



Conflict Diamonds in Zimbabwe: Actors, Issues and Implications

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Abstract

Resource war literature examines the links between natural resources and violent conflicts, in an attempt to explain the causes of conflict in places such as Sierra Leone, Liberia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The literature finds such links to be credible, covering such resources as oil, diamonds, timber and coltan, among others. This article explores this question with relation to Zimbabwe's Marange diamond fields, unravelling the actors, issues and implications of conflict diamonds. It observes the efforts the international community have made in dealing with the issue of conflict diamonds. It is the conclusion of this paper that the Kimberley Process (KP) has been largely undermined by the Zimbabwe's Marange diamonds.

Introduction

In the 1990s, Zimbabwe was determined to become a leader in African mining. The country gained its independence from the British on 18 April 1980, and was recovering from the adverse effects of colonialism. According to Saunders (2009: 4), Zimbabwe had advantages in terms of competitive mineral resources, a well-maintained infrastructure, skilled labourers, regulatory institutions, well managed state production, sound fiscal and monetary policies. Sachikonye (2002: 13) writes that the nation was amongst the top four most industrialized nations in Sub-Saharan Africa and had a relatively diversified economy. In terms of its economy in general, it had a superior human resource base than most Africa states and held a middle-income position. The country had large investments in ferrochrome and platinum – it was putting itself in a position to attract its highest levels of foreign direct investment since independence.

The political and economic decline towards the end of the 1990s dampened the dream of becoming a world-renowned mining industry. Raftopoulos (2009: 201-202) states that this has its genesis in the enduring structural economic and political legacies of colonial rule along with political heritages of African nationalist politics. The situation erupted with the emergence of a major threat to the political future of the ruling party, the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) of President Robert Mugabe, in the form of the opposition led by the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) of Morgan Tsvangirai (Alex 2010: 2). In 2000, the government's proposed new constitution was rejected in a referendum, which contributed to and

hastened an already unfolding political and economic crisis. Mugabe's regime began using natural resources as a means of political survival at the expense of sustainable economic development (Partnership Africa Canada 2010: 2).

The Central Bank of Zimbabwe and the state's main mining-related bodies, the Zimbabwe Mining Development Corporation (ZMDC), its main exporting agent, and the main mineral exporting agent, the Mineral Marketing Corporation of Zimbabwe (MMCZ) were deeply affected. In 2007 Reserve Bank Governor, Gideon Gono, estimated 40-50 million USD per week was being lost to the public through smuggling (Saunders 2009: 6). The era of hyperinflation and investment decline cut through the mining sector and saw the near collapse of gold, among other mineral sectors. By October 2008, the inflation rate had reached a record-breaking 231 million percent (Mirell 2012: 40). It would be the discovery of the Marange diamond mines in 2006 that brought hope to boost the failing economy at the time when the country was facing a worsening economic crisis.

The political and economic decline that began in the late 1990s had not improved at the turn of the millennium. In the context of worsening economic crisis, the government's declaration of the discovery of diamonds at Chiadzwa in 2006 had remarkable effects. Motivated either by economic hardship – given the lack of prospects to earn a decent living in Zimbabwe's declining economy – or dreams of quick wealth, this discovery instigated a 'diamond rush', with an influx of 15,000 to 20,000 unlicensed artisanal miners and illicit diamond dealers to the area. The fields produced six million carats per year and promised an era of economic recovery as inflation had ravaged incomes (Vircoulon 2010: 1).

The Kimberley Process (2014) defines conflict diamonds, also known as blood diamonds, as those diamonds that are utilised by rebel movements and their allies to finance conflict directed at undermining legitimate governments. Conflicts associated with these diamonds have resulted in the death and displacement of millions of people on the continent. Human rights groups began to shed uncomfortable light on the circulation of blood diamonds as they were increasingly found in the international markets. A series of international campaigns led to the formation of the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS). The organisation's purpose is to stop the sale of conflict diamonds and to prevent them from entering the international markets (Nichols 2012: 650).

It has been argued, however, that the Kimberley Process has fallen short of its obligations. One of its biggest criticisms has been in dealing with the Zimbabwe's Marange conflict diamonds. Following the strict definition of the term conflict diamonds, according to the Kimberley Process, it is evident that since there are no rebel movements using diamonds to finance attempts to undermine the government in Zimbabwe, then conflict diamonds in that country do not exist. The question is: what happens in cases where the sovereign state itself is dealing in conflict diamonds?

