

The Underestimation of the Congolese Crisis: the Downplaying of Local Complexity

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This article will focus on the assumption that the current crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has been narrowly defined by the international community. The term 'international community' is here used to refer to three specific actors: the United Nations (and more precisely the Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies pour Stabilisation en RD Congo - MONUSCO peacekeeping mission, currently acting in the DRC), the European Union (EU) (as a single entity), and the African Development Bank (ADB).

The core hypothesis is that most of the analysis regarding the DRC is based on a series of standardized variables, resulting from the modern discourse on development. In addition, it will be argued that the "technocratic and scientific" (Zamponi 2007: 191) view of development, as supported by experts and international donors, is somewhat abstracted from the Congolese socio-political peculiarities, and the overall underestimation of such complexity incidentally led to the structuring of an "excluding democracy" (Zamponi 2007: 176); to do so, the case of the recent spreading of violence in the South Kivu region will be analysed. Closer attention will be paid to the independent, complex emergence of new forms of protection, authority, and rights to

wealth in the DRC (Vlassenroot, Raeymaekers 2005; Raeymaekers 2007), eroding the centrality of the state, which consequently came to play a brand-new, interstitial role (Raeymaekers 2007). This last part will be addressed in the conclusions.

There is no intention to label the international intervention as either 'good' or 'bad', but great emphasis will be put on the causal, almost deterministic aspects of the international approach (Duffield 2001, 2010; Zamponi 2007), in order to find confirmation to the thesis that an underestimation of the local 'learning processes' took place. The international intervention will be argued to be founded on the idea that "[...] (d)emocratic consolidation in African countries has been associated with economic growth [...]" (ADB 2016: 135); such intervention is said to be built on "[...] governance indicators (that) are a fact-based measure of governance evaluating the quality of the interactions between governments, other political institutions and citizens [...]" (ADB 2016: 118). Those indicators, however, are affected by several limits, first of which being the data collected: the latter leans heavily on the core assumptions of the modern discourse on development again underestimating local complexity. As a consequence, even if (in the words of the ADB, one of the major investors in the DRC)¹ there is an awareness "[...] of the limitations of the GPRSP² monitoring and evaluation framework, and the lack of available statistical data in DRC [...]" (ADB/ADF 2012: 19), to correct the weakness of the monitoring/evaluation systems, the Bank still refers to statistics and decided to "[...] recruit a monitoring/evaluation specialist who will be responsible for the establishment and maintenance of reliable monitoring/evaluation systems for the fragile countries of the Central Region [...]" (*ibidem*). Such a detached approach, based on the funding pillars of the modern paradigm of development, failed to challenge the current Gordian knot of insecurity and instability which characterizes the Congolese case.

The Nexus of Modern Development: Security and Good Governance

Nowadays, the "[...] promotion of development has become synonymous with the pursuit of security. At the same time, security has become a prerequisite for sustainable development [...]" (Duffield 2001: 37). It is implied that without security development cannot be *sustainable* as well; as a consequence, even if the DRC is one of the richest African country in terms of resources and growth potential (ADB 2015, 2016), its everlasting "insecurity *conundrum*" (Vlassenroot, Raeymaekers 2009) stopped the country from overcoming its own limits. As it was stressed by the then World Bank Senior Vice President and Chief Economist, Joseph Stiglitz, the so-called Washington-Consensus failed because development, as such, had been seen too narrowly (Duffield 2001); there was the need to put forward a new development paradigm: "[...] the vision needs to include a view of the transformation of institutions, the creation of new capacities, in some cases to replace traditional institutions that will inevitably be weakened in the process of development. [...]" What is required is participation in a process that

constructs institutional arrangements, including incentives. Institutions, incentives, participation, and ownership can be viewed as complementary; none on its own is sufficient [...]" (Stiglitz 1998, as quoted in Duffield 2001: 40).

