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It's all connected! Merging the “networks of greed” and the “organisational power apparatus” into a new scheme to analyse complex perpetrator interactions in white-collar criminal cases

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Abstract: In this paper, we expanded on the challenges when researching complex cases of white-collar crime due to the clandestinity of available information or the lack thereof. We used established concepts of the networks of greed as well as the organisational power apparatus to construct a novel approach for analysing the actors in such cases and their interactions. This new scheme was then applied to three cases, the exploitation of coltan in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the trafficking of arms in Mexico, and the grabbing of land in Bangladesh. Following our approach, we made some first steps towards a deeper understanding of the cases at hand. We were also able to draw some superficial conclusions on general topics of white-collar crime research. These included the hierarchy of criminal networks, the role of regular street crime therein, and the necessity to look beyond strictly empirical data that might otherwise remain unnoticed by research.

Keywords: white-collar crime, organised crime, networks of greed, organisational power apparatus, RxR scheme of interaction

Zusammenfassung: In dieser Arbeit haben wir uns mit den Herausforderungen, die sich bei der Erforschung komplexer Fälle von Wirtschaftskriminalität aufgrund des Mangels an verfügbaren Informationen ergeben, befasst. Wir verwendeten die etablierten Konzepte der Networks of Greed sowie des Organisatorischen Machtapparates, um einen neuen Ansatz für die Analyse der Akteure in solchen Fällen und deren Interaktionen zu entwickeln. Dieses neue Schema wandten wir anschließend auf drei Fälle an: die Ausbeutung von Coltan in der Demokratischen Republik Kongo, den Waffenhandel in Mexiko und die Landnahme in Bangladesch. Unserem Ansatz folgend, gelangten wir zu ersten Erkenntnissen bezüglich der vorliegenden Fälle. Außerdem konnten wir einige übergeordnete Schlüsse zu allgemeinen Themen der Erforschung von Wirtschaftskriminalität ziehen. Diese umfassten die Hierarchie krimineller Netzwerke, die Rolle von herkömmlicher Straßenkriminalität darin sowie

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die Notwendigkeit, Erkenntnisse jenseits strikt empirischer Daten zu suchen, die ansonsten ungesehen von der Forschung bleiben.

Keywords: Wirtschaftskriminalität, Organisierte Kriminalität, Networks of Greed, Organisatorische Machtapparate, RxR scheme of interaction

Introduction

For a long time, criminology was mainly concerned with conventional street crimes like burglary, theft, or homicide on city, municipal, and maybe national level. However, since the notion of *Edwin Sutherland* that crime was not only a phenomenon of the working class but instead spread among powerful actors of global politics and economy (Sutherland, 1968), this perspective of criminological research has begun to be put in question. Allowing for this so-called *white-collar crime* (WCC), criminology had to include all the activities of corporations, that might be considered illicit, therefore expanding its view across national borders and jurisdictions, if a company was active in multiple regions (Clinard/Yeager, 2011). This became even more important as corporations grew their businesses in other countries, leading to an increasing globalisation of trade and enterprise. At the same time, opportunities for profitable, but illicit ways of doing business, as well as possibilities to evade the consequences of prosecution of such activities, arose. Consequently, criminal actors started to hide suspicious enterprises in maze-like transnational interactions including offshore and shell companies, or simply relocated to less sophisticated jurisdictions, where one could get its way by employing bribery or the like (Friedrichs, 2007; Huisman, 2008). Finally, the very same complexity led to increasing difficulty in identifying the victims of illegal activities, if there were any, as well as the damage caused (Eisenberg/Köbel, 2017, p. 931). Taken together, these developments not only hinder criminal persecution but any research done on cases of WCC as well, as the information available can be scarce and of questionable reliability. In this work, we therefore follow up on the question, of how criminological research could approach complex cases of WCC, despite the aforementioned challenges. To do so, we expand on existing theories that describe actors of WCC as well as their interactions and propose a continuation of these theories to make them more applicable in research practice.

The original definition of WCC does not specify, who the criminal actors are, as long as the crime is “committed by a person of respectability and high social status in the course of his occupation” (Sutherland, 1983, p. 7). It is therefore conceivable that we need to look for criminal actors within both politics and the economy. Although research has looked at these actors individually (e. g. Clinard et al., 2014, or McCoubrey/White, 1995), looking at the interplay of both has been particularly fruitful. This phenomenon was termed *state-corporate crime* (SCC); depending on the state initiating or merely enabling criminal corporate activity, e. g. by a lack of control or corruption, one could distinguish between *state-initiated* and *state-facilitated* SCC (Kramer et al., 2002). While the original theory explains the relation of seemingly legal actors very well, a third important class of actors has been left out of it, which is organised crime. Although initially excluded by the aforementioned definition of WCC by Sutherland, organised criminal groups have become increasingly important for transnational crime as they developed parallel to globalising corporations into powerful threats to international security due to an intensification of violence in both the countries of origin of illicit goods, as well as the countries where they are sold (Europol, 2021; Interpol, 2023). An example of this are Latin American criminal groups (Bagley, 2004), which will also be the subject of our research in the second case study of this paper.

A very useful concept to describe both actors within legal and illicit economies is the *dirty economy* by *Vincenzo Ruggiero*, which describes the interaction of organised criminal actors with

legal enterprises, where the latter either hire the former to take care of certain illicit operations or the latter even adapt criminal practices themselves (Ruggiero, 1997). A concept, however, describing the interaction of organised criminals with governmental actors in a manner similar to SCC, or a general theory including all three types of actors, i. e. state, corporations, and organised crime, or their interaction, to our knowledge is yet missing, although there have been indications of such concepts (Bublak, 2022; Knabe, 2021).

In this paper, we, therefore, propose such a general concept about criminal actors in transnational WCC, which tries to capture their involvement and interactions regardless of whether them being governmental, economic, or actors of organised crime. For this, a framework established in an earlier work by the author (Knabe, 2022) will be presented in the following and afterwards applied to a series of different cases of transnational WCC from the past and present. In that way, we hope to complement the proposed theory for it to be used in the analysis of future cases.

Before we do so, however, we must formulate a warning about the weight given to the results presented in this paper. Due to the limited resources available in this area of criminology, we do by no means claim completeness or conclusiveness of the case studies presented. All analyses are qualitative, and could best be described as a form of narrative review (Demiris et al., 2019). The overarching goal of this approach is to create awareness of the importance of this kind of research in general as well as the specific cases and to motivate more sophisticated analyses based on this work.

1. Theoretical background

Before we can look at the individual cases, we need to consider two concepts, from which we will be deriving an approach of our own afterward.

1.1. The “Networks of greed” by Ruggiero

The first one has its origin in the aforementioned idea of dirty economies, i. e. the cooperation of legal and illegal actors in the prosecution of common goals. As a driver of such a shadowy interaction, globalisation as well as increasing economic dependence, growing competition between legal actors, and a lack of uniform regulation accompanying it, is mentioned. At this point, the question of what qualifies as a legal, and what is an illegal actor might arise. Ruggiero himself argues that the distinction was based upon the extent to which an actor was involved in actions considered legal or illegal within the pursuit of their economic goals (Ruggiero, 2012). Therefore, legal actors would focus their operations on the production of legal goods (e. g. car manufacturing), however, might utilise criminal activities to boost their enterprises. Illegal actors, on the other side, would focus on the production of illegal goods (e. g. drug manufacturing) but might use legal businesses to cover up their main activities. In line with this, some sources define organised crime as a form of continuing, structured enterprise profiting mainly from illegal operations (UNODC, 2020b); further definitions might expand on the network character of organised crime (Tonry/Reuter, 2021), which will also play an important role in this work.

In another work, Ruggiero points out, that interactions between actors could evolve into multiple, local cooperations that begin to span across borders and continents (Ruggiero, 2017a). This growing system of interactions he termed a *network of greed* (Ruggiero, 2017b). It was the inherent characteristic of such a network that every member would both profit from and contribute to the network’s common goals to a certain degree. At the same time, the network had a margin of

flexibility, as the elimination of single members, e. g. through capture, would not necessarily affect the network as a whole. This “strength of weak ties” (Ruggiero, 2017b, p. 16) would also hinder an effective criminal prosecution or, even worse, increase the risk of other actors immersing into the network as well. Single actors were motivated to contribute to the network as it allowed for the dispersion of risk and responsibility and because they often were dependent on the functioning of the network for their own enterprises to persist. We understand it that single actors within a network differ from each other by means of several other actors depending on them to be able to work together (called the actor’s *connectedness* in the following), as well as the extent the actor can be removed from the network without risking its entire collapse (called the actor’s *interchangeability* in the following).

At this point, we must remark on network theory (Otte/Rousseau, 2002), as many of the concepts mentioned before and in the following are also present in this theory. The majority of applications of network theory, however, are built on more sophisticated sets of data than the ones available for this work and are mostly quantitative. Due to our approach specifically looking at cases with little data available and being strictly qualitative, we draw our arguments from the work of Ruggiero, as it was qualitative. We will, however, further discuss the role of network theory for the improvement of the approach proposed in this work at a later stage.

1.2. The “Organisational power apparatus” by Roxin

The notions of dispersing responsibility and interchangeability of actors are similarly used in the context of *Claus Roxin’s* concept of indirect perpetration (Roxin, 2020). According to this, in a group of a certain size, which has both a certain purpose and structures of leadership, not only the perpetrators of a crime committed in the name of this group should be held responsible, but also the leading figures, who command, yet might have never been in direct contact with any criminal activity. This hierarchical constellation was termed an *organisational power apparatus* by Roxin. An important characteristic of such an apparatus, which points out the relation to the networks of greed by Ruggiero, is the fungibility of actors with a low status within the apparatus, while actors with high status were more important or even vital for the apparatus as a whole; we understand this to be similar to the aforementioned interchangeability of actors within a network of greed. Specifically, the importance of actors would increase proportionally to the distance and hierarchical levels between the perpetrator of a crime and the one commanding it, as the latter was responsible for the commission of all the crimes of all actors under their command. Following this idea, Roxin created the concept of indirect perpetration and the criminal persecution of actors indirectly connected to a crime, which became a cornerstone of German criminal law (Roxin, 2006). Although the theory of Roxin is not a criminological one per se, it has been successfully used in criminological research, e. g. in the corporate context (Radde, 2018) or the analysis of dictatorship in Latin America (Palermo, 2010). This encourages a further implementation of this concept in our work.