This study aims to discuss the actors, issues involved in, and the implications of, conflict diamonds in Zimbabwe's Marange diamond fields, and examines the KPCS through the case study of Zimbabwe. The paper begins by discussing the issues of conflict diamonds and the

relationship between natural resources and violent conflict. Section two goes on to examine the KPCS, and section three applies the theory of conflict diamonds to the Zimbabwean Marange diamonds. The last section provides concluding remarks.

What are ‘conflict diamonds’?

According to the Kimberley Process (2014), conflict diamonds are rough diamonds used by insurgent factions or their supporters to fund armed conflicts intended to weaken legitimate governments. Natural resources, particularly diamonds, were central to the funding of some of the most brutal and protracted wars in the 1990s and 2000s. Rebel leaders such as Jonas Savimbi of Angola, Charles Taylor of Liberia and Foday Sankoh of Sierra Leone used diamonds to support and prolong their wars (Reddy, Henry and Oppong 2005: 52). It is estimated that approximately 8.5 billion USD worth of diamonds are sold overseas from the African continent every year, and this accounts for about 65 percent of world production in diamonds. The international rough diamond trade produces 30 billion USD annually; and a staggering 300 million USD a year is associated with blood diamonds (Murphy 2011: 209).

Much recent literature has emerged in an attempt to explain the relationship between civil war and natural resources. Collier and Hoeffler (2004: 563) look at the economic causes of civil wars by using the “greed or grievance” dichotomy. Rebels need a reason which can be both positive (greed) and negative (grievance), where greed is a desire for more wealth, and grievance is related to inequality, injustice, the lack of political rights, or ethnic/religious divisions in society. They conclude that a model that centres on the opportunities for rebellion performs well, whereas objective indicators of grievances add little explanatory power. According to the greed theory, economic motivations and opportunities are more concurrent with the onset of conflict than ethnic, socio-economic, or political grievances (a quest for fairness). The grievance factors are seen as little more than a smokescreen to cloud their real objectives and to gain popular support (Ballentine and Nitzschke 2008: 4).

Lulaja (2010: 15-26) observes that natural resources do play a vital role in violent conflict especially those that are easily extractable. He further investigates whether the location of these resources affects rebel movements, using duration analysis and conflict onset analysis. The duration analysis reveals that rebel access to gemstones doubles the conflict duration whilst the conflict analysis confirms that secondary diamond production and other gemstones are related to the duration of the conflict but not the onset of conflict. Ross (2004: 337) finds similar results; gemstones do not instigate war but are likely to prolong pre-existing wars.

Lulaja, Gleditsch and Gilmore (2005: 559-560), in investigating links between civil wars and natural resources, offer the following four main contributions to modern literature on civil wars. Firstly, that diamonds do matter in civil wars but they are not a motive of conflict onset. Secondly, the geological type of diamond deposits is an important factor, meaning secondary diamonds can be used to prolong the war while non-lootable resources might discourage the risk of conflict onset and occurrence. Thirdly, secondary diamonds have had a greater impact on the onset of civil wars after the end of the Cold War. Lastly, that diamonds are mostly dangerous

only when production has begun, not their mere discovery in conflict prone areas. Lulaja et al. (2005: 539) criticize the work of Collier, taking issue with the fact that the research does not take into account the role the state plays in prolonging the conflict; it only focuses on the role the rebels play. Ballentine and Nitzschke (2008: 2) make similar claims.

Le Billon (2001: 562) attests to the fact that natural resources are by no means an attribute that is unique to conflict in Africa, and that they have constantly played a prominent part in the history of armed conflict including imperialist wars. He claims that natural resources raise the susceptibility of countries to armed conflicts by weakening the capacity of political institutions to peaceful conflict resolution. Resource dependent countries, at a country level, usually have poor economic performance and socio-economic inequalities. The resource rents oftentimes cause corruption in state institutions, and/or high economic inefficiency. Moreover, resource rents afford political elites with traditional means for staying in power by establishing regimes arranged through a system of patronage, with political elites rewarding followers and chastising adversaries. This tends to leave little benefits to those outside the state circle, and ultimately, this may culminate in violent conflict. It is under such circumstances that natural resources become a 'curse'.