Sustainable development shifts the burden of "supporting the change" from States to the population, "social entrepreneurs or active citizens [...] operating at the level of the household, community and basic needs [...]" (Duffield 2010: 69). The inefficiencies of the 'narrowed developmental agenda' which characterized the 1980s international approach, forced to an overall reconfiguration of the concept of development itself, whose keywords are now responsibility, democracy, participation, transparency, institution building, capacity building, and good governance (Zamponi 2007), with the aim of instituting a framework of best practices. This new emphasis brought together good governance and democracy in terms of societal capabilities, thus the willingness (and capacities) of societies and, consequently, of active citizens as well, to be actively involved in the process of overall societal and national transformation (Zamponi 2007). It follows that (local) ownership and decentralization were to become the hubs of the new developmental paradigm.

As a matter of fact, state crisis as well as governmental frailties and inefficiencies are now approached as problems of 'governmental unwillingness', which is labelled as 'poor governance', if not 'bad governance' as such (Zamponi 2007). Corruption, patronage, exclusion, authoritarianism, 'bad governance', fostered conflicts, and 'bad elites' managed to exploit, even to overwork, ethnic cleavages and marginalized communities to serve their purposes. As the former World Bank Research Leader on Economies of Civil War, Crime and Violence, Paul Collier, observed: "[...] the true cause of much civil war is not the loud discourse of grievance, but the silent force of greed [...]" (Collier 1999, as quoted in Duffield 2001: 133). It follows that, since stability is both a consequence and a prerequisite for development, the prerogatives of "corrupt few" (Duffield 2001: 131) are "[...] illicit aberration(s) that can be circumscribed and policed [...]" (which is vital) if development itself is to be maintained [...]" (Duffield 2001: 131-2). Political transformation (and, if needed, transition) is a prerequisite for economical development; under-development is then a negative consequence of a 'bad governance', which has to be criminalised as such, otherwise there will be no chance in succeeding in what is perceived as the main obstacle to development: poverty. The current strategy adopted by the EU³ in the DRC follows the same 'developmental path' described above, for the whole focus is on "[...] promoting governance, in close collaboration with the civil society. [The implications of the developmental path in] the formulation, application and actualisation of public policies should take under consideration the needs of the population, while promoting the dialogue among different actors for development [...]" (European Commission/EuropeAid 2014: 4).

Furthermore, the ADB's description of the DRC (a vision shared with the EU as well) is that of a country still incapable of achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

by the end of 2015; nevertheless, it is reported that “[...] the incidence of poverty fell from 80% in 1990 to 63.4% in 2012. The continual increase in the national budget allocated to social sectors led to an increase in the enrolment, literacy and primary school-completion rates; a significant reduction in infant and maternal mortality; and improved electricity provision and access to water, sanitation and housing. This progress led to the country improving on the Human Development Index (HDI),⁴ moving from 0.329 in 2000 to 0.439 in 2014, thus climbing 11 spots in the 2014 world ranking [...]” (ADB 2016: 280).

However, while the general picture seems to be almost 'optimistic', the paradoxical re-emergence of conflicts and the widespread of violence (Vlassenroot, Raeymaekers 2009) – which have characterized the DRC for its whole 'democratic' experience⁵ – collides with the Bank's (pre)visions; only to mention one of the biggest obstacle for the developmental transition in the DRC, the democratic elections (planned for November 2016, within the constitutional deadline), were described as the country's main political challenge to consolidate the achievements of the democratic process begun in 2006 (ADB 2016). On the contrary, elections were delayed, while violence spread from the Eastern regions, reaching the Kinshasa area as well,⁶ to which the government answered with repression and imprisonments.