1.3. Deriving a new scheme of perpetrator interaction

Even though the concepts of the networks of greed by Ruggiero and the organisational power apparatus by Roxin certainly have their differences, they both include ideas that might be helpful when approaching complex cases of transnational WCC. In previous work, we examined whether our understanding of such cases could be improved by combining both concepts and their features into one comprehensive model (Knabe, 2022). In this, there are levels of actors like in Roxin's work,

however, with increasing distance, both temporal and geographical, of an actor from the commission of a crime does not necessarily come the importance of that actor for the system as a whole. Instead, we argue that an actor's importance is based upon the measures of interchangeability and connectedness implied by Ruggiero. Like a knot in a fishing net, different actors bind together parts of the network. The more strings connected to a knot, the bigger the hole in a fishing net, if that knot is cut, i. e. if a well-connected actor of the network is eliminated from it. In consequence, there can be actors, who are not at the top of the hierarchy, but who connect with a lot of actors on a lower level. Based on this notion, these would be the actors most important for the functioning of the network as a whole; actors of a network with these attributes, we will call the most *committed* in the following.

Nevertheless, the propositions of a hierarchy of Roxin in our understanding do not lose their value in light of the characteristics of the network of greed. While the latter allows for differentiating single groups or actors from each other, the former becomes important the further and the more complex interactions between single actors get, as it allows for the clustering of a vast network ranging across countries and continents, into hierarchical levels. Roxin does not specifically define the nature of these levels. Following some insights from our previous work, we decided to differentiate them geographically, e. g. into local, regional, national, and international levels. These levels might also differ in terms of the number of important, i. e. committed actors, they house. Based on this, the levels including the most actors with high importance for the network as a whole, are called most *crowded* in the following. Instead of the actors most distant from the actual crime, like in Roxin's original work, we propose the actors on the most crowded level of the network should be identified as the main drivers of a network's criminal activity because most of that activity will at some point involve an actor from this level. Actors at lower levels might still be held responsible, yet there are actors whose elimination would be more threatening to the existence of a criminal network as a whole, as they manage more vital parts of its underlying enterprise. At the same time, actors on higher levels might be more influential overall, yet their involvement in the network is too shallow and unspecific. This indicates that we must differentiate actors more than would be achieved when relying on just their strict hierarchy. To clearly distinguish our approach from a hierarchy, we will therefore refer to the clusters of actors as *levels of consideration*, as we build upon Roxin's idea of clusters of actors, yet not its implication of actors on the top being necessarily more important than actors on the bottom.

The result of the proposed view on criminal networks is a system of levels, knots, and links between both, which is depicted in Figure 1 (next page). This merely tries to visualise the thought process behind the concept proposed and does not have any analytical value itself. In honour of the authors 'works this concept is based upon, we term it the *RxR scheme of interaction*.

Applying the RxR scheme of interaction to a case study is intuitive. First, one must try to identify, if possible, all the different actors of a case as well as their confirmed and suspected interactions. The latter can be particularly challenging, as collaborations between actors can be very discrete, i. e. using a single phone call or email. Given the scarcity of this kind of detailed information in the following case studies, we decided to not restrain ourselves to specific forms of interaction. This then allows us to spread the actors across various levels of consideration based on their distance to the events in question, resulting in a scheme analogous to the one in Figure 1. Based on this, individual actors of the network can be differentiated according to their commitment as described above. Finally, one could assess the actors across distinct levels of consideration to identify the most crowded levels.

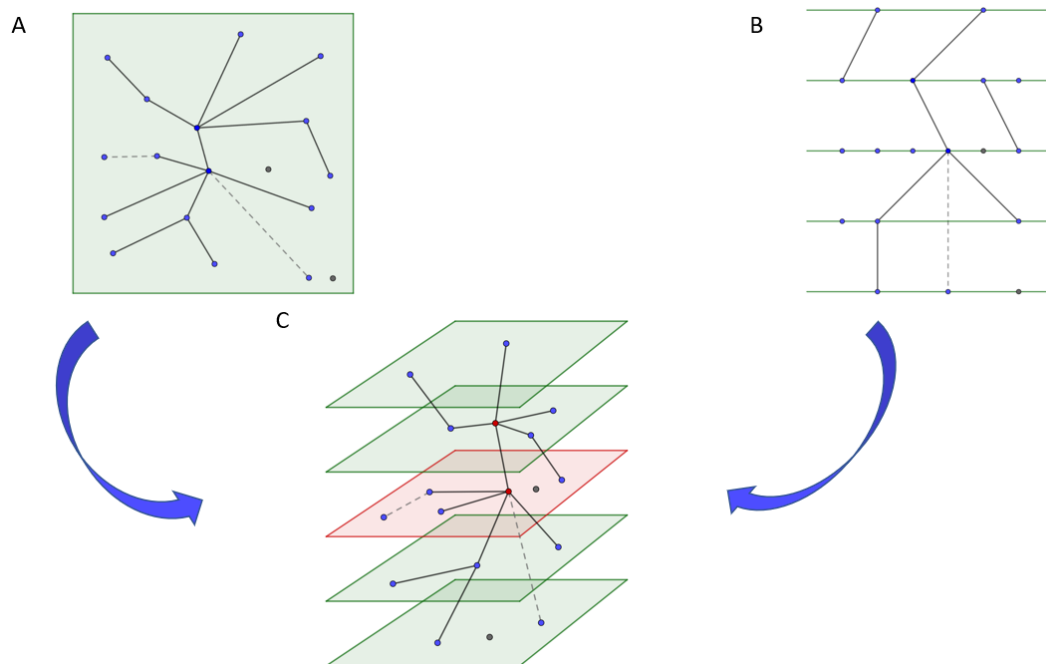


Figure 1. Schematic representation of the merging of the two theoretical concepts of the network of greed by Ruggiero (A) and the organisational power apparatus by Roxin (B) into a unified criminological concept (C). *Note.* The individual actors are shown as blue nodes or grey ones if unknown, their relationships with each other as grey lines which are dotted if unknown, and their clustering on green levels. The most committed actors, as well as the most crowded levels, are coloured in red (C).

This scheme helps not only to systematise and cluster complex case studies but also to depict the actors and their roles within the case. It also allows for the identification of those actors who are both committed and located on particularly crowded levels of the network and who, according to the theory, are most important for the functioning of that network as a whole.

It must be mentioned that this approach of course is rather idealised. It, therefore, remains to be seen whether the RxR scheme of interaction will prove its value in different case studies, as will be examined next. We are aware that the baseline analytical value of this approach might be difficult to assess due to the missing definitions and characteristics of the concept, e. g. what qualifies an individual actor to be put on a specific level of consideration or to be deemed particularly committed to the network. As mentioned before, the main goal of the proposed scheme is to make complex cases with little available information more approachable and to motivate further research on them using more sophisticated analyses.

2. Analysing perpetrator interactions in three cases of white-collar crime

After presenting the theoretical concepts on which this work is based, we will now apply them in a total of three case studies. To offer a broad spectrum of consideration, the selected cases are set at various times in the last two decades and on three different continents. In this, we will first present the cases in as much detail as possible, to then sort certain aspects of them into the scheme as presented in the last section.

For researching information about the cases, we mainly relied on searches within relevant academic databases as well as Google Scholar. In addition to that, we used references of works found there to access further literature, e. g. local newspaper articles. Finally, we sometimes added

information via manual research if necessary. We applied special caution concerning our resources' credibility. However, numerous resources remain far from empirical works; we decided to mention those, nevertheless, to at least appreciate the information in them. Unfortunately, we were overall limited to resources publicly available via the internet for our analysis. Hence, none of the cases could be captured to their full extent.

2.1. Coltan exploitation in the Democratic Republic of Congo (*Congo Case*)¹

The first case looks at the exploitation of natural resources in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) during the early 2000s.

2.1.a. Background of coltan exploitation in the DRC

For a long time, these resources have been a driving power of the African continent's economy, however, they have also been a source of conflict and a point of attraction for foreign influence on the people living there as well (Murombedzi, 2016; National Geographic, 2012; UNEP, 2017). This becomes particularly vivid in light of the growing digitalisation and the accompanying need for rare metals from Africa to build technical devices. Similar to the colonial times, however, it is not the inhabitants of the areas of origin of these metals, commonly referred to as the *Global South*, profiting from their value. Instead, the main revenue is generated and kept within the nations, where the end products are sold, accordingly called *Global North* (Böhm, 2020). At the same time, the people and regions of the Global South suffer from the consequences of the unrestrained exploitation of natural resources. This happens either directly through damage to the environment or forced relocation of indigenous settlements, or indirectly through people being forced to work under inhumane circumstances or other forms of exploitation like prostitution of women and children in that context (Brisman/South, 2018; Ruggiero/South, 2013).

While there are numerous examples of exploitative actions in Africa, we decided to focus on the exploitation of the rare metal coltan due to its importance for modern technology and the little research done on it. At the same time, this sets the focus of this work on the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), as a large proportion of global coltan supplies originates there (Behrendt et al., 2007; Moyroud/Katunga, 2002). While direct damages caused by the extraction of this metal are fairly low compared to other minerals, there are indications that the exploitation of coltan is often supervised by violent rebel groups claiming power over regions of the DRC and utilising the recruitment of child soldiers, eviction and rape at the same time (ACCORD, 2018; Amnesty International, 2003; UNSC, 2008). This becomes particularly important if there are official parties inside and outside the DRC profiting from the coltan gathered under such circumstances.

To exemplify this conflict, in this case study, we included two German mining companies, namely H. C. Starck (HCS) and Masingiro (MG), who allegedly cooperated directly and indirectly with actors in the DRC and beyond to support the exploitation of people and environment to come to coltan and power (Eggenburg, 2006; UNSC, 2002, 2003). In this, we will first analyse the actors involved in coltan exploitation in general to then look at the two companies mentioned.