Ballentine and Nitzschke (2008: 7-9) give a stakeholder analysis of the political economy of conflict. They ask the questions, "who are the key actors that participate in the war economies? What motives do they have? What incentives do they have to seek peace? Who controls the means of violence?" Identify a wide range of answers to these questions, which they divide according to three types of economies: combat, shadow and coping. The combat economy deals with both fighters and the suppliers of weapons and materiel; the shadow economy considers the activities of others who profit (through illicit trade) from the existence of conflict; and the coping economy covers poor families and communities affected by conflict.

Broodryk and Solomon (2010: 2) concur that after 1990, there has been a growing number of scholarly work and policies that have investigated the economic aspects of conflict in more detail – placing a greater focus on issues such as the role of resource abundance and scarcity on conflict. In this view, war making is no longer about defeating an enemy, but is about the economic gains in continued fighting and the institutionalisation of violence for economic achievements. Broodryk and Solomon (2010: 3), Lulaja (2010: 15) and Ross (2001: 352) are in agreement that prolonging violent conflicts only serves the business interest of these 'warlords'. Hence, there seems to be a strong correlation between natural resources and armed conflict.

An interesting contribution to the link between natural resources and civil wars is made by Cameron Thies, particularly from the perspective of primary commodities and states. Earlier findings on resource were rebel-centric and did not include predatory states. However, current literature on the civil war literature has begun to incorporate both state rulers and rebels as logical predators that try to maximise their revenue. Thies (2010: 329) puts forth an argument about the role of primary commodities in civil war commencement, but most importantly, how primary commodities affect the relationship between civil war and state capacity. In answering this question, he uses the predatory theory of state building. This is theory that has been

articulated by Tilly (1985: 169-70) – which considers a state as a rational actor which is capable of plundering natural resources to maximise revenue. Primary resources are a source of revenue to both rebels and rulers because they can be easily plundered and taxed.

Le Billon (2001: 569) finds that the lootable nature of primary commodities is due to the fact that mined resources are mostly at the disposal of governments and rebels alike with little bureaucratic infrastructure. Natural resources allow rebels to fund their military operations; hence, there is a vested economic interest in prolonging violent conflict. This view challenges the old tradition of conflict resolution, which is an inclusive political agreement. It also suggests a dichotomy of ‘war’ and ‘peace’, meaning, the transition from war to peace must take into account the economic elements that prefer war to a peace settlement.

The Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS)

What is the Kimberley Process (KP)?

Apparently the worth of diamonds lies in their association with beauty, status and marriage. But if they are instead associated with the slaughter of human beings, war and child soldiers, their worth will suffer considerably (Alex 2010: 1). The KP (as it is commonly known) was adopted in 2000 by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). It was initiated by the South African government due the growing tensions concerning conflict diamonds. The KP was a tripartite agreement between diamond producing nations, diamond industry leaders and human rights groups (Bieri 2010: 3). It was only in 2003 that the KP Certification Scheme (KPCS) entered into force as an original move towards the regulation of the diamond industry and combating atrocities regarding conflict diamonds. Murphy (2011: 214) claims that the scheme was also meant to assist legitimate governments to regain control of their natural resources in order to rightfully gain from the sale of diamonds with the anticipation of building or rebuilding the infrastructure of their countries.

How did the Kimberley Process begin?

According to Murphy (2011: 214), in the late 1990s, Global Witness, an international natural-resources overseer, reported how diamonds contributed to the bloody conflicts in countries such as Sierra Leone, Liberia, Angola and the Ivory Coast – leaving an estimated four million people dead. This was part of broader research into the link between natural resources and conflicts. Reacting to this growing international outcry from Global Witness and other Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), key diamond trading and producing nations (Britain, Belgium, USA), representatives of the diamond industry, and NGOs met in Kimberley, South Africa, to decide how to deal with the blood diamonds dilemma (Bieri 2009).

