

## **BLUE GOLD by Elizabeth Stewart**

Elizabeth Stewart's "*Blue Gold*" tells the story of three teenage girls on three different continents, whose lives are connected by Coltan, a mineral used in the technology that helps power cellphones and computers. In Africa, Congolese refugee Sylvie fights to keep her family together after her father's death, her mother's descent into despair, and her brother's attraction to the militias that rule the refugee camp. All are fighting to control the coltan market, and Sylvie fears that if she can't find a way to get her family out of the country, the deadly battles will consume them. In Asia, farm-girl Laiping moves to the big city to take a job in a cell-phone factory. At first it seems like a dream come true, until the monotonous labor, arbitrary system of reward and punishment, and crackdowns on worker protests reveal the true nature of the system. And finally in North America, Vancouver teenager Fiona snaps a suggestive selfie for her boyfriend, only to discover that once the image enters cyberspace, there's no controlling who has access to it. Fiona's struggle to regain control of her reputation and her life leads her in surprising directions, and forces her to confront the problems faced by teenage girls beyond her relatively privileged world.

Sustainable prosperity is a concept that reflects a comprehensive, long-term vision for a community. It represents a unifying and guiding vision that targets economic, environmental, and socio-cultural health. This means all human beings live with their basic needs met, with their dignity acknowledged, and with opportunity to pursue lives of satisfaction and happiness, all without risk of denying others the ability to do the same. Although one of sustainable prosperity's main goals is to empower marginalized people and improve the quality of their lives, *Blue Gold* illustrates a different picture of what the characters' lives are really like. For example, some of the benefits that come with sustainable prosperity are bringing jobs and income to workers, good wages, good labour conditions, and environmental sustainability. It is evident however, that these work benefits and conditions don't apply to either Sylvie nor Laiping. Instead, they work long hours, assembling cell phones, and enduring conditions that have caused other employees to develop serious medical conditions.

These horrible conditions also affect and violate the girls' human rights. Human rights are the basic rights and freedoms that belong to every person in the world, from birth until death. They apply regardless of where you are from, what you believe or how

you choose to live your life. These basic rights are based on values like dignity, fairness, equality, respect and independence. They are defined and protected by law, and can never be taken away, although they can sometimes be deprived. Throughout the novel we witness Sylvie's life where maintaining basic needs is a daily battle. Her daily life is dangerous, and her past includes scenes of extreme violence. We also read about Laiping's crushing work conditions, and how when she tries to improve her situation, she sees what happens to those who dare question the electronics company's policies. Both girls were deprived of even their basic human rights, and were being taken advantage of while in desperate need to help their own families out of misery.

Blue Gold also links to the concept of globalization, which is the process of becoming increasingly interconnected. As there are different types of globalization, such as Environmental, Cultural, Economic, Military, Knowledge, and Political globalization, novel Blue Gold specifically links to economic and environmental globalization. Economic globalization refers to the integration of economies around the world. The novel links to this type of globalization because it has to do with multinational corporations and manufacturing in different countries, as Sylvie and Laiping work in factories as manufacturers handling coltan to make phones and other electronics.

In conclusion, Blue Gold is, self-evidently, a book that explores the connections between the consumer lifestyle of developed nations and the poverty, violence, and abuse that exist elsewhere in the world. It links three girls from completely different parts of the world, through the concepts of sustainable prosperity, human rights, as well as globalization. Sylvie from the Democratic Republic of Congo where vast deposits of "blue gold" are mined and warred over, Laiping from China where virtual slave labor is used to produce many electronics that use "blue gold", and Fiona a Canadian who learns how fast blue gold makes electronics work and how one wrong choice can ruin your life forever.