2.1.b. Identifying actors of coltan exploitation

In the DRC, coltan is mostly found within the so-called *Kibara Belt*, which is located between Rwanda, Uganda, and Burundi, which will play a minor role in this case, as well as the DRC (Pohl

¹ This case is based on a past work of the author (Knabe, 2022).

et al., 2013). Mining in the Kibara Belt happens mostly in the form of *artisanal mining*, i.e., by small groups and cooperations with only a few workers, in the regions of Kivu and Katanga (Schütte/Näher, 2020). The people working in a mine, so-called *creuseurs* (French for digger or search dog) commonly have economically weak positions with mining being their only source of income; often, women and children are involved (Buxton, 2013; Hilson/Hilson, 2015; OHCHR, 2010). The owners of a mine, so-called *managers*, are usually more wealthy, selling gear and permissions to exploit coltan to the workers (Fritz et al., 2018). This creates a financial dependence of the workers, as they must borrow money from richer locals or bribe them to be able to work. Unpaid debts arising from this are sometimes collected violently (Banchirigah, 2008; de Koning, 2010; Kelly, 2014). At the same time, as everybody needs to work in the mines to make a living and pay outstanding debt, education falls into the background, while phenomena like prostitution, not seldomly of minors, and drug abuse emerge (Tegera et al., 2002).

Besides these actors, there are so-called *négociants* (French for merchant) collecting revenue from several mining sites, either in the form of coltan ore, or protection money (de Koning, 2010; Mantz, 2008; Vlassenroot/Perrot, 2012). They often hold local political power, have more money and connections, and can therefore influence the mining and trade of coltan (Dietrich, 2000; Perrot, 1999). It is important to note that *négociants* can either be limited to a local area with several mining sites or can move between regions. If that is the case, these actors are referred to as *hiboux* (French for owl). Their mobility, however, requires the moving of resources, which often happens by employing smuggling via car, boat, or small aircraft (de Koning, 2010; Hayes/Burge, 2003; UNSC, 2001, 2002; Wakenge et al., 2018). As this demands better logistics, *hiboux* regularly work together in groups centred around bigger cities like Goma and Bukavu in Kivu as well as Kalemie in Katanga (Spittaels, 2010). Additionally, they could cooperate with regional political actors or hold power themselves. An example of this was the Congolese political party *Congrès national pour la défense du peuple* (CNDP) and its leader Laurent Nkunda, who until 2009 controlled almost all of the mining in the region of Goma in northern Kivu (Koning, 2012). Besides smuggling of coltan, *négociants* and *hiboux* are regularly involved in the cutting of coltan ore by introducing impurities to increase the amount sold, so-called *vragage* (de Koning, 2010; Wakenge et al., 2018).

This supply of coltan of varying purity leads to regional price differences and opportunities for arbitrage, which is utilised by people having the resources to move between regions (IPIS, 2012). These are either particularly influential *hiboux* or actors, who are even more widely connected and powerful. Such actors are called *comptoirs* (French for counter or bank teller), who usually have the resources to organise national and international coltan trade (Cuvelier/Raeymaekers, 2002). This almost certainly would include connections to governmental institutions in and outside the DRC to acquire export licences for coltan ore, as well as to secure coltan sources through local forces (UNSC, 2001). An example of this is the Swiss national Chris Huber, who acquired coltan from Rwanda Metals, a facade company of the Rwandan political party *Front Patriotique Rwandais* (FPR), to then export it to the smelting company Ulba in Kazakhstan. This example also shows the interconnection between different business fields. This might be problematic, as Huber used aircraft provided by the arms dealer Viktor Bout, who at that time sold arms in African areas of conflict (Cuvelier/Raeymaekers, 2002; OHCHR, 2010). The *comptoirs* can also influence the coltan trade by being able to pay higher prices or by exclusively buying coltan from people cooperating with them (UNSC, 2008).

In this setting, the German mining company MG owned numerous mining sites in the DRC, allegedly selling their coltan yields to the company RCD-Goma (RCDG), which was managed by the Congolese political party *Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie* (RCD). While

supporting their agenda, armed forces employed by that party would secure the coltan mines of MG, sometimes violently (Cuvelier/Raeymaekers, 2002). A central part in this was played by Karl Heinz Albers, the owner of MG, who had led several other African mining operations before and therefore had good connections across African countries, including the DRC, allowing MG to do business with cooperations from Germany (HCS), China (Ningxia) and the USA (Cabot; Eggenburg, 2006; UNSC, 2003).

The smelting firm HCS on the other hand did not seem to own mining sites within the DRC. Instead, it imported coltan from mining firms. While most of the ore was obtained from MG, HCS also appeared to have business ties with the companies Eagle Wings (EG), owned by the aforementioned FPR, as well as the Mozambique Gemstone Company (MGC), which declared its coltan to be from Mozambique when it was actually from the DRC and Rwanda, e. g. obtained by EG (Eggenburg, 2006; UNSC, 2002). Finally, there are indications of HCS working together with the Burundian businesswoman Aziza Kulsum Gulamali, who, like Karl Heinz Albers, was well-connected across the region and was also involved in the smuggling of arms and cigarettes (UNSC, 2001).

2.1.c. Drafting a scheme for coltan exploitation.

After putting work into identifying several actors in the exploitation of coltan in the DRC, we can now move on to determine their respective levels of consideration. Starting from the bottom, we need a local level housing the creuceurs and managers. Still local, but sometimes on a regional level, the *négociants* are situated. We would also place MG at this level. At the same time, its owner, Karl Heinz Albers, we would locate at a transnational level due to his numerous businesses across the continent. Most of the political parties, like the RCD, as well as their subsidiaries, would be set at a national level, although it would require a deep analysis of the groups' dynamic changes in power to make a precise assessment of a group's actual political reach. The same holds for the *hiboux*, although it is challenging to set them apart from the *négociants* and *comptoirs* respectively, depending on how widely spread across countries their activities are. As mentioned, actors like Karl Heinz Albers as well as Aziza Kulsum Gulamali, who seem to act like *comptoirs*, would be situated on a transnational level. One could argue that actors like Gulamali were acting more like *hiboux* as she was involved in smuggling activities, however, the boundaries between the *hiboux* and *comptoirs* appear to be thin. Finally, actors without direct ties to the exploitation of coltan, like HCS and other smelting enterprises, are located on an international level.

With that all in mind, one can draft a scheme describing the coltan trade in the DRC, which is depicted in Figure 2 (next page).

Based on this, we can identify transnational actors as being most committed to the network due to numerous connections to other actors. At the same time, the national level of consideration appears to be the most crowded one, as it houses a considerable number of well-connected actors. This allows for two concluding observations about this case. First, *comptoirs* like Karl Heinz Albers appear to have a considerable influence on the network as a whole due to their contacts within the DRC and beyond. HCS was also important, however, as it is located at the upper edge of the network, it will be more interchangeable than the well-connected actors in the network's centre. Nevertheless, the company has a responsibility for the sources of its coltan, for which HCS has never been held accountable. Second, structural issues on a national level in the DRC supporting the coltan trade, like the involvement of political parties in mining cooperations, seem to be supportive of the problematic trade with the ore.

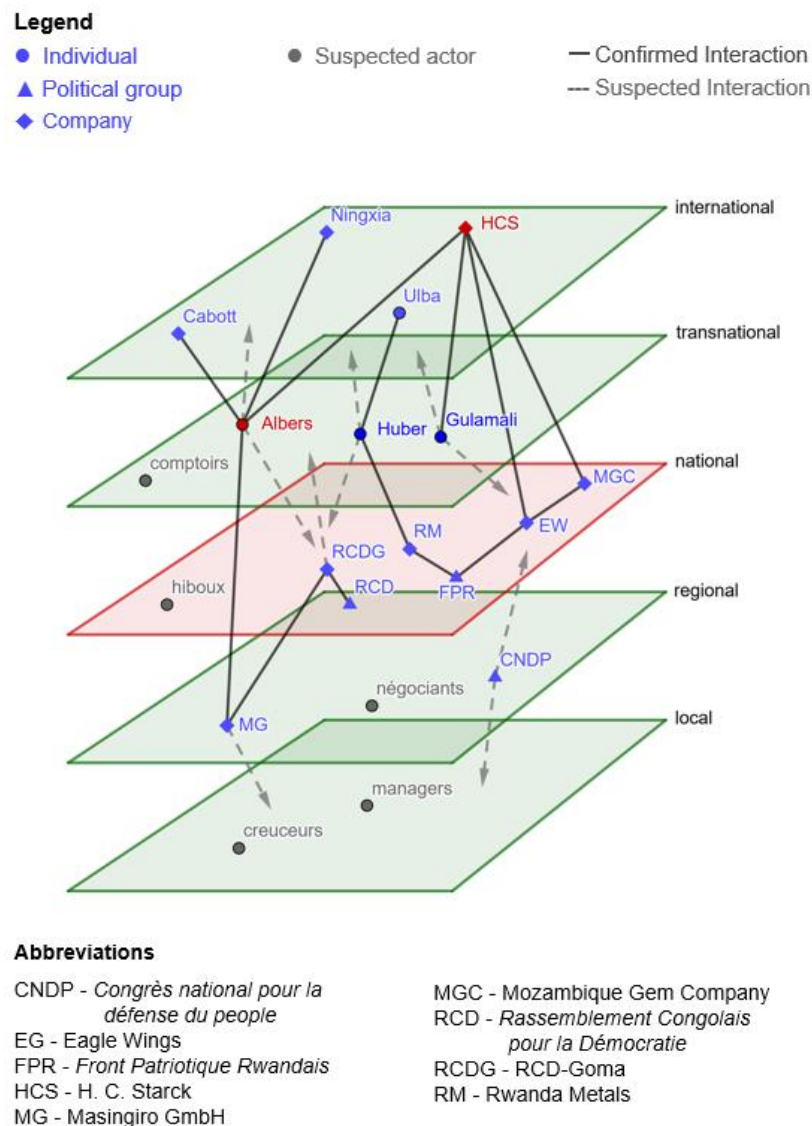


Figure 2. Schematic representation of the case of coltan exploitation in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Actors are spread on local, regional, national, trans-, and international levels, with the most committed actors as well as the most crowded levels highlighted in red.

2.2. Dealing with arms in Mexico (*Mexico Case*)²

The second case is concerned with the trafficking of small arms between Mexico and the USA, as well as their use in Mexico during the 2010s with a focus on the year 2014.

2.2.a. Background of arms trafficking in Latin America.