The name derived from the South African diamond-rush town of the 1860s (Kimberley), where all the concerned parties met (Alex 2010: 2). This marked the commencement of an often controversial three-year negotiating process, which concluded in the establishment of an international diamond certification scheme. The KP was endorsed by the UNGA and the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and launched in January 2003.

How does the Kimberley Process work in practice?

The KP is an import-export certification scheme which necessitates participating governments to certify the origin of rough diamonds (Nichols 2012: 659). Thus, blood diamonds can be identified and systematically disqualified from flowing into the international trade market. Again, the scheme requires governments to certify that shipments of rough diamonds are conflict-free and that systems are put in place for efficient control to avert conflict stones from entering the supply chain. By 2010, it had 49 members representing 75 countries (Grant 2009: 11). Member countries must enact domestic legislation to implement the scheme, and can only trade rough diamonds with other members. This creates an incentive for countries that wish to produce, trade or process uncut stones to join (Global Witness 2013).

The KP's procedural requirements are implemented by governments, but its tripartite structure connotes that NGOs and the diamond industry hold official status as observers and take part, along with member states, in all working groups and decision-making processes (Bieri 2009). Murphy (2011: 216) remarks that of outmost importance to note from the KP preamble is that it is a voluntary scheme of self-regulation that can merely enjoy credibility to the extent that members have instituted a domestic system of control intended to eradicate the presence of conflict diamonds in the line of production, exportation and importation of rough diamonds within their territories.

Issues and actors in Zimbabwe's conflict diamonds

Zimbabwe's Marange diamond fields

The discovery and popularity of alluvial diamond deposits in the rural Chiadzwa area of Marange District in Southeast Zimbabwe in 2005 brought a new dimension to politics in Zimbabwe. Marange is located in the Manicaland province, near the border with Mozambique. The diamond fields extend to some 66,000 hectares and are reputed to be the richest diamond mines in the world – with a value estimated at up to 800 billion USD and a potential source of wealth for the next 80 years (Nichols 2012: 665). In 2008, the Reserve Bank Governor estimated the monthly value of the diamond mines at 1.2 billion USD (Partnership Africa Canada 2010: 14). Marange is Zimbabwe's third diamond mining site, others being River Ranch and Murowa, that are privately owned and commercially operated kimberlite mines located in Beitbridge and Zvishavane, respectively. Marange is an alluvial diamond deposit, unlike River Ranch and Murowa (Mirell 2012: 45).

Initially, the Zimbabwe government did not give exclusive rights to any private company to mine the fields, but just opened them, culminating into illegal mining activities (Nichols 2012: 666). The Marange diamond fields are distinctive in Zimbabwe because miners are able to access the diamonds without intricate or costly extraction methods. In 2006 and 2007, when the news about the discovery of the diamonds spread, the rural area of Chiazwa was suddenly faced with 30,000 newcomers (Africa Confidential 2010: 5). Illicit buyers also started arriving, including those from the DRC and Angola. Farineau (2013) notes that Zimbabwe's Marange diamond

fields became targeted by smugglers, illegal miners and international buyers. Informal diamond mining in Marange became an issue in 2006 and increased in 2007 and 2008 – creating a vibrant informal diamond economy (Katsaura 2010: 341). However, 2008 brought about a new turn of events, when the Zimbabwe police and military force, using two attack helicopters, seized the area (Alex 2010: 3).

Zimbabwe: A predatory state and/or a shadow economy?

In June 2008, Robert Mugabe became a sole candidate for the elections after Tsvangirai boycotted the second round of the elections – claiming that his supporters were being intimidated by Mugabe’s ZANU-PF followers and horrified by violence that left 200 of his supporters dead (Harding 2013). According to *The Economist* (2013), between March 2008 and March 2009, Zimbabwe spent a year without a government. The MDC won the majority of seats in Parliament in the 2008 elections against Robert Mugabe’s ZANU-PF; but fell short of the mandatory majority of more than 50 percent of the presidential vote. This called for a rerun of the presidential elections (Katsaura 2010: 344).

In February 2009, the Government of National Unity (GNU) was formed between ZANU-PF and MDC, although Mugabe still undermined this unity with political oppression, including arrests, and the suppression of political and press freedoms (PAC 2009: 2; PAC 2010: 2). During the July 2013 elections, Mugabe won the elections with 61 percent of the votes, while the MDC attracted 34 percent of the votes. Tsvangirai refused to accept the outcome, alleging that the party received the voters’ roll only on the eve of the elections, which made it impossible to audit the register of 6.4 million people (News24 2013).