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More than being held hostage of an institutional stalemate, the DRC has to face several challenges: the unequal access to social services drives exclusion, thus marginalization and conflict, denying any chance of actual social, political, and economical development (ADB 2015). In addition, there is a different (perhaps selective) path in power and voice at the community level, thus suggesting the permanence of a patronage system, affecting the whole country.⁷ In the case of the DRC, the situation has been worsened by the eruption of the two Congo Wars in the '90s (see note 5). However, although Joseph Kabila's assisted transitional process led the country out of the violent stalemate resulted from the AFDL rebellion and the RCD counter-insurgency, violence did not cease. In order to ultimately challenge and overcome those structural problems, which still undermines stability and consequently a proper development, “endogenous development processes” (ADB 2015: 183) have to be implemented. Again, the local level is deemed to be the hub of the national resurgence; consequently, there is the need of a closer co-ordination and collaboration with local elites, in order to properly enhance a bottom-up process of development. Great emphasis is put on the central government, whose role is to be both a co-ordinator and a partner, locally and internationally. There is no process of local 'atomisation'; on the contrary, decentralisation is described as “[...] transferring responsibilities to local governments in order to hold local decision makers accountable [...]” (ADB 2015: 189). The idea is that the enhancing of local governance would improve coordination among levels of government, non-state actors and the

international community, therefore helping to articulate sectoral policies. Thus, the expected results are to defuse local conflicts and to share the burden of development with local authorities, thus eliminating the 'perils of marginalization', which led to the constant resurgence of the Congolese conflicts, especially in the Eastern regions.⁸ The European Union identifies the same obstacles, focusing on the reduction of poverty, the empowerment of democracy, the rule of law and the stabilisation of the country (European Commission/European Development Fund/Government of the Democratic Republic of Congo 2014a: 7).

However, paradoxically, the European Union – as well as the African Development Bank – stresses the importance of the active participation of Kinshasa in the process of development. Kinshasa, despite its weakness and unwillingness, is the 'main auditor', deemed as the political and administrative centre in charge of the process of political and administrative decentralisation. This contrasts with the fact that Kinshasa is – to some extent – itself responsible for the constant resurgence of conflicts. Nonetheless, as introduced in the first paragraph, the local emergence of violence is often defined as a direct consequence of a *localized* corrupted elite, which based its own patronage system on an extractive economy, which denied the civil community the access to modernity. Any other form of conflict is labelled as: "[...] armed groups (which are still) active, with frequent fighting either between armed groups [...] and FARDC⁹ or between ethnic groups competing over the control of resources and land [...]" (European Commission/EuropeAid 2015: 4).

Ethnic violence is tied to under-development, thus a result of – and prerequisite for – instability and social unrest, one more obstacle to development, to the extent that ethnicity is itself an instrument used by a corrupted local elite, in order to secure the access to natural resources and political representation. Ethnicity is not perceived as an autonomous narrative, but rather as a merely valid instrument: "[...] a society can function perfectly well if its citizens hold multiple identities, but problems arise when those sub-national identities arouse loyalties that override loyalty to the nation as a whole [...]" (Robinson 2013: 21).

Armed groups, 'patrimonialistic' elites, ethnic agendas, social unrest and segmentation – development, thus democracy, will eventually eliminate any obstacle for the Democratic Republic of Congo, overcoming the paradoxes of the international approach. Local development (if 'guarded' by a corrupted elite) will lead to national alignment, in spite of the central government's unwillingness (Robinson 2013).

Limits of the development paradigm in the DRC

"[...] any approach to democratic development in Africa that does not recognize the diversity and dynamism of ethnic communities in any foreseeable future cannot succeed [...] (for) at the heart of ethnic politics is the use of historical and cultural resources of past and present in a struggle for control of the future and definition in terms of social change [...]" (Berman, Eyoh, Kymlicka 2004: 4-5).

The modern paradigm of development ultimately comes to perceive civil society as "passive viewers" of the process of democratic modernisation, labelling as 'atavistic' or 'instrumental' what falls far from the "ubiquitous neo-liberal" path of (proper) development (Berman, Eyoh, Kymlicka 2004: 21). Furthermore, it is difficult to define under-development as a 'cultural attitude', for it would mean to label the DRC as 'historically adversed to development', given its troubled past - and present. Moreover, 'ethnically-defined' conflicts resurfaced for more than four decades, as early as 1950;¹⁰ would this mean that the DRC is not just a 'fragile state', but also a 'primordial' one? The point here is that the sectorial approach promoted by the international donors did not cease to be sectorial at all: "[...] (f)rom 1999 onward, most violence took place behind the official frontlines. Fighting remained concentrated in the east (the provinces of North Kivu, South Kivu, North Katanga, and the district of Ituri) while the northern and western parts of the country enjoyed relative stability. Civilians were the primary victims: more than 3.3 million died between 1996 and 2003, mostly in the eastern Congo. [...] To quell local violence, diplomats and UN staff relied on the deterrent presence of the international peacekeeping troops. They left responsibility for conducting local peacebuilding work to Congolese authorities, religious leaders, and NGOs. Except for a few, Congolese authorities and religious leaders were either unwilling or unable to conduct local peacebuilding - or they were involved in fuelling violence [...]" (Autessere 2009: 257, 261).

