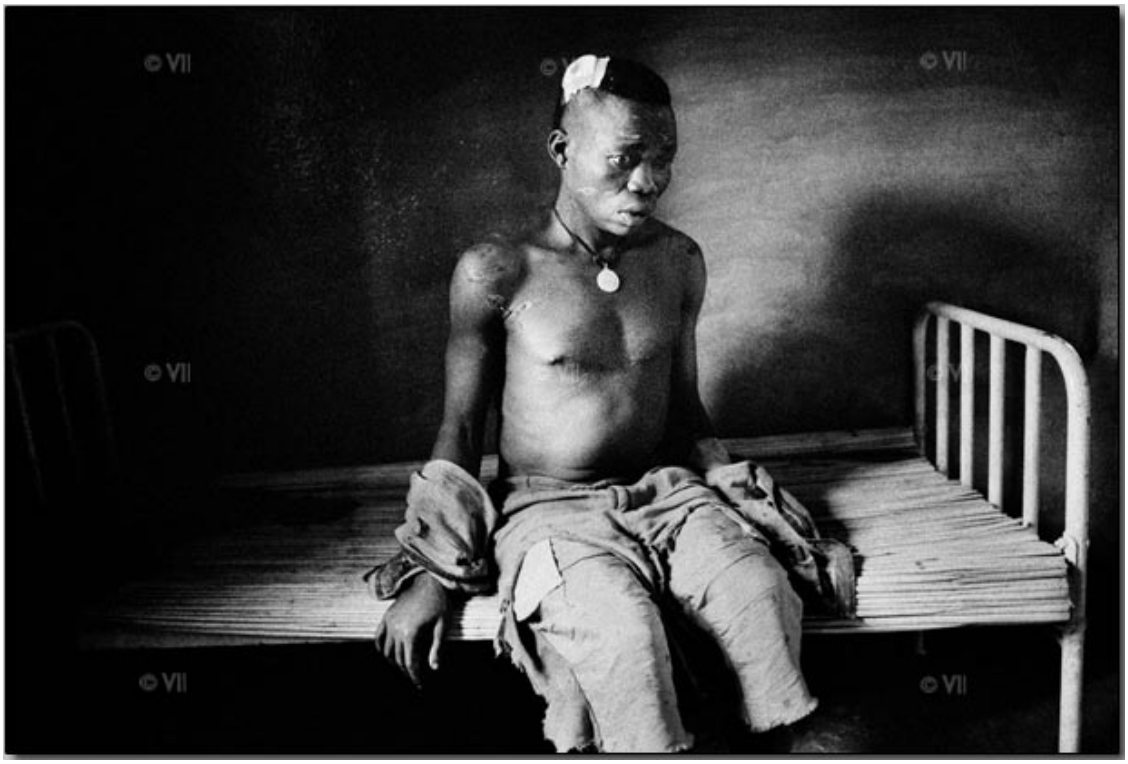
Bodies of Hema men, executed by Lendu militia just hours before, lie on the road north of Fataki. They were bound and impaled with spears before being shot. Their ears had also been bitten off during the ritual killing



A child soldier rides back to his base in Ituri district, northeastern Congo



A child soldier with the Mayi-Mayi militia waits in Kanyabyonga as CNDP rebels advance. He was recruited while young men in the area were being abducted by the rebel forces. He didn't want to be forced to fight, so he volunteered with the Mayi-Mayi



A militia soldier lies in a makeshift hospital in Dro Dro. The militia in the area have been accused of being cannibals by the local population. This militia soldier was captured and beaten by the local population



The guard at General Laurent Nkunda's farm in North Kivu. General Nkunda claims he's fighting a war in eastern Congo to "protect the rights of Congolese Tutsis against the Hutu Interahamwe from Rwanda," otherwise known as the FDLR. Nkunda was arrested by Rwanda in early 2009



Gold miners crawl out of the deep tunnels where higher quality ore is found. Many of these tunnels collapse, often killing miners trapped inside



Refugees flee south after a rebel attack on Bule and Fataki, northeastern Congo



An early-morning religious service in the Gety displaced camp, just days before the historic 2006 elections



A gold miner suffering from tuberculosis in Mongbwalu, northeastern Congo, is left to fend for himself in a sanatorium. Most of the miners in this region are combatants who have controlled mineral-rich areas and are profiting from resource exploitation. Others are bonded workers forced by soldiers to mine for little reward



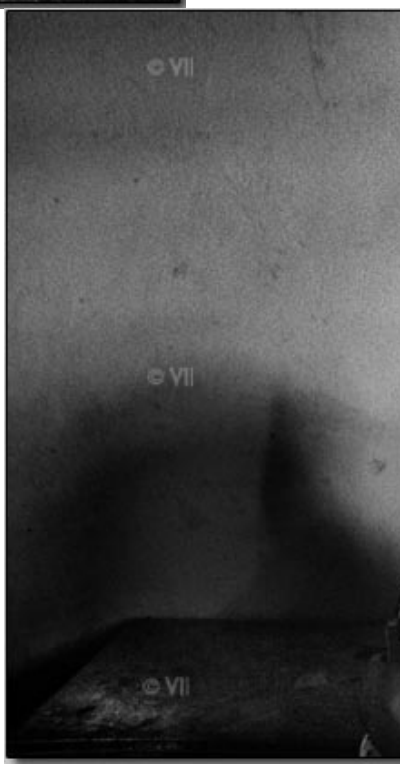
He writhes in agony as the pain medication he was given has worn off



Mapenzi Boloma, ten-months-old, died from diarrhoea and vomiting several days after arriving in the Gety camp. She was one of eighteen people who died that day, just before Congo's historic elections



A UN armoured personnel carrier responds to fighting in the bush in Ituri district



A twenty seven-year-old victim of sexual violence, in a church in Bunia that doubles as a women's counselling centre



A forty-year-old victim in a women's counselling centre in Bunia. She was the victim of sexual violence in Gety



Government Soldiers on the hills surrounding Goma after retaling a position from General Nkunda. They got drunk to celebrate that evening and lost the position agin in the morning



The body of a government soldier lies in the road several kilometres outside Goma, killed in a fire-fight against CNDP rebels during the night. The dead are often left in the roads as a message to the government troops and the local community



Children at a centre for street kids in Kinshasa. Many children are made homeless after being accused of being sorcerers when a family suffers bad luck and economic hardship



Displaced people bring back water to their camp in Goma after fleeing fighting in Karuba and Mushake. Fighting rages between government forces and rebels in Karuba, North Kivu province.



Displaced people fish in the evening on the Congo River outside Nyonga, Katanga province



Police brace themselves for a riot in front of Jean-Pierre Bemba's residence



Police round up supporters of opposition candidate Jean-Pierre Bemba the day after results were announced. Tension remains high in the city after Kabila won the first democratic elections in forty-six years



Ilunga Estere, seven, is tended to by her mother while suffering from acute malnourishment and malaria



The coffin arrives for the burial of eight-month-old Sakura Lisi, the daughter of a gold miner in Mongbwalu, northeastern Congo. She died from anaemia brought on by malaria



Parents say their final goodbyes at the burial of the eight-month-old Sakura Lisi, the daughter of a gold miner in Mongbwalu, northeastern Congo



The washing of the body at the burial of the eight-month-old Sakura Lisi, the daughter of a gold miner in Mongbwalu, northeastern Congo



The burial of the eight-month-old Sakura Lisi, the daughter of a gold miner in Mongbwalu, northeastern Congo

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