As noted above, initially the Zimbabwe government did not give exclusive rights to any private company to mine the fields, but just opened them (having expelled De Beers). As Nyota and Sibanda (2012: 129) write, this led to a frantic diamond rush which fashioned new ‘communities’ of artisanal miners and dealers at Chiadzwa. But, most of these miners were ordinary Zimbabweans forced by hardships of Zimbabwe’s dramatic post-2000 economic decline to go and seek out new forms of livelihoods. Because the diamond fields were opened in this manner and the fact that they contain alluvial deposits (able to be mined by artisanal methods), the fields became targeted by smugglers, illegal miners and international buyers, creating a vibrant informal diamond economy. Katsaura (2010: 346) states that the absence of a government between 2008 and 2009 meant that there was a state of anarchy, which provided a window of opportunity for the creation of a shadow economy. Within this analysis, those with coercive power and the right connections gained significantly from cross-border smuggling activities. The shadow economy in Zimbabwe is driven by political, military, police and business elites who use their access to authority as the basis for access to diamonds for self-aggrandisement. Again, it was during this turmoil in the Zimbabwe politics that the government of Mugabe saw an opportunity to use natural resources to sustain its political interests.

Hence, in October 2008, Mugabe deployed the military to the Marange diamond fields to seize the area and secure it – mostly from the artisanal miners (Alex 2010: 1). Air Marshal

Perence Shiri, a cousin of Robert Mugabe, was deployed to the scene (PAC 2009: 7). Whether the use of the military was designed to combat the lawlessness that existed in the fields or as a way to guard the regime's interest is highly contested, but the fact is that some 800 soldiers were deployed in the fields and used coercive means to force locals out of the area (Nichols 2012: 667). The military subsequently initiated operation 'Hakudzokwe kumunda' ('you will not return to the field'). This operation sparked international condemnation of Zimbabwe's 'conflict diamonds'. Human rights groups estimated that there were between 15 and 35,000 people working at or around the Marange diamond fields at the time (Nyota and Sibanda 2012: 133). The operation left more than 200 hundred people dead, and military personnel themselves involved in smuggling diamonds – the majority of the illegal mining diamond activities can be traced to the government officials smuggling the stones over the country's borders.

From there onwards, the Marange diamond fields became heavily militarised, with gross human rights violations being reported by the media and human rights groups. According to Grant (2009: 12), the year also saw massacre of Zimbabwean citizens being perpetrated in the area by the soldiers. A policewoman working in Chiadzwa, for example, witnessed a pile of 50 dead bodies after one helicopter attack (PAC 2009: 8). The police and army committed other human rights violations including forced labour, torture, sexual abuses, arbitrary arrests and detention against both diamond workers and local communities. In one case, at a checkpoint between Mutare and Chiadzwa in 2008, three women underwent humiliating body searches by a police constable and were forced to strip naked. Afterwards, the male police officer searching them put in his gloved finger in their private parts, claiming to be looking for hidden diamonds (Human Rights Watch 2009: 27). Zimbabwe thus joined other African states long enmeshed in 'blood diamond' epics of their own, such as the DRC, Sierra Leone, Angola, Liberia, and the Ivory Coast (Nyota and Sibanda 2012: 131).

Nyamunda and Mukwambo (2012: 147-8) observe that the attitude of the central state tended to shift regarding artisanal activities. From 2006 to around late 2007, artisanal activities were borne by the central state. This drastically changed following the March 2008 elections in which ZANU-PF lost the first round of the elections, only to recover in the contentious runoff election held in June 2008 in which Mugabe was the only candidate. Hence, in search of votes, Mugabe formed a patronage system that would reward the informal miners if they supported the party. Contrary to popular belief, this was a rational strategy meant to win votes. Ultimately, the informal diamond economy in Zimbabwe is driven by political, military, police and business elites – underlining the theory of the 'politics of the belly', which in essence, is the politics of self-aggrandizement (Katsaura 2010: 342).