Ethnicity, identity, marginalization, struggle for modernity and development aren't detached narratives; on the contrary, they are in a multi-structured, multi-layered reciprocal relation. Most of the analysis regarding the DRC concentrated on neo-patrimonialism, finding 'localisable' culprits in either a corrupted elite or an unwilling government (Autessere 2012), "[...] labelling of the Congo as a 'post conflict'¹¹ situation [through] the belief that violence is innate in the Congo [...]" (Autessere 2009: 251), to which followed "[...] the conceptualization of international intervention as exclusively concerned with the national and international realms [...]" (*ibidem*). Democracy came to be seen as "separated from socio-economical conditions" (Zamponi 2007: 180). Democratic values now shape the normative order, resulting in the criminalisation of *unwilling* leaderships and corrupted extractive economies, that led to the abstraction of those aspects of political economy that address the *profits* that can be made from organised violence and informal economy (Vlassenroot, Raeymaekers 2009). By addressing local actors as 'passive', it is rather possible to underestimate the fact that the same victims of such a societal transformation are actually *aware* of its depth; at the same time, it is reductive to think at the Congolese government as merely *unwilling*. On the contrary, its role had been shaped by the constant re-definition of the Congolese state as such. Consequently, nowadays Kinshasa has pursued a brand-new, 'interstitial' role (Raeymaekers 2007; Vlassenroot, Raeymaekers 2009), in order to maintain and strengthen its authority among a kaleidoscopic framework of conflicts and societal re-

configurations. Ethnicity, thus 'ethnic citizenship', comes to have a double definition: on one hand, it means to be a citizen (whose existence is secured thanks to the ethnic reference); on the other hand, it enhances the possibility to actively participate to national dynamics, although re-formulating the very idea of self-(and communal) perception.

However, "[...] [t]o understand the local actors who were obviously not related to national or regional politicians, most international peacebuilders adopted a standardized analytical framework based on a simplified version of Collier [...] theory: these local groups were motivated by greed - the control of mineral resources; therefore, it was a 'law and order problem' to be addressed by national authorities [...]" (Autessere 2009: 268).

Closely analysing the most recent conflicts in the South Kivu region (rich in natural resources - Jourdan 2010), it can be argued that extractive economies and corrupted elites aren't sufficient causes to explain the most recent local conflicts. First and foremost, "[...] [l]ittle is known about disadvantaged groups in unstable areas such as [...] Eastern DRC [...]" (ADB 2015: 195); nevertheless, funds are still being deployed (see note 1 and 3). Moreover, the conflict in South Kivu is described as a particular mixture of *ethnicised* armed mobilization, where armed groups¹² are entangled in violent skirmishes against the national army, while at the same time ethnic groups compete over the control of resources and land. The downplaying of the Mayi-Mayi Yakutumba is crucial in pointing out the underestimation of the complexity of the South Kivu case. The Mayi-Mayi is a local, ethnic militia, based in the Eastern regions, which first made its appearance during Gustave Soumialot' Simba¹³ rebellion in 1964, opposing the first government formed after the death of Patrice Lumumba, leader of the Congolese independence (Jourdan 2010). The ethnic connotation of the Mayi-Mayi isn't clear though, for they present themselves as - at first - a mainly Bembe militia; then, the formerly enemy Fuliuro and Vira communities joined the ranks (Vlassenroot 2013), opposing Kasavubu's presidency, then Mobutu's regime (after the latter's *coup d'État* in 1965), then aligning with his government against the AFDL invaders (the AFDL was led by Laurent Kabila, a former Mayi-Mayi ally back in 1964). The Mayi-Mayi supported Kabila's ruling when he faced off Rwanda and Uganda (ultimately leading to the eruption of the second Congo War - see note 5) and, as per today, its alliances are liquid: Joseph Kabila's presidency confronted, even opposed the Mayi-Mayi, and then supported them from time to time (Jourdan 2010; Stearns *et al.* 2013; Stearns, Verweijen, Eriksson-Baaz 2013; Eriksson-Baaz, Verweijen 2013). The result of such an erratic historical and political trajectory is that "[...] [t]he Mayi-Mayi Yakutumba are embedded in civilian networks in Fizi,¹⁴ through family, clan and political relation. These relations are shaped by a wide variety of often fluctuating motives, and oscillate between persuasion and coercion [...]" (Stearns *et al.* 2013: 38).