Illicit trade and smuggling within Latin America are dominated, although not exclusively, by the bidirectional distribution of goods across the border between Mexico and the United States (US) to

² This case is based on a past work of the author (Knabe, 2021). It must be noted that the original work was focused on weapons by Heckler & Koch, therefore limiting the scope of particular actors. Additionally, the information available for this case was particularly vague. Hence, the claims made in this part of our work must be treated with distinct caution.

open up a larger sales market for these goods (Carey, 2014). One of the most important of these products being transferred from Mexico to the US is drugs like marijuana and heroin from Mexico, or Cocaine from Colombia, which are sold in the US for considerably larger profit margins (Beittel, 2015; INL, 2021). In return, the money from selling goods like this as well as advanced weaponry find their way back to Mexico to fuel an ongoing drug war in the country (Goodman, 2013; Trejo/Ley, 2018). The actors of this war are organised within criminal groups, called cartels, which reign over a certain territory, called a *plaza*. As every plaza brings along certain resources and routes of distribution of goods, some of them are fought over violently, not only by the cartels but also by the Mexican government to assert power over a region (Dudley, 2010; Sullivan, 2011). However, in the past years, some of the cartels have risen to such an influence and acquired such sophisticated equipment, that the Mexican state does not or cannot intervene with illicit activities due to corrupt officials cooperating with criminal groups or those groups simply being more powerful. Hence, some areas in Mexico became de facto ruled by criminals (Atuesta/Pérez-Dávila, 2018; Bunker, 2013; del Pilar Fuerte Celis et al., 2019).

Based on this situation, the acquirement of weapons enabling single non-state actors to unfold considerable power in Mexico appears to be of particular interest. Most of the weapons used in the drug war originate from gun shops in the US due to less strict gun laws than in Mexico (ATF, 2020). However, half of these weapons are made by manufacturers outside the US. Although arms by the Belgian FN Herstal and Russian Kalashnikov seem popular among cartel hitmen, some weapons used in Mexico stem from the German manufacturer Heckler & Koch, e. g. the G-36 assault rifle (Báez Zamudio et al., 2018; Boggs/Rand, 2015; Goodman/Marizco, 2010). These came to sad notoriety in 2014 as they were utilised by Mexican police forces and members of the criminal group *Guerreros Unidos* (GU) to murder 43 students demonstrating against social injustice near Iguala in Mexico's state of Guerrero (Navarro, 2015). Intriguingly, in 2022, the general attorney appointed to investigate the case in 2014 had to stand trial due to allegations of him being connected to the disappearance of the students (Buschschlüter, 2016).

This gives rise to broader questions about connections between public officials, firearm vendors, and criminal groups in Mexico fuelling both arms trade and violent conflict. After a general perspective, we will therefore use the incident in Iguala as a basis for an analysis of the actors and their interaction with gun trafficking in Mexico and beyond.

2.2.b. Identifying actors of arms trafficking

First, we look at possible ways of weaponry getting into Mexico. Again, the border between Mexico and the US seems to play a major role in this (ATF, 2020). The main transfer of illegal weapons appears to happen at the border crossings between San Diego and Tijuana, Laredo and Nuevo Laredo, El Paso and Ciudad Juarez as well as Nogales. Another route bypassing the direct border between the two countries seems to emerge between Florida and Mexico via Guatemala (Goodman/Marizco, 2010). Usually, the people crossing the border with arms are US citizens with firearm licences or privileges regarding the possession and use of firearms, e. g. police officers or security personnel. These might be employed by Mexican cartels, or just trying to make a good deal by privately reselling their firearms in Mexico; if the former is the case, this is called a *straw purchase* and the actors involved in it are called *strawmen* (Goodman, 2013). Usually, there is a large number of such individuals, each carrying only a small quantity of firearms, mostly light weapons like handguns, across the border; this is referred to as *tráfico hormiga* or *ant trafficking* (Cook et al., 2009; UNODC, 2020a). Cook et al. also mention the possibility of obtaining and smuggling weapons, which are not even available for sale within the US, through the diversion of

official exports or theft from military deposits. Due to the significantly higher risk of such operations, however, this appears to be less common. Due to less strict regulations both within the US as well as regarding the export of foreign weaponry, e. g. forged by HK, into the US, this potentially allows weapons of any kind to get into Mexico without further restrictions (BMWK, 2019; Chu/Krouse, 2009; Goddard, 2008); however, there might be regional differences due to different laws within US states across the border, making some of them more attractive for arms trafficking than others (Dube et al., 2013). It remains unclear if this practice is further facilitated by corruption among patrol units on both sides of the border, however, there are some allegations of bribery among US border units, most of which were related to organised crime (CBP, 2019; Jancsics, 2019). An example of this is given by agents of the border patrol in New Mexico smuggling firearms for the *Cártel de Juárez* (Izquierdo, 2021). This particular connection also highlights that certain criminal groups like the *Cártel de Juárez* controlling plazas directly at the border to the US might have an edge on the gun market and cross-border trade in general (Dube et al., 2013), therefore being more important to this case.

2.2.c. Official imports into Mexico

Considering firearms produced by HK, they are either brought into Mexico from the US as mentioned, or exported from Germany to Mexico directly. While this is organised by the *Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und Klimaschutz* (BMWK, Ministry of Economy and Climate), the *Bundesministerium für Verteidigung* (Ministry of Defense) as well as the *Auswärtiges Amt* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) in Germany, the import of weapons into Mexico is regulated by the *Dirección de Comercialización de Armamento y Municiones* (DCAM, agency for the oversight of arms and ammunition) as well as the superordinated *Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional* (SEDENA, Ministry of Defence) in Mexico (BMWK, 2019; SEDENA, 2023). This interaction was repeatedly strained by alleged miscommunications between these agencies regarding the distribution of imported German weapons. On the one hand, the BMWK prohibited the import into the Mexican federal states of Guerrero, Chiapas, Chihuahua, and Jalisco due to an ongoing crisis there, which the DCAM and SEDENA claimed to have not known about (Ott/Richter, 2018; Report Mainz, 2011); at the same time, it seems that HK sold firearms to police forces in these regions, e. g. in Jalisco, despite those regulations (Grässlin, 2013, p. 462). On the other hand, the import of certain weapons like assault rifles was only allowed if old weaponry was destroyed in return (DB, 2015). However, it remains unclear if this requirement has been complied with, resulting in considerable differences between German and Mexican records of guns being officially imported into Mexico, which remained unaccounted for (ARTE, 2014). While the supply of weapons imported is regularly overseen by the SEDENA or DCAM, it seems that HK influenced this process by paying premiums to agency officials for the distribution of its products (Grässlin et al., 2015, p. 89). At the same time, there are indications of certain cartels like the *Beltrán Leyva Organization* (BLO) being connected to the SEDENA, therefore potentially having access to imported firearms (Ahmed, 2020). Besides foreign weapons imported to Mexico, there is a considerable number of domestic weaponry present in the country, which is readily distributed to all branches of military and law enforcement as well as, occasionally, criminal groups through corruptive practices like the ones described (Cook et al., 2009).

2.2.d. Weapons transfer through violent conflict

The distribution of firearms, once they are inside Mexico, might happen in more than one sense. Another feasible way is the capture of firearms during armed confrontations between military and

police forces with members of drug cartels. An example of this is given by a firefight between the paramilitary group *Los Zetas* (LZ) with police special forces in Piedras Negras (Kuhn/Bunker, 2012). Similarly, fights between criminal groups can lead to an exchange of weaponry, e. g. during a conflict between the *Cártel Jalisco Nueva Generación* (CJNG) and the *Cártel de Santa Rosa de Lima* (CSRL) in Valle de Santiago (Vanguardia, 2019). Finally, weapons could be distributed by civil militias, which arose in several Mexican regions due to people's disbelief that official agencies could handle violent conflicts in the regions properly (Felbab-Brown, 2016). An example of such a militia is the *Coordinadora Regional de Autoridades Comunitarias-Policía Comunitaria* (CRAC-PC) located in Guerrero, which repeatedly entered into conflict with both police forces and cartel members, utilising, among others, G-36 assault rifles made by HK, although these were officially banned in the region (ARTE, 2014; Ley et al., 2019; Sierra, 2017).

2.2.e. *The case of Iguala*

Looking into the case of Iguala mentioned in the introduction to this case in detail, we can get further insight into the entanglements of more local actors, which could have been utilised to distribute weapons like the G-36 assault rifles used, among others, in the aforementioned killing of the 43 demonstrating students. First, the members of the GU which is a splinter group of the BLO, were allegedly looking for retaliation against the rival group *Los Rojos* when opening fire on the demonstrating students (Gurney, 2021; Navarro, 2015). At the time, however, the GU was connected to Iguala's mayor José Luis Abarca, and his wife María de los Ángeles Pineda Villa, as Abarca seemed to have received monetary payments from the group, and Pineda Villa being related to high-ranking members of it (Cawley, 2017; Grässlin et al., 2015). This opens up the question of whether GU could have gotten the lethal HK guns by either collaborating with the BLO utilising their connection to the SEDENA, or their connection to the municipal police force which was under the command of the mayor of Iguala (Navarro, 2014; Schulz, 2015). The local government would have benefited from such cooperation by having a partner ready for violence against political opposition like the student demonstrators (Harrich, 2015; Navarro, 2014). There are further indications of state and federal police forces as well as the military being present in Iguala in reaction to the incident. However, as they did not intervene in the events, it is challenging to assume connections between these agencies and criminal groups that furthermore might have led to the transfer of guns (Guerrero, 2014; Thornton, 2015).

2.2.f. *Drafting a scheme of arms trafficking.*

Looking back at the case, we can identify similar levels of consideration as in the coltan case, although actors are less clearly defined making their allocation to the respective levels challenging. Starting from the top, an international level houses German state agencies as well as HK, who both influence the Mexican arms trade from afar by providing powerful weapons or enabling their transfer to Mexico; on the same level, other international weapon manufacturers would be put as well. On a transnational level, specifically focused on the transit between Mexico and the US, we put the US government and all the people involved in smuggling firearms across the border, i. e. certain border personnel as well as people conducting straw purchases; this is also the case for actors based in Guatemala, who, however, appear to be considerably less important in this case. On a national level, we find some of the more powerful agents of the Mexican drug war like the BLO, the CJNG, and LZ as well as the Mexican government; however, there appear to be numerous splinter groups of these bigger organisations acting on regional or even local levels only (Dudley, 2010). Similar to the political parties in the DRC, the criminal organisations in Mexico must be

assessed carefully to make valid assignments to a level of consideration based on their respective influence. The influence might also be connected to a cartel's stronghold's geographical position, as proximity to the border could influence power over the trade across it. The same holds for civil militias like CRAC-PC acting either regionally or locally. To distinguish between cartels of varied sizes, we chose the forms of the diminutive and augmentative of the Spanish *el cartel*. Hence, *cartelito* refers to a particular small criminal group, *cartelón* to a particularly big one, and *cartelazo* to a cartel with an international reach like the *Cártel de Sinaloa* which seems to handle the drug trade beyond America, e. g. in Europe (Europol, 2022). Certain individual actors like the mayor of Iguala and his wife must be assessed carefully regarding their actual political reach within Mexico; based on their position and alleged connection to the GU, we would put them on a regional level while keeping the mayor's office of Iguala on a local one. Finally, the armed forces of the Mexican government can be spread across the levels quite easily as their reach is defined by their respective organisation. We, therefore, distinguish between military and federal police on a national, state police on a regional, and municipal police on a local level.