In August 2010, the government sold 900,000 carats of rough diamonds through the support of the KPCS, generating 56 million USD in revenue, of which the state only received 30 million USD (Smith 2010: 19). Evidently, the ZANU-PF associates stood to benefit from this militarised operation of the diamond mines and substantial sums are being lost to the state in a politically guarded export business profiting a few (Africa Confidential 2010: 8). Among these are the Minister of Defence, Emmerson Mnangagwa, and his long-time political rival, General Solomon

Mujuru, the retired head of the armed forces and one of Zimbabwe's richest men (Africa Confidential 2010: 8-9). Mines Minister, Obert Mpfu, has also been implicated in benefiting from sources of revenue above his ministerial pay (Gotora 2012). The most influential group of the Mugabe regime are members of the Joint Operations Command (JOC), who are the final authorities of tough decision making for each single government-sponsored act of repression. The JOC is heavily monopolising the Marange's diamond resources in order to fund ZANU-PF's acts of repression to opposing parties (PAC 2010: 2-3).

Private companies which are heavily associated with the government are also seeking their share in the Marange diamond fields. The fields were initially discovered by De Beers in 2002, but as they did not deal in alluvial diamonds, they did not exploit them (Africa Confidential 2010: 8). Then, a London-registered company with strong Zimbabwe connections, African Consolidated Resources Private Limited Company (ACR) registered the first mining claims there. However, the government revoked their contract in 2006 after announcing the presence of diamond deposits (Katsaura 2010: 343). The government continuously refused to resolve the issue and has turned down numerous propositions from the ACR to develop it into a joint venture, claiming it has contracted the rights to two other companies, Mbada and Canadile (PAC 2009: 4).

ACRs rights had been capriciously transferred to two small South African companies – Mbada and Canadile, in joint ventures with the parastatal Zimbabwe Mining Development Corporation (ZMDC). These two companies are claimed not to have any prior experience in the mining industry (Africa Confidential 2010: 5).

Mbada is a partially owned by the government and by Grandwell Investment (South African owned). The chairman of Mbada is Robert Mhlanga – a retired air vice-Marshal, claimed to be very close to Mugabe and his former pilot (Africa confidential 2010). Other representatives include Sithengiso Mpfu (sister-in-law to Minister Mpfu) and Dingiswayo Ndlovu (Personal Assistant to the Minister of Mines, Mpfu). The owners of Canadile Miners include Cougan Matanhire (retired major). Other directors include Adrian Taylor, who worked for a private military company in Sierra Leone, and Yehuda Licht (Israeli diamond dealer), Danesh and Ashok Pandeya and Lovemore Kurotwi (Africa Confidential 2010: 8).

The choice of the board of members raises serious eyebrows not to mention that half of Canadile's board members are implicated in serious illegality of one type of another- termed "shady individuals and fugitives from justice" by *The Zimbabwean* newspaper (MISA 2012: Internet). Kurotwi is a retired officer who played a senior role during the notorious 5th Brigade massacres in Matabeleland (MISA 2012). Adrian Taylor is alleged to have worked as a mercenary in Sierra Leone, while Licht is believed to have spent time in jail in Angola on diamond-related smuggling offences. Danesh and Ashok Pandeya were active diamond smugglers in the DRC conflict and boast to be partners of high-level people in the Zimbabwe government. Ashok is on the police wanted list in Thailand over fraud involving diamonds worth 100 million USD (Rose and Muleya 2010).

Another interesting issue is the Chinese involvement in the Marange diamond fields. The Chinese government is often argued to exploit, have imbalanced economics and make alliances

with dictatorships in Africa (Farineau 2013: 28-29). Anjin Investment, a Chinese-Zimbabwean joint venture has profited greatly from a period of civil unrest, punctuated by rape and other human atrocities that culminated in the October 2008 massacre. Half of the company is owned by the Zimbabwe army's Defence Industries (ZDI) and another army adventure whilst the Chinese corporation owns the other half. The company has been accused of breaking labour laws, and committing human rights abuses that the Zimbabwe government has turned a blind eye to, regardless of the many reports by human rights watch groups.

It must be stated that it is the right of every sovereign state to ensure that order and security is maintained. Additionally, a state has an obligation to protect the natural resources in the land and to fairly distribute wealth. However, the Zimbabwean government's seizing of the diamond fields would appear to reflect a realist assumption of states as political actors seeking to maximise their power and would also appear to offer support to the predatory theory of state building.