More than simply being embedded, the Mayi-Mayi Yakutumba actively controls the Fizi area (Stearns, Vogel 2015: 4). At the same time - referring to the EuropeAid's description

of local militias above mentioned - there are *twenty* different Raia Mutomboki militias, and *twenty* different Mayi-Mayi militias, plus other armed groups with different names as well as socio-historical trajectories, for a total of *sixty-nine* different armed groups operating between North and South Kivu (*ibidem*).

Needless to say, there have been prominent political and military actors who were able to exploit violence and communal tensions - but this is only a partial explanation for the local complexity: while the Mayi-Mayi Yakutumba is presented as a destabilizing force as such, its inter-relative role has been severely ill-defined.

"[...] After the school I became a farmer, which means to be unemployed for those who aren't married yet [...] I joined the Mayi-Mayi when I was eighteen [...], I had a debt with Papi [...] I escaped my debts (and joined the Mayi-Mayi) [...]" (interview with a former Mayi-Mayi combatant, in Jourdan 2010: 158).

"[...] I joined the Mayi-Mayi in 1993. I quit my studies because I couldn't afford the fees anymore. Later on I decided to join the Mayi-Mayi to liberate the country, but I would have kept studying [...] I don't know the reasons of the war, I'm not a politician. In Congo we have 450 languages and each dialect has its own leader. Peace is difficult [...]" (interview with a former Mayi-Mayi combatant, in Jourdan 2004: 127).

In addition, the role of the Banyamulenge community has been downsized (Stearns *et al.* 2013). This is a rwandophone community, whose citizenship and social identity have been questioned since the colonial era, fostering conflicts from the 1963 Simba rebellion onwards. As a matter of fact, when such rebellion turned into an 'ethno-military campaign' against the Banyamulenge (Jourdan 2010; Stearns *et al.* 2013; Vlassenroot 2013) the latter formed an alliance with the Congolese national army to challenge the rebels pillaging their lands; while the Banyamulenge saw no other option than to seek protection from the army (aligned with Kasavubu and Mobutu), their Bembe and Fuliuro neighbors saw "[...] this decision [as] an unforgivable collaboration with the enemy [...]" (Vlassenroot 2013: 25), eventually leading to the ultimate defeat of the Simba rebels.

This insurgency became a point of reference for future political competition (Vlassenroot 2013): the neighbour communities (mainly the Bembe, Vira and Fuliuro) depicted the Banyamulenge as allied with Kinshasa or - later - as Rwandan stooges, depending on the historical moment (Jourdan 2010; Stearns *et al.* 2013). The role the Banyamulenge of South Kivu played in the Congo Wars was of great importance in shaping the present societal and political assets in the region, for the AFDL forces counted among its ranks Banyamulenge who fled South Kivu between the 1980s and 1990s, and the RCD counter insurgency opposing Désiré Kabila's ruling saw an active participation of unsatisfied Banyamulenge, often openly aligned with Kigali (Reyntjens 2007; Stearns *et al.* 2013; Vlassenroot 2013). However, after the 2008 Bukavu Summit (intended to pacify the South Kivu region - Stearns *et al.* 2013) the community's tensions were set aside in the international analysis (Stearns, Verweijen, Eriksson-Baaz 2013): the violence in