Bringing all that together, we can at least paint a vague picture of gun trafficking in Mexico, as was done in Figure 3 (next page).

Based on this, we can again observe structural issues on a national level, related to activities of influential drug cartels, to be supportive of gun trafficking into and inside Mexico. However, as there is a great dynamic among cartels, with criminal groups splintering, e. g. as a consequence of the arrest of a cartel's head figure, there could be a shift from national to regional or even local level with more and more issues arising in an increasing number of areas in Mexico (Oxford Analytica, 2015). In our analysis, the Mexican state and its respective agencies, as well as the firm HK seem to be of particular importance for the network of gun trafficking. In this, the sources this case is based upon suggest several associations of some government agents with criminal activities of Mexican cartels, be it by means of corruption or personal relation. As for HK, although there have been trials against HK in the matter of illegal gun trade within Mexico, we think that there is a lasting responsibility of the firm for the remaining and use of its products. Like HCS in the Congo Case, however, HK is located more at the edge of the network and is therefore deemed the less important actor here. It must be noted that relevant actors or interactions might have been left out of our analysis due to the restricted amount of available information on this case. For example, based on the sheer number of strawmen captured while bringing small quantities of weapons into Mexico (McDougal et al., 2013), it is conceivable that those play a bigger role in the case than our analysis might suggest; unfortunately, there rarely is enough information about individual actors to conduct a thorough examination of this.

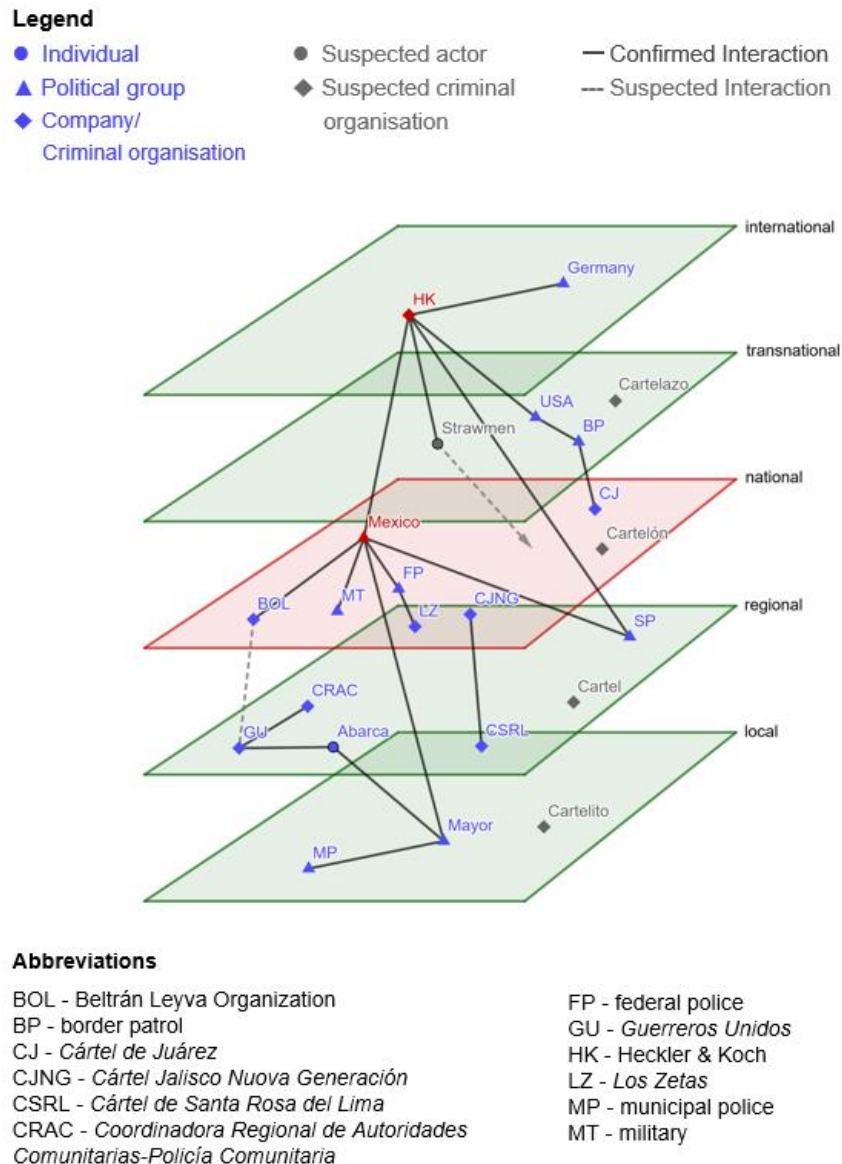


Figure 3. Schematic representation of the case of firearms trafficking in Mexico. Actors are spread on local, regional, national, trans-, and international levels, with the most committed actors as well as the most crowded levels highlighted in red.

2.3. Environmental damage and social conflict in Bangladesh (*Bangladesh Case*)

Finally, the third case is concerned with social conflicts related to land tenure and their connection to climate change in Bangladesh, which is a pressing issue to the present date.

2.3.a. Background of climate change and land grabbing in Bangladesh

The challenge of climate change, i.e. “the long-term shifts in temperatures and weather patterns on a regional or global level” (United Nations, 2022) has become increasingly pressing for human civilisation in the last decades. In its present form, it is mostly the consequence of the steady growth of human prosperity, which was achieved through industrial emissions, the clearing of rainforests for the establishment of farms, the disposal of toxic production residues in nature, and the

exploitation of natural resources at sea and on land. It manifests itself in the rise of global temperature and the melting of the poles, which results in increasingly extreme weather events such as hurricanes, floods, and droughts, but also in economic, political, and social tensions that arise from the damage caused and the increasing scarcity of resources (NOAA, 2021; United Nations, 2022; White, 2018). It is noteworthy that regions of the Global South are particularly affected by these impacts, even though they contribute only little to the described causes of environmental degradation compared to actors in the Global North (Klugman, 2011; Kramer/Michalowski, 2012; Uddin, 2017). An example of this is the differences in food security in the rural areas of the Global North and South (Raj et al., 2022).

This is particularly evident in the example of Bangladesh which suffers from the consequences of climate change because of its geographical and climatic situation. Due to a rise in sea level, the coastal region of the country at the Bay of Bengal becomes the victim of flooding. Consequently, the soil and groundwater are salinised and the livelihoods of the local population, geared towards agriculture and fishing, are deprived as land suited for farming becomes increasingly scarce and fish stocks decrease as a result of pollution. Likewise, the rise in temperature and the accompanying evaporation of liquid in some regions leads to periods of drought on the one hand and periods of heavy rain on the other, resulting in the flooding of the flat land by the Ganges, Brahmaputra, and Meghna rivers. The frequent floodings destroy infrastructure and boost the spread of transmissible diseases in a region already deprived of modern health care (Islam et al., 2013; Khan et al., 2015; Pörtner et al., 2022; Rahman, 2019).

All this leads to the migration of the affected population to urban regions such as Dhaka, resulting in an overload of the city's infrastructure and social tensions (Scheffran/Battaglini, 2011; Schellnhuber, 2009). To deal with the issues of population growth, urban, commercial, and industrial projects take over agricultural and fishing areas, leading to an increasing discrepancy between the economic needs of the people of Bangladesh and most of the land's actual usage (Deininger et al., 2011). As soil suited for agricultural use becomes increasingly scarce and due to state-initiated programmes to adapt to climatic changes, land previously owned by many small farmers is bought up by large investors. This becomes problematic from a criminological standpoint if the remaining residents are coerced into giving up their land by the use of force. Furthermore, they might become simply unable to afford their former homeland due to the corrosion of their original livelihoods through economic activity, e. g. exploitation of natural resources. The former is referred to as *ex situ* displacement or land grabbing, the latter as *in situ* displacement or land denial. This is further stressed if people's unfavourable situation is exploited to generate advantages, e. g. by leasing land to the same individuals it was taken from (Adnan, 2013; Feldman/Geisler, 2012; Sovacool, 2018).

Often, the issues described seem to not arise from individuals, but rather from a network of state, domestic, and foreign economic actors as well as local confederates who contribute to the social and environmental burden of the land in diverse ways. It is, therefore, the aim of this case study to identify and analyse the actors and their interaction in these new forms of social conflict arising from growing climate issues.

2.3.b. Identifying actors of land grabbing

The issue of land grabbing and denial in Bangladesh is not just a problem arising from climate change but from deep-rooted socio-economic processes regarding land tenure in the country (Sovacool, 2018). This was mainly due to a "lack of proper documentation, official records, and grabbing by others" (Barkat et al., 2010, p. 2). These issues are stressed by poor and corruptive

governance as well as, lately, climate change (Quan/Dyer, 2008). In Bangladesh, the state initially holds the land as a public asset (so-called *khas land*) and then leases it to private users for a given number of years. However, according to a study, only a fraction of available khas land has been disbursed adequately and legally (Shamsuddoha et al., 2014). This relates to the Bangladeshi real estate market being determined by social division and class differences, as, on the one hand, there is a strong wealthy elite, which has money as well as connections to the two big political parties, the Awami League (AW) and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). On the other hand, the majority of people are part of marginalised groups, poor and powerless (Feldman/Geisler, 2012; Titumir, 2007). Frequently, the elite has an edge on the markets due to their position of power, e. g. if bribery is necessary to be considered for the tenure of an estate. Similarly, false documents can be bought that either fake ownership or enable evictions. Alternatively, violence can be employed by the one paying people to seize land and intimidate its inhabitants (Barkat et al., 2010; Shafi/Payne, 2007; United Nations, 2007). The involvement of powerful actors in the misappropriation of real estate is indicated by numerous incidents, e. g. the dismissal of a District Commissioner, the highest official on a regional level in Bangladesh, in Bogra due to the destruction of an archaeological site (Daily Star, 2011a), or a lawsuit against the general secretary of the AW due to the misuse of a temple area (New Age, 2011b).