The Kimberley Process and the Marange diamonds fields

The issue of the Zimbabwe's Marange diamonds is about smuggling and hucksterism; a diamond rush which was initially perpetuated by raw economic desperation by Zimbabwean citizens. This later turned into profound greed; government-sponsored suppression, human rights violations and disregard for the rule of law and democratic principles (PAC 2010: 2). Human rights violations were reported by the human rights groups (Human Rights Watch and PAC and others) associated with the KP as early as 2006. The Zimbabwean government outright denied any misconduct associated with the Marange diamond fields. Yet, large volumes of easily identified smuggled Zimbabwean diamonds were the subject of arrests in Dubai and India (PAC 2010: 9). The KP reacted with limited action and reported that the Zimbabwean government had adhered to the KPCS requirements but made no comments on alleged human rights violations. It would take almost a year for the KP review team to confirm the stories and discover just how profound the smuggling and governmental corruption had been (Smillie 2013: 1018).

In March 2009, Bernhard Esau, Namibian Chair of the KP, embarked on a journey to Zimbabwe to diffuse the situation. Yet his visit did little to assuage concerns about the status of the country's diamond sector. Then in June 2009, Zimbabwe hosted a KP Review Mission, which visited Marange and other parts of the country (Grant 2013: 332). The Review Mission witnessed the presence of the Zimbabwe military in Marange and met with several victims of government-directed violence in the diamond fields. The Review Mission to Zimbabwe reported that it was not compliant with the KPCS, emanating mostly from the Marange killings of October 2008 by the Mugabe regime. Moreover, that there was mounting evidence that there had been gross human rights violations as the Mugabe regime sought to gain greater control of the diamonds fields (Bieri 2009: 23). The report recommended suspension and announced that unless the government withdrew its military from the mines and stopped the illicit trade in diamonds it would be banned from selling their diamonds in the international markets (Farineau 2013: 29). However, a consensus could not be obtained on suspending Zimbabwe from the KP.

A month later, following a report by a KP monitor and former president of the South African Diamond Board, Abbey Chikane, concluding that Zimbabwe was now fully complying with the KP rules; two small sales of Marange diamonds were permitted, there was no further commitment to deal with the human rights violations being constantly reported, and the fields were left heavily militarised (Vircoulon 2010: 2). A month earlier, on May 25, 2010, Chikane had a confidential meeting with Farai Maguwu (director of the Mutare-based CRD). Maguwu had been observing the human rights abuses and widespread smuggling of diamonds in Marange. On June 3, Maguwu was arrested and cross-examined. This prompted protest from local and international human rights groups, including Amnesty International. Apparently Muguwu had reported the ongoing human rights abuses and the involvement of the security forces to Chikane and had cautioned that at least 2000 carats a day were being smuggled out, with the main culprits being employees of Canadile, a South African company.

A follow-up KP Review Mission to Zimbabwe followed in August 2010. The inspection team found that some improvements had occurred but that the government's commitment to the KP's previous mission was uneven. During the June 2011 KP Intersessional meetings, the civil society observers marched out in protest over the lack of authentic consultations by the Congolese Chair and false intimations of unanimity regarding the Zimbabwe issue. Again, civil society observers such as Global Witness boycotted the November 2011 KP Plenary meetings. Global Witness, a founding civil society observer withdrew from the KP (Grant 2013: 333).

The decision of the KP to certify the Zimbabwean diamonds to flow into the international markets cast a shadow of doubt among human rights groups and states as to the real objectives of the KP. Some have argued that the self-interest of its founding members (De Beers and South Africa in particular), rather than ethics is driving the KP, leaving it seriously damaged as a result (Barron 2013: 7). There have been increases in sales as a result of the KPCS and those that are members imply legitimacy with their diamonds. A stronger argument against the KP is that its perimeters only extends to rebel movements but do not take into consideration legitimate governments that use natural resources to fund conflicts and undermine democratic principles and the rule of law (Murphy 2011: 222). Perhaps the KP only followed earlier findings on the resource studies that were rebel-centric and did not include sovereign states that deal in blood diamonds. Nonetheless, current literature on the civil war literature has begun to incorporate both state rulers and rebels as logical predators that try to maximise their revenue (Thies 2010: 329).

