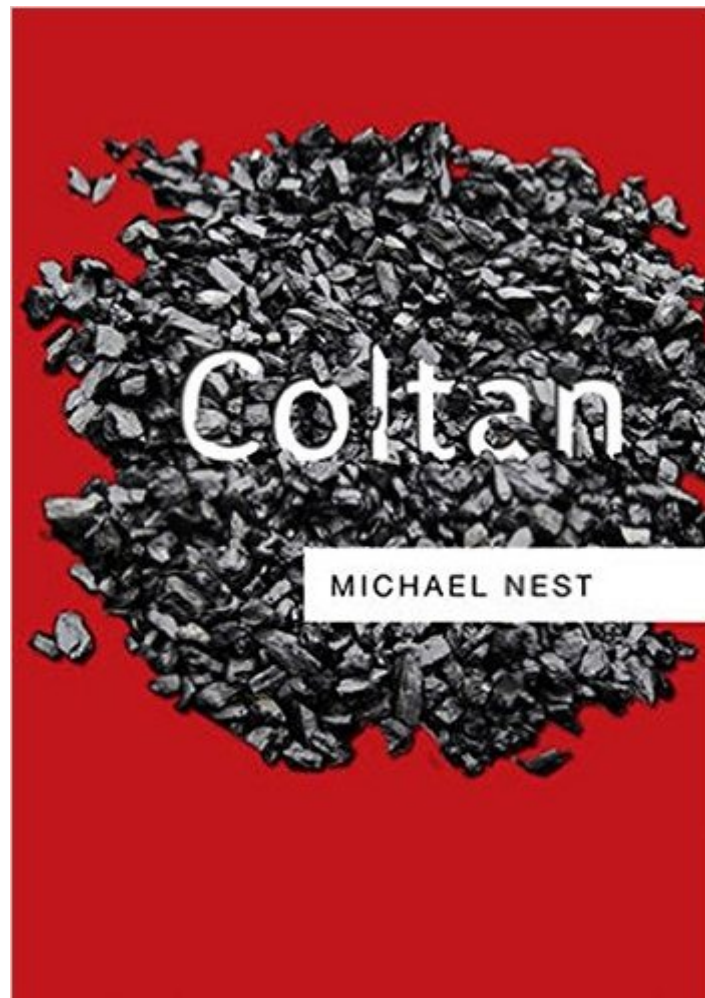


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# Coltan



## Synopsis

A decade ago no one except geologists had heard of tantalum or 'coltan' - an obscure mineral that is an essential ingredient in mobile phones and laptops. Then, in 2000, reports began to leak out of Congo: of mines deep in the jungle where coltan was extracted in brutal conditions watched over by warlords. The United Nations sent a team to investigate, and its exposé of the relationship between violence and the exploitation of coltan and other natural resources contributed to a re-examination of scholarship on the motivations and strategies of armed groups. The politics of coltan encompass rebel militias, transnational corporations, determined activists, Hollywood celebrities, the rise of China, and the latest iGadget. Drawing on Congolese and activist voices, Nest analyses the two issues that define coltan politics: the relationship between coltan and violence in the Congo, and contestation between activists and corporations to reshape the global tantalum supply chain. The way production and trade of coltan is organised creates opportunities for armed groups, but the Congo wars are not solely, or even primarily, about coltan or minerals generally. Nest argues the political significance of coltan lies not in its causal link to violence, but in activists' skillful use of mobile phones as a symbol of how ordinary people and transnational corporations far from Africa are implicated in Congo's coltan industry and therefore its conflict. Nest examines the challenges coltan initiatives face in an activist 'marketplace' crowded with competing justice issues, and identifies lessons from coltan initiatives for the geopolitics of global resources more generally.

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## Customer Reviews

I have to admit I didn't really know very much about coltan before reading this book. I knew it had something to do with mobile phones and came from a war-torn part of Africa and that was about it. But after reading this, I not only know a lot more about coltan, I also know a lot more about the role of such substances not just in funding various murderous militias but in global trade - and thus politics - generally. The term 'coltan' as it is used in this book: '...is an abbreviation of columbite-tantalite, a mixture of two mineral ores, and is the common name for these ores in eastern Congo. Tantalum is the name of the metal extracted from tantalite-bearing ores, including coltan, after processing.'

(P3) There are many other parts of the world where tantalite ore may be found, but 'coltan' specifically refers to the ore mined in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Most tantalite sources are exploited by global mining conglomerates. Coltan is different as it is extracted by 'artisanal' means - by individual miners digging it up wherever they can find it. It is implicated in the funding of the continuing armed struggles in the DRC and is considered a 'blood mineral' in the same sense as 'blood diamonds'. This book sets about exploring not only the nature of coltan mining in the DRC but all associated issues - the full supply chain, from digging it out of the ground through to its use in mobile phones and laptop computers. The book consists of just five chapters: 1. Facts, figures and myths, 2. Organization of Production and Markets, 3. Coltan and conflict, 4. Advocacy, campaigns and initiatives and 5. The future of coltan politics. Straight away, in chapter 1, the author sets about exploding common myths.

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