South Kivu was perceived as 'normalized', so that the international focus could turn to the structuring and implementation of the modern paradigm of development. On the contrary, as early as in 2011, the government initiated a new push to neutralise armed groups ahead of the polls (Stearns *et al.* 2013); at the same time, the Banyamulenge political movement, the Forces Républicaines Fédéralistes (FRF, itself divided because of internal struggles for authority - Stearns, Verweijen, Eriksson-Baaz 2013) was undergoing the *brassage* in 2011. The *brassage*, a DDR (Disarmament, Demobilization and Reconciliation) program - funded and promoted by the international community (Eriksson-Baaz, Verweijen 2013) - aims to integrate former armed militias in the ranks of the FARDC;¹⁵ the process of integration was organized in the wake of the devastating humanitarian consequences the joint FARDC/MONUC *Amani Leo* ("Peace Today") Mission had.¹⁶ Kabila's administration, rather than being unwilling to deal with armed groups, literally played a double role: following the practical failure of the pacification mission (see note 17), it tried to gather back some of the same support the pacification mission mined, trying at the same time to defuse local tensions, fighting back against the Mayi-Mayi militias, which Kinshasa itself funded years before (Stearns *et al.* 2013). Furthermore, the *brassage* process caused criticism from some FRF supporters, who feared that by giving up their military power they would no longer be able to pressure the central government to realize their political demands. This further complicated the intra-community tensions among the Banyamulenge, split between those who wanted the FRF to integrate (in the aftermath of the *Amani Leo*) and those who did not, further split among those who feared that, after the *brassage*, the FRF would have turned its back on its supporter. Then, there were those who simply did not trust the central government at all, given its relation with Banyamulenge's 'old enemies', the Mayi-Mayi militia (especially Yakutumba's). The same electoral pressures reinforced the Mayi-Mayi Yakutumba's political position, with electoral hopefuls actively supporting the Mayi-Mayi, relying on them to boost their popularity, even presenting them as "guarantors of security in Fizi" (Stearns *et al.* 2013: 38).

"[...] The other candidates are coming asking for your vote support the Banyarwanda [...]. If you choose Louise Munga, you choose Kabila, who is backed by Rwanda. I'm behind Yakutumba, he is our son and our mkombozi ('saviour'). Without him, we will be victims of the Banyarwanda [...]" (interview regarding Bembe candidate Jemsi Mulenga's political stance, as quoted in Stearns *et al.* 2013: 40). Such support can be partially explained with ethnicity only in part, for Kinshasa actively financed Yakutumba again in March 2012, in the wake of the M23 Rebellion,¹⁷ in order to prevent the M23 from gaining allies in South Kivu (Stearns *et al.* 2013).

Given the complexity of the societal and political fragmentation, it's hard to believe that an 'atavistic' sense of belonging is the main reason for almost two decades of violence.¹⁸ The international approach towards South Kivu undoubtedly underestimated the whole complexity characterising the region since the early 1960s. The emphasis

put solely on the modern paradigm of development led to the incidental structuring of an 'excluding democracy', since the local communities mistrust both the central government and the neighbouring communities as well. In addition, the overall downplaying of the South Kivu complexity resulted in the disastrous FARDC/MONUC joint military campaign, which again caused the widespread of local violence and which was eventually exploited by the Congolese government as well. Furthermore, "[...] a disproportionate share in command positions were allocated to the former CNDP and, to a lesser extent, the mostly Hutu former Coalition des Patriotes Résistants Congolais (PARECO) [...]. Two thirds of the *Kimia II* (later renamed *Amani Leo*) [...] were Hutu and Tutsi [...]" (Stearns *et al.* 2013: 32).

This, incidentally, affected the local perception of the pacification mission, which was seen as an act of violent repression perpetrated by the central government, an inexplicable abetment of the rwandophone communities, the umpteenth oppression of local communities (such as the Bembe and Vira), and the factual proof that Joseph Kabila was indeed a Rwandan stooge.