An interesting dimension of the Zimbabwean diamond case is that, unlike other notorious cases of conflict diamonds, as those found in Sierra Leone and Angola, where mineral profits fuelled armed rebellion from outside the state, Zimbabwe's conflict diamonds posed a threat to legitimate government from within (Nyamunda and Mukwambo 2012: 161). It is government officials that are being reported flexing their political muscle to loot the precious gems – mostly driven by greed. In their 2009 report entitled 'Zimbabwe, diamonds and the wrong side of history', Partnership Africa Canada (PAC) write:

When UNITA rebels under Jonas Savimbi and RUF thugs under Foday Sankoh took villagers from their homes and forced them into virtual slavery digging for diamonds, international civil society did not hesitate to call these diamonds what they were – blood diamonds. The situation is no different when the perpetrators belong to the police and army of a government like Zimbabwe’s ... nor is its name – blood diamonds (PAC 2009: 9-10).

In essence, the Marange diamond fields, despite having been a place where gross human violations were committed, do not qualify as conflict diamonds. Henceforth, the KP has failed to stop the flow of these diamonds in flowing into legitimate diamond markets, as Mugabe and his cronies continue to loot resources to keep him in power. He has created an inner circle that protects his interests at all costs – at the expense of ordinary Zimbabwean – suppressing opposition and freedom of the press. The failure of the KP to evolve and include such borderline cases as that found in Zimbabwe might leave it toothless and its certification without meaning.

Conclusion

The discovery of the Marange diamond fields in 2006 brought a glimpse of hope to the Zimbabwean people that had endured the economic and political hardships that rocked the country. The Marange diamond fields are unique in Zimbabwe due to the fact that miners are able to access the diamonds without intricate or costly extraction methods. The informal diamonds mining that sprung up at Chiadzwa thus proved lucrative. As Nyamunda and Mukwambo (2012: 146-7) state, “for many of the politically and economically displaced, Chiadzwa provided a refuge as well as an economic niche for those willing to work under the trying conditions. It offered some reprieve to the unemployed or the ‘gainlessly’ employed”.

The political impasse of March 2008-March 2009 opened a window of opportunity for the Mugabe regime to loot the Marange diamonds. The regime heavily militarised and seized the Marange diamond field in order to fund repressive activities against the MDC opposition of Morgan Tsvingarai. As Le Billon (2001: 562) points out, resource rents afford political elites with traditional means for staying in power by establishing regimes arranged through a system of patronage rewarding followers and punishing foes. Although not a civil war, the Mugabe regime in the context of political and economic hardships is sustained in power by illicit smuggling of diamonds across borders by members of his circle. Again, the economic instability caused the government to be dependent on resource rents – these were not making it to government coffers, but to individuals with the right connections to the government. Moreover, the geological type of diamond deposits found in the Marange diamond fields – secondary or alluvial diamonds – are those that are claimed to prolong violent conflicts.

The resource war literature becomes challenging in the Zimbabwean case for a number of reasons. Firstly, there was no civil war in that country but a political conflict and economic instability where diamonds served to help keep the ZANU-PF in power. Secondly, Zimbabwe is a case of a predatory state that is looting the diamonds, not of rebels seeking to oust a government. Collier and Hoeffler’s ‘greed or grievance’ distinction is rebel-centric. Evidently,

there are no rebels in Zimbabwe but a government that loots natural resources. Tilly (1985: 172-3) writes, “What distinguished the violence produced by states from the violence delivered by anyone else? In the long run, enough to make the division between ‘legitimate’ and ‘illegitimate’ force credible”.

The Marange diamond fields shed an interesting light on one of the weaknesses of the KP. Under the current definition by the KP of conflict diamonds, one which is limited to the use of the mineral by rebel movements or their allies, the diamonds extracted from the Marange diamond fields, in spite of the associated human rights violations, do not qualify as conflict diamonds. Henceforth, the KP has failed to stop the flow of these diamonds into legitimate diamond markets, as Mugabe and his inner circle continue to loot resources to keep him in power at the age of 90 years.

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