Altogether, people's access to farming land, urban residency as well as fishing grounds could be hindered by general shortcomings of the Bangladeshi government through corruption or collusion. Of particular interest in this are areas on the periphery of the coast or the shores of big rivers in Bangladesh, so-called *char land*, as well as suburban areas (Barkat et al., 2007; Feldman/Geisler, 2012). We will therefore focus our investigation on those.

2.3.c. Land grabbing in rural areas and char lands

Starting with the situation in the char lands, the tenure situation is ambiguous. On the one hand, it is determined by the area's high economic value due to good farming soil and rich fishing grounds. On the other hand, high tenure instability caused by regular flooding has always been an issue that is, however, recently exacerbated by the consequences of climate change (Feldman/Geisler, 2012; Sovacool, 2018). Originally, the chars were inhabited by the poorest parts of society which were forced to adapt due to the force of nature or industrial takeover of the regions (Aker, 2009). This regularly drives them to relocate or to work for local power holders called *talukdars*, either as an agricultural workforce on the lands they once owned themselves, or as henchmen, so-called *lathiyals*, to support the violent eviction of other settlers or even intimidation of local authorities. Usually, a system of patronage arises between the wealthy and the poor in such situations, as the poor have to lease the land they work on or take on credit debt from the wealthy, whereas the wealthy use them as a cheap labour force as well as voters to assert their local power (Haque/Zaman, 1989; Hossain, 2003; Sovacool, 2018). In a more extreme form of the process which turns evicted people into the ones evicting, some of the former settlers of the char land formed criminal groups known as *banadasyus* to take over areas with force, basically becoming a form of patrons themselves by employing other settlers and coercing them into paying money for settling rights and protection (de Wilde, 2011; Iftexhar/Hoque, 2005; Nabil, 2000; Sajjaduzzaman et al., 2005). The power of talukdars and banadasyus, however, was only momentary, as they themselves were often evicted from their estate by more powerful actors, known as *jotedars*, the government or both in collusion (Haque/Zaman, 1989; Shafi/Payne, 2007). This is enabled by a higher-reaching system of patronage, where the local jotedars are the clients of regional politicians who are connected to national party members or businesspeople. At the same time there are also indications of banadasyus

reaching out to political actors, e. g. members of the political opposition who were supported in multiple ways, like participation in rental revenues (Adnan, 2013, 2011; de Wilde, 2011).

It must be mentioned that similar processes are evident in other rural areas of Bangladesh which are not necessarily considered char land. In particular, regions inhabited by the indigenous people of Bangladesh are a vulnerable target of land grabbing due to their low socioeconomic status and small position of power within the community (Haque, 2019). An example of this is the Chittagong Hill Tracts in southeast Bangladesh which is described in detail by a study by the Kapaeeng Foundation (Chowdhury/Chakma, 2015). Here, the land is mainly used for the extraction of natural resources like wood and brick burning. Besides the negative impact of those enterprises on the environment per se, this study particularly highlights the use of violence by both private and public actors to drive people from their land. Two aspects can be highlighted in these cases. First, the abuse, physical and sexual, of particularly vulnerable groups like children and women, to intimidate inhabitants to leave their land (UNPO, 2018). Second, the involvement of law enforcement agencies not only to violently evict but to prosecute settlers under the guise of following up on justified accusations of other parties (Chowdhury/Chakma, 2015). However, most accounts appear to be fabricated to avoid resistance of certain individuals against the grabbing of their land as well as their political participation. Similar incidents have been reported in several cases across the rural areas of Bangladesh, which are described and analysed in other works (Khan, 2020; Raihan et al., 2009). In many of these instances, police authorities as well as other public institutions collaborate with businesses trying to utilise the seized land for their enterprise, e. g. planting of tea or rubber, sugar grinding, as well as others. The *modi operandi* of land grabbing, however, appear to be similar across all those cases.

2.3.d. Land grabbing in urban areas

Due to the growing urbanisation of Bangladesh as people migrate from rural areas into towns and cities, looking at the situation in the urban periphery becomes particularly important. Following that movement, owning land in urban areas becomes considerably more attractive for both private investors to use it for rental commercial and industrial purposes, as well as the state for constructing public institutions. Consequently, similar mechanisms of land grabbing like in the char lands are evident (Feldman/Geisler, 2011; Roy, 2011). However, due to the importance of urban centres like Dhaka for larger enterprises, the urban areas often house considerably more powerful actors which are referred to as the *nouveau riche* of Bangladesh (Hye, 2018). To develop new real estate, wealthy actors convert areas into buildable space by dredging and filling arable land, wetlands, and waterways, step by step stretching the borders of cities (Feldman/Geisler, 2012). This practice, however, on the one hand, strains local ecosystems through pollution and denial of access to water. On the other hand, it makes the area more vulnerable to damages caused by flooding as the drainage of water is hindered and natural waterways are blocked. An example of this is the continuing enclosure on the great Meghna River flowing near Dhaka, where the water is used by industrial plants built next to or even in the river (Ali, 2019). In light of the increasing number of flooding events as a consequence of climate change, this practice progressively endangers the livelihood of any kind in these developed areas (Daily Star, 2011c; Unb, 2011).

There are several examples of the described processes in urban areas. First, there were governmental projects like an Army housing which was built by the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) and the Capital Development Agency of Bangladesh, *Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha* (Rajuk) upon a filled-up area of the Ramchandrapur river in Dhaka's suburb Baunia. Similarly, the Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) filled up the Buriganga river at the edge

of Dhaka to construct a market (Daily Star, 2011b). Second, there were industrial projects, mostly employed by the strong garment manufacturing sector in Bangladesh. A first instance connected to this is the violent eviction of peasants in Dhaka's suburb Sastapur by the garment company Knit Concern, executed by a gang of henchmen led by the company's director (Daily Star, 2012; New Age, 2011a). Another instance is related to the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Export Association (BGMEA), a powerful industry federation in Bangladesh, in collusion with a governmental agency. Here, there were indications of unlawful ownership of real estate used to build a factory which, however, were only investigated after the finishing of the site. This is particularly interesting, as the BGMEA is occupied by several members of the Bangladeshi nouveau riche and is considered to be a cornerstone of the economy of Bangladesh (Feldman/Geisler, 2012). Concludingly, it must be noted that not all wealth used to realise the projects described, comes from within Bangladesh. Instead, financial support is given by foreign developmental aid as well as direct investments (Sovacool, 2018). It is, however, challenging and a matter of its own right to precisely allocate these streams of money to illicit activities like land grabbing.

2.3.e. Land grabbing in the context of environmental protection projects

Besides the described contexts of land grabbing, a separate focus can be laid on projects aiming at fighting the consequences of climate change and protecting the environment in Bangladesh. One particular important effort is the transition from agriculture to fishing in the coastal areas as a form of adaption to rising sea levels and the continuing salination of the grounds (Paprocki, 2019). For decades, there have been projects for the cultivation of shrimp which appeared to be a promising commodity to replace agricultural gains, therefore attracting international investors and donors which further drove demand for fishing areas (Bhattacharya et al., 2005; de Campos Guimaraes, 2002). The opportunity for profit arising from this new area of economy, however, also promoted land grabbing in regions suited for shrimp farming. This is made particularly evident through a study that examines land grabs related to the establishment of a secured zone dedicated to the cultivation of shrimp in the region of Noakhali in the eastern coastal area of Bangladesh (Adnan, 2013). Accordingly, since 1992 substantial portions of the Noakhali region have been taken over by regional power elites involved in the shrimp industry. This followed the establishment of the shrimp zone rules, *Chingri Mahal*, allowing for the claim of land if it was used for shrimp farming. Those new landowners made use of either regional administration by modifying regulations that limited individual land tenure, manipulating property records, or using brute force employed by groups of henchmen or local police forces (de Wilde, 2011; Foyej, 2004).³ Besides officials and actors of the industry, the land was allotted to their lawyers, relatives, or followers, called *benamis*, to avoid regulation of large individual holdings of real estate (Nabil, 2000; Sajjaduzzaman et al., 2005). These takeovers were backed by the Ministry of Land approving an establishment of the aforementioned shrimp zone in Noakhali as invoked by the Shrimp Resources Development and Management (SRDM), a regional industrial committee. This happened despite Noakhali not being considered suited for shrimp farming (de Wilde, 2011). In the following, all land within this zone was converted into khas, i.e., state-owned land, giving local and regional administration full control over its reallocation (Borras/Franco, 2010; Guttal/Monsalve, 2011). With the ongoing seizure of land for shrimp farming, areas occupied by banadasyus came into focus as well. However, as they did not want to give up their land and the position of patronage connected to it, regional power holders brought together military and paramilitary forces from across the country to support the

³ Please note that Foyej (2004) is an unpublished manuscript in Bengali which was cited by Adnan (2013).

forceful eviction of the banadasyus. This included the militia Bangladesh Rifles as well as Navy corps to secure the waterways. The former nowadays is called Border Guard Bangladesh and secures the borders of the country (PRB, 2023). Additionally, local patrons were said to be steering up a mob of former inhabitants of banadasyu land to take violent revenge on their former oppressors (Foyej, 2004; Kaiser, 2003). After the elimination of the banadasyus, the seizure of land in the region continued with even more vigour, although accompanied by numerous protests from people who got robbed of their property in the process.

As similar shrimp zones arose all across the coastline of Bangladesh, it is conceivable that there have been more incidents like the ones described all across the country (Paprocki, 2019). It is important to note, that the shrimp industry has risen to be involved in more than just land grabbing as there have been reports of illegal deforestation, killings, and rape employed by a so-called “shrimp mafia” (Pokrant, 2014, p. 124) to get an edge on the shrimp market. This, however, demands an analysis of its own right.