Conclusions

"Joseph Kabila does not rule through brute strength [...] He rules through cunning, by co-opting his enemies, and by keeping everybody weak [...]" (Stearns, Verweijen, Eriksson-Baaz 2013: 42).

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The *brassage* process is a clear example of such attitude; demobilisation processes have been supported by the international community, mainly through the International Security and Stabilisation Support (ISSS) strategy, a donor program designed to support the Congolese government's Programme de Stabilisation et de Reconstruction des Zones Sortant des Conflits Armés (STAREC). The ISSS Programme was designed to back up the peace deal agreed between Kinshasa and armed groups between 2008 and 2009, with the aim of reinforcing the presence of the state (empowerment), especially its justice, security and administrative agencies (rule of law, thus good governance - Stearns, Verweijen, Eriksson-Baaz 2013); nevertheless, the programme underestimated the instability of some of the targeted areas (namely, South Kivu) and did little to address local complexity, focusing instead on the construction of infrastructures (perfectly in line with the strategic objectives put forward by both the African Development Bank and the European Union). Paradoxically then, "[...] police stations and court buildings were built without provision as to how these were going to be staffed, managed, or secured by the national institutions of which they formed a part, and without paying much attention to political and military development in the targeted zones [...]" (Stearns, Verweijen, Eriksson-Baaz 2013: 57).

The FARDC itself is an example of the consequent magnitude of such approach; the *brassage* process became an instrument often exploited by Kinshasa's administration in order to co-opt oppositions and secure its authority. Furthermore, the UN peacekeeping

mission¹⁹ backed the "often ill-disciplined" (Stearns, Verweijen, Eriksson-Baaz 2013: 57) FARDC in its counterinsurgency efforts, which were eventually led by the same patron-client interests the army was supposed to challenge and eliminate.

There is no doubt that the Congolese government has done little to pursue reconciliation and transitional justice; nevertheless, such unwillingness is presumably an attitude Kinshasa *knowingly* exercises. The same can be said of local authorities, customary chiefs and armed militias.

The international community, focused as it is on a series of 'consequential mechanics', did not properly challenge the emergence of a series of alternative networks of belonging and political (yet societal) representation (Raeymaekers 2007). A dynamic processes of re-negotiation of the existing local political, social, and economic space took place, which led to the re-organisation of the same space as well.

Conflicts did never cease, deeply transfiguring local societies, which led to the structuring of a "state-in-society" (Migdal 2001, as quoted in Raeymaekers 2007: 6) model: an *ordered* model (socially, politically, and economically speaking) for "[...] [although] these new orders are almost invariably violent, exploitative, and illiberal in character, these are 'orders, not anarchy', and their development sometimes constitutes the *best chance* for a country or community to emerge into something worthy the expression of 'post-conflict' [...]" (Vlassenroot, Raeymaekers 2005: 2).

Rebellion (thus violence) and identity (thus inclusion/exclusion and ethnic belonging) are deeply entangled in a process of constant socio-historical re-definition and re-proposition, a dynamic 'hybridisation' of past and present particularities. Such process of constant re-negotiation took (and takes) place locally *and* nationally; consequently, it has to be suggested "that the Weberian inspired analysis of the state that has hitherto disconnected (social) theory from practice" (Raeymaekers 2007: 6) may have to be approached more critically. An alternative model has to view state 'collapse' not so much as an end state or breakdown, "[...] but rather as a culmination point in the continuous struggle, between various forces in society, to control the three core functions that are generally connected to state performance [...] [which are] (1) the provision of security - commonly supported by a monopoly over the means of force; (2) the allocation of welfare - or the ability to extract and allocate economic resources; and (3) the representation of a "national" population inhabiting a fixed territory. This model could be identified as the *state-in- society model* [...]" (*ibidem*).