2.3.f. Drafting a scheme of land-grabbing

Bringing all the actors of land grabbing in Bangladesh together, we again find similar levels of consideration like in the previous cases, yet some of the actors cannot be clearly identified or located. An important actor in this case appears to be the government of Bangladesh itself which, similar to the Mexico Case, is located on a national level. On an international level, we assume foreign investors and donors (FID), however, there are only suspicions about their involvement in land grabbing practices. We did not find any meaningful actors on a transnational level, as most illicit acts seem to happen from within Bangladesh. However, we could identify further public agencies on a national level and below, e. g. the Rajuk as well as the BIWTA on a national level, as they are concerned with the internal affairs of the country. Similarly, the BGMEA as a national industrial federation as well as Knit Company as a large garment manufactory would be located here. The representatives of Bangladesh’s two political parties might be housed on a national level as well, although this can vary based on their respective influence. The same holds true for the Bangladeshi nouveau riche. Finally, the military units like the Navy as well as the Bangladesh Rifles respective Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) are situated on a national level. On a regional level, we have some government agencies as well, e.g., the DCC as well as the District Commanders (DC) of certain regions if they are involved in land grabbing. Here, we would also place smaller industrial federations like the SDMR in Noakhali as well as the jotedars. Again, their individual influence might vary; the same holds for the respective supporters and relatives of the latter, the benamis. Finally, the remaining talukdars, the lathiyals employed by them as well as the marauding banadasyus are set on a local level. Notably, the involvement of police could only be identified on a local level through violent intervention against rural peasants, however, due to the interconnections between private and public sectors, their engagement on other levels of consideration is possible. A distinction between police officials and lathiyals acting out policing authority sometimes appears unclear. Putting all that together, we can draft a scheme of land grabbing in Bangladesh, which is depicted in Figure 4 (next page).

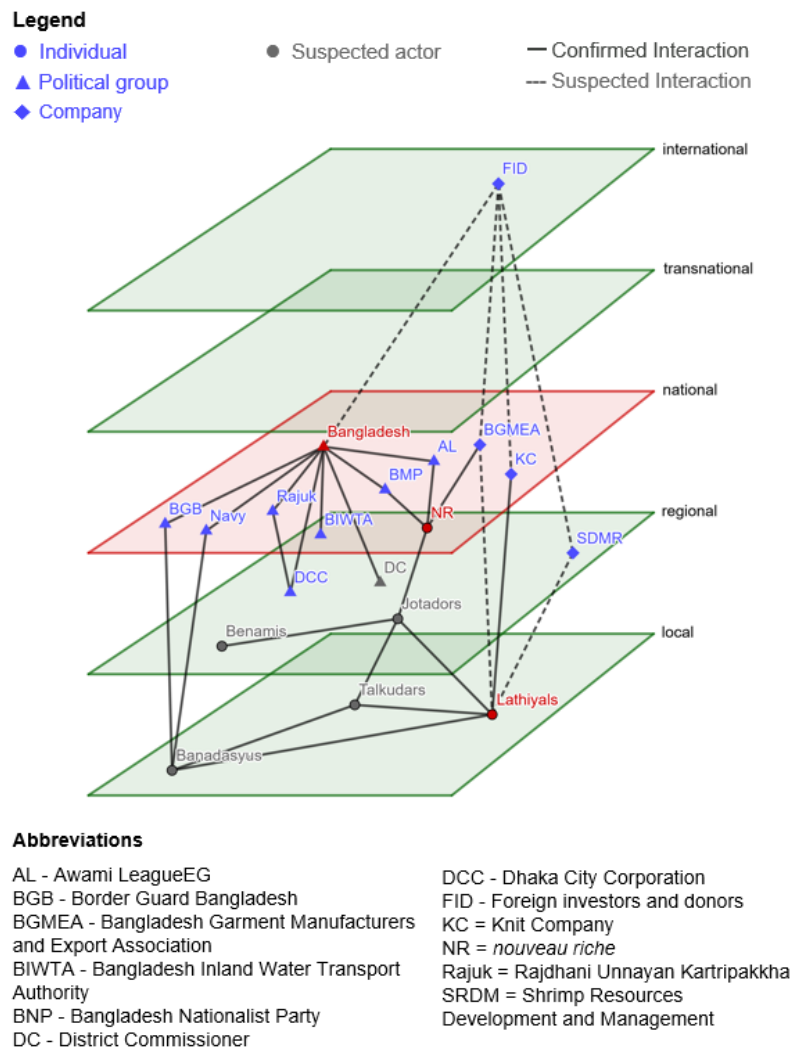


Figure 4. Schematic representation of the case of land grabbing in Bangladesh. Actors are spread on local, regional, national, trans-, and international levels, with the most committed actors as well as the most crowded levels highlighted in red.

Based on this, we can identify the national level as the most crowded one in the issue of land grabbing in Bangladesh, as it houses numerous influential actors that contribute to the seizure of land in both rural and urban spaces. Here, the works on this issue suggest that government agencies play an overarching role, facilitating land grabs by means of collusion with other actors or acting on their own. At the same time, the *nouveau riche*, Bangladesh's elite, seems to be an important connector of actors on various levels and therefore similarly important for the network as a whole. Finally, the *lathiyals*, or groups of henchmen in general, appear to play a significant role, especially in the enforcement of violent land grabs, as they are a welcomed "tool" for other actors who do not want to get involved in the "dirty work" of forceful evictions.

3. Discussion

After applying the RxR scheme of interaction on the cases in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mexico, and Bangladesh, we now want to critically reflect on the results from the individual cases, their differences, and similarities as well as implications for theory and practice.

3.1. Reflections on the results

3.1.a. Crowded levels of consideration

Across all three cases, we repeatedly found notions on the involvement of actors on a national level, be it political parties in the Congo Case, influential criminal groups in the Mexico Case, or a political and economic elite in the Bangladesh Case. This would indicate that the criminal activity related to these actors is not just a phenomenon restricted to certain hot spots, but instead a structural problem of the countries. In line with this, past concepts of state crime and state-corporate crime point out the involvement of public actors, either by the active commission of crimes or the passive omission of their detection and prosecution (Chambliss, 1989; Kramer et al., 2002). However, the modes of involvement vary across the cases.

In the Congo Case, several state-like actors took an active role in the exploitation of coltan by owning mining companies and sometimes using violent force to achieve their economic and political goals. Although we focused on the early 2000s for our analysis of the Congo Case, our findings connect well to similar research done on the association between politics, violence, and the exploitation of minerals like coltan at a later point in time (Geenen/Claessens, 2013; Larmer et al., 2013; Sovacool, 2019). These also constitute the basis for further analyses of the involvement of some of the same actors we identified as relevant for coltan exploitation in areas of economy and politics in the DRC that go far beyond mineral extraction. That is the control over parts of the very livelihood of people living in certain regions of the DRC through taxation, eviction, rape, or pillage (Laudati, 2013).

In the Mexico Case, corruption seemed to play a key role, although there were indications of nepotism as well; here, there were few indications of state actors directly dealing with arms, however, transfers could have happened during the careless conflict with criminal groups or in exchange for cartel money. Corruption in particular has been shown to be a driving factor of all kinds of legal and illegal businesses in Mexico in past research (Morris, 2012, 2013; Nieto, 2012). Besides that, practices like violent intimidation, bidirectional favouritism, as well as gang members running for political offices, have been shown to play a role in cartels influencing state agencies to facilitate their enterprises (Flores Pérez, 2014; Lessing, 2015; Trejo/Ley, 2018). As we will discuss below, our analyses, including the Mexico Case, have a certain dynamic. Research across the ages on these issues in Mexico, however, indicates that the underlying mechanisms stayed pretty much the same, while actors utilising them to gain wealth and power might change (Lupsha, 1993).

Finally, in the Bangladesh Case, there seemed to be an entanglement between the state and private actors who interacted for the realisation of land grabbing. In line with this, earlier research has argued that the system of patronage present in Bangladesh constitutes a general problem for any governance measures including control of illegal activity in the country (Alam/Teicher, 2012; Sarker, 2008). This has been exemplified by research looking at the garment sector in Bangladesh (Ahmed et al., 2014) which was also identified to be important in our case. Systems of patronage that utilise clandestine operations and might be associated with criminal activity, have furthermore been found across other Asian countries like India, Korea, Taiwan, and the Philippine Islands (Teehankee, 2012; Vaishnav, 2017; You, 2014).

Notably, we found the actors on a national level to also be well connected to the levels of consideration below. This suggests at least some kind of hierarchy as intended by the organisational power apparatus (Roxin, 2020) with actors on the top influencing actors at the bottom of the scheme. In our case studies, however, this hierarchy was not strictly linear, but instead somehow V- or

Arrow-shaped with the crowdedness of a level growing to a certain point in the scheme and then decreasing again.

In line with this, we found regional and transnational levels to often be the second most crowded levels. However, we did not find research sharing a similar approach and applying them to a comparable set of cases to neither confirm nor falsify the observations made in our case.

3.1.b. Committed actors of the network

Looking at individual actors who appeared to be important, the three cases vary. For the Mexico and Bangladesh Cases, the national government as well as their agencies were among the most committed actors of their respective networks. Again, this is in line with the aforementioned research on the criminal involvement of states. It is also unsurprising given the logic of our scheme, where well-connected actors are particularly pronounced, as governmental agencies per se would need to be involved in numerous issues to run a country effectively. In line with this, influential non-state actors like Chris Huber or Karl-Heinz Albers played a more prominent role than state actors in the Congo Case following the instability of the government in the DRC in the early 2000s which continues to the present date (Denisova/Kostelyanets, 2023; Guyguy/Xu, 2019).

Interestingly, in the Bangladesh Case, we found the lathiyals to be an important group of actors in the issue of land grabbing. This is surprising, as these actors were mostly powerless members of the lower classes in Bangladesh, yet utterly important for a case of white-collar crime. This somehow contradicts the general idea of these kinds of crimes being regularly committed by actors with a certain degree of wealth and power as defined in the introduction of this work. However, this result is in line with the original idea of dirty economies (Ruggiero, 1997), where powerful actors utilise the “dirty” practices of regular street crime if it benefits their overarching goals. Although criminology in recent years has done a decent job of moving beyond street crime to address criminal actors hiding behind their positions of political and economic power, it sometimes seems necessary to fall back into the paradigm of looking at “regular” thugs who are utilised by more influential actors to understand criminal networks better.

When looking at actors like the lathiyals, one must consider the system of dependence they are in, as submission to more powerful actors is the only way to come to money for most of them, money that is partly used to pay off loans given by the very same employers. This is similar for the creucers in the Congo Case that work in the coltan mines to pay off debt or finance permissions to even work in the very same mines. This vicious cycle of earning a living under inhumane circumstances to pay for upholding the same system of inhumanity is very similar to the depiction by Hans-Jörg Albrecht (2007), who termed such a setting an *economy of violence*. Although his concept, as we understand it, was conceptualised as a macroeconomic view on certain economies, mainly in fragile states, it appears to uphold when employing a more microeconomic, local view. Examining vicious cycles as described in depth might be promising to further understand the quality of interactions within a network, which will also be picked up in the following.

Taken together, the application of the RxR scheme of interaction to the cases in question allows for conclusions that somehow are in line with similar studies. Applying it therefore seems to be a feasible first step to tackling complex cases of WCC, and even allowed for uncovering some less examined points of consideration.

3.2. Limitations and future research

The conclusions derived above must be assessed carefully in light of a few limitations of this work.

3.2.a. Lack and dynamic of information

The first and most pressing issue is the discrepancy between the amount of information necessary to effectively work with the RxR scheme of interaction and the information available. This comes with an underlying premise of incompleteness. That could become problematic when looking at interactions of actors as well as their association with a certain level of consideration. This was evident from the ambiguity regarding certain political groups in the Congo Case as well as cartels in the Mexico Case, as their importance for the network changes depending on the number of accounts about their involvement coming to one's knowledge. This is worsened by the reasonable assumption that information about groups engaging in crime, in general, is clandestine.

Furthermore, as noted right at the beginning of our case studies, we had to sometimes rely on sources, whose credibility could not be validated properly due to a lack of documentation or further references. In our opinion, however, this will be regularly the case when analysing the actions of single actors and groups, especially on a local level hardly accessible to research. This is particularly important as we have increasingly encountered evidence of contradictory or biased reporting on sensitive issues during our analysis. It seems indispensable to us to acknowledge references and details in our analysis, even if they are not found in peer-reviewed journals. In this way, we can hope to give the victims of the crimes we investigate a voice that would otherwise be denied to them. In that sense and drawing back to our initial research aim, we ultimately think that the RxR scheme of interaction does an acceptable job of painting a first picture of a case as well as identifying certain focal points like specific actors or conditions in a case that are worthwhile looking at in a more in-depth analysis.

Closely related is the issue of a network changing dynamically due to actors rising to or losing influence, being captured, or killed, or any other reason perceivable. The observations in this work can therefore be only considered a snapshot of the issues described. This becomes worse, the more unstable a case environment is, e. g. in the Mexico Case, where the power of a cartel could change within short periods following the capture or death of a leading figure and the consequent splintering of a criminal group. We, therefore, suggest using the scheme presented in this work only for certain cases, where a certain degree of stability can be assumed. Despite the instability of a single scheme about a dynamically changing case, our approach could also be applied to the same case at different points in time which would somehow allow us to address the issue at hand; this would, however, increase the amount of information necessary. At the same time, mechanisms, which underlie the interaction of any actors in their pursuit of illegal enterprises, e. g. corruptive practices, do not change as much as the actors utilising them do, as was mentioned above. It might therefore be advisable to focus on those for overarching conclusions about the issues described in this work.

3.2.b. Interactions in-depth

Another challenge when applying the proposed scheme is that it does not yet account for various kinds of interactions but treats every connection equally. This is problematic, as the importance of an actor might vary depending on the kind of interaction they have. An example would be the lathiyals in the Bangladesh Case, whose numerous connections are mainly based on them being utilised by other actors, while they themselves are not really in a position of power. Other actors might be both utilising and being utilised, e. g. shell companies in the Congo Case, while some might only be utilising others, e. g. particularly influential members of the *nouve riche* in the Bangladesh Case. To make further distinctions, the different kinds of relations described by *Nikos Passas* (2013) could be implemented into our scheme; these have successfully been used to describe other cases of white-collar crime, e. g. the garbage industry in Italy and its connections to organised

crime (Bublak, 2022). Still, interactions vary in the degree of personal contact and interactive actions, as some connections might just be based on the exchange of money and goods, e. g. the trade of coltan, while others, like the employment of physical violence against settlers in Bangladesh, require face to face contact. Then again, some connection might be both, e. g. the mayor of Iguala and his wife being related to the GU by both bribery and family bonds in the Mexico Case. To accurately assess the interaction, one would therefore need to somehow quantify its extent. While this seems doable for flows of money and goods between actors, other kinds of relations, especially personal ones, pose a great challenge due to their high degree of subjectivity. It, therefore, remains an aim of future research to deepen our understanding of individual actors' interactions.

3.2.c. Social Network Theory

As mentioned at the beginning of this work, the RxR scheme of interaction could be understood as a weak form of Social Network Theory (Otte/Rousseau, 2002). Therefore, we want to reflect on how this established, yet mostly quantitative approach could be utilised to both account for dynamical change as well as individualisation of relations between actors. Social Network Theory itself builds on graph theory, a branch of mathematics concerned with the elements (called *nodes*) and connections (called *edges*) of a network structure as well as ways through it (called *paths*), which is applied to social interactions. This allows for the formalisation of the relations described in this work through standardised measures called *centrality measures* which capture the importance of single nodes and edges. One of the most important of these measures are *closeness centrality*, i. e. the length of a path from one node to every other node of a network (Bavelas, 2005), *betweenness centrality*, i. e. the number of times a node acts as a connection between other nodes (Freeman, 1977), as well as *eigenvector centrality*, i. e. the overall influence of a node on a network (Newman, 2008). All of them could be relevant for our work, as all three allow for a different view on the influence of actors, represented as nodes, either through their closeness to or role as connectors between other actors, as well as their influence on the shape of the whole network. There are numerous variants and modifications of these measures, e. g. *percolation centrality*, which accounts for the nodes' capacity to further relate to other nodes (Piraveenan et al., 2013). Looking at an epidemiological setting for example, this would allow us to distinguish between people based on their social activity as well as towns based on their infrastructure, allowing more people to travel from or to this town, potentially transmitting a disease. In our work, this is relevant too when looking at actors with contacts across countries and the globe, e. g. Karl-Heinz Albers in the Congo Case, as those have a greater potential of distributing illicit goods, attaining monetary funds to support a deviant cause, and so on. Finally, edges between nodes can be weighed based on external factors determining their importance (Wasserman/Faust, 1994); this could be used to capture quantifiable characteristics of the connection between two actors, e. g. the known flow of money.

Besides the measures of centrality used as a proxy for the commitment of actors to a network, another concept of graph theory can be used to depict crowded levels of consideration. This is the so-called *clustering coefficient*, indicating the tendency of individual nodes to form groups within the network (Holland/Leinhardt, 1971). This clustering capacity of some nodes could be used as a defining criterion for sorting actors to a specific level of consideration which will be discussed in detail below. Like individual nodes, clusters can be ranked based on their importance for the network, therefore allowing for a formalised approach to crowded levels of consideration. This happens either globally for the clusters as a whole (Luce/Perry, 1949) or locally for all the nodes of a cluster (Watts/Strogatz, 1998).

Once formalised by putting together all known actors and their interaction as described, assessing their commitment through measures of centrality as well as clustering them as a proxy for their respective levels of consideration, dynamic changes can be accounted for easily, as new findings regarding actors and their relations automatically change the standardised measures of all nodes, therefore fitting the network as a whole.

However, the Social Network Theory approach still heavily relies on the information available and might be biased. This is particularly true for hidden details, e. g. the amounts of money transferred, resulting in the scheme being applicable to its full extent only by certain agencies like law enforcement or financial intelligence. We, therefore, remain sceptical if it is reasonable to use such an approach in settings, where the quality and quantity of information do not fulfill the theory's requirements. Considering this, having a less precise but also less meticulous model like the RxR scheme of interaction could be helpful to at least approach certain cases of white-collar crime that would otherwise be ignored by criminological research entirely.

3.2.d. Defining levels of consideration

One last caveat relates to the distribution of actors across multiple levels of consideration. While we relied on a returning pattern of important levels across all three cases which are local, regional, national, transnational, and international, our scheme still lacks clear definitions of these levels as well as criteria for assigning an individual actor to a certain level. It seems reasonable to distinguish the levels of consideration based on geographical aspects, i. e. following the structure of a country's municipals, federal states, direct neighbours, and countries further away. Using the Mexico Case as an example, the local level would therefore concern the municipals, the regional level its federal states, the national level the country as a whole, the transnational level its neighbours USA, Guatemala, and Belize, and the international level all other countries. When putting an actor on one of these levels, we must carefully consider, where exactly they engage in criminal activity. To exemplify this let us again look at Karl-Heinz Albers from the Congo Case. Albers led a German company, therefore certainly doing business in Germany. However, he did not promote the extortion of coltan at the cost of the people and the environment in Germany but only in the DRC and neighbouring countries like Rwanda. We, therefore, considered him to be a transnational instead of an international actor; this would change, if Albers were also extracting minerals in countries beyond the DRC and its neighbours, e. g. in South America. Following this logic, some actors are set on certain levels almost axiomatically, for example, various kinds of public agencies whose reach is usually clearly defined. This would only change if they were involved in criminal activity outside of their reach, e. g. if a country decided to invade or act on another's territory in an illegal matter, as has become reality again with the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. However, governmental agencies are not always clearly defined and might change which is conceivable when looking at the Congo Case with its numerous political parties from inside and outside of the DRC that effectively rule parts of the country. Summarising, further studies are needed to specify the categories made by the RxR scheme of interaction and the criteria of categorisation. One approach to this could be the use of clustering as discussed above.

4. Conclusion

In this work, we utilised two established criminological concepts, the networks of greed by Ruggiero as well as the organisational power apparatus by Roxin to form a new and comprehensive scheme for analysing the interaction of perpetrators in complex cases of white-collar crime, the RxR scheme of interaction. We then applied the scheme to three different case studies across different points in time and regions of the world, namely the exploitation of coltan in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the trafficking of arms in Mexico, and the grabbing of land in Bangladesh. Through this, we arrived at a deeper understanding of at least some actors in these cases as well as structural issues facilitating their actions. In particular, we identified structural issues on a national level as a driving force of illegal activities across the respective cases. For the Democratic Republic of Congo, certain well-connected individuals orchestrating the coltan trade turned out to be of particular interest. The same holds for Mexican state agencies as well as a powerful elite in Bangladesh and local henchmen employed by them.

The application of our novel approach led to several important observations and suggestions for future research, for example, that the influence of actors across distinct levels of consideration appears to behave in a V-shaped manner instead of a strictly hierarchical manner. Furthermore, research on white-collar crime might need to sometimes return to regular street crimes as points of reference due to their tight ties to legal and illegal enterprises in certain cases.

Nevertheless, our approach remains limited, mainly due to the lack of accurate and detailed information, the changing of that very information as well as the lack of clear definitions and criteria to rigidly apply the scheme. We, nevertheless, think that the RxR scheme of interaction functions as an important first approach to cases of white-collar crime that otherwise remain unnoticed by criminological research.

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