The constant referring to a model of (alleged) statehood against conceptually derived forms of state authority - that are described as 'failed', 'weak' or even 'collapsed' - is instrumental to the modern paradigm of development; nonetheless, as argued, Kinshasa's role is fluid and ambiguous. The local 'learning process' has been reduced to a series of standardized mechanical causal factors, while central variables in the democratic equation fails to properly reach the expected results. The DRC crisis appears to be (from time to time) a matter of governmental unwillingness, then greed, then

ethnicity, then 'primordialism', state failure, then again unwillingness - frustratingly, it all seems to start over and over again.

On the very contrary, however, rather than being 'hostage of itself' the Democratic Republic of Congo is adapting to its conflictual framework, locally and nationally. This is neither a progress, nor a criticism; it is simply - so-to-say - a challenging "fact-based measure of governance evaluating the quality of the interactions between governments, other political institutions and citizens" (ADB 2016: 118); it is complexity which defined the erratic trajectory of this violence-torn country.

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NOTES:

1 - The African Development Bank's portfolio in DRC comprises 38 operations (12 at the national and sub-national level) for a total of 472.61 million US Dollars; 28.33% of the national portfolio has been disbursed in 2013, distributed among the infrastructure (67.19 %), agriculture (17.87%), social (8.46%) and private (0.13%) sectors (ADB/ADF 2012: 11).

2 - Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper.

3 - The EU is the second major investor in the DRC; a total € 620 million will be disbursed between 2014 and 2022, according to the 11th European Development Fund - National Indicative Programme for the Democratic Republic of Congo, 2014-2022. 26% of the portfolio is aimed for the Government Reinforcement and the promotion of the rule of law, while 2% (€ 12 million) is for the reinforcement of the civil society.

4 - The United Nations Development Program (UNDP)'s Human Development Index is an aggregate indicator of achievement in three key dimensions of human development: health, education and income. The HDI measures the capacity to "[...] lead a long and healthy life, to be knowledgeable and to have access to resources necessary for a decent standard of living [...]" (ADB 2016: 94).

5 - After the fall of Mobutu's regime in 1997, by the hand of the Rwanda and Uganda supported AFDL (Alliance des Forces Démocratique pour la Libération du Congo/Zaire, led by Laurent-Désiré Kabila), further violence spread throughout the country, resulting in two civil wars (the two Congo Wars - Reyntjens 1999, 2001, 2007), which saw the emergence of two opposing movements: the Rwanda supported CRD (Congolese Rally for Democracy) Goma - based in North and South Kivu, and the Uganda supported CRD-Kisangani/ML (Mouvement de Libération), which moved to the Ituri region. At first allied, the two countries had different agendas in Eastern Congo. The CRD counter-insurgency signalled a new wave of conflicts which rapidly inflamed the whole country; it was only in 2006 - after the assassination of Laurent Kabila in 2001 - that the DRC held its first 'free and fair' elections, resulting from a transitional period led by Kabila's son, Joseph, who was elected in 2006 and then again in 2011 (Reyntjens 2007; Stearns *et al.* 2013).

6 - Although a *Dialogue national et inclusif* was organized by the MP (Majorité Présidentielle) along with several opposition parties, this very Dialogue has been boycotted by the main opposition parties (assembled in the so-called *Rassemblement*) and the Catholic Church (*RD Congo: L'Église Catholique Suspend sa Participation au Dialogue Politique en Cours*, in «Jeune Afrique» (on-line), 20th September 2016: <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/358912/politique/rd-congo-leglise-catholique-suspend-participation-dialogue-politique-cours/>). At the same time, the Congolese population organized a series of peaceful demonstrations, which degenerated into open violence more than once. On September 19th, a national strike organized in Kinshasa resulted in several pillages, leaving 32 people dead on the ground (*RD Congo: Les Violences ont fait au Moins 32 Morts Lundi et Mardi à Kinshasa*, in «Jeune Afrique» (on-line), 21st September 2016: www.jeuneafrique.com/359228/politique/rd-congo-violences-ont-32-morts-lundi-mardi-a-kinshasa/); the UN called for an autonomous enquiry, but - to date - nothing has been done (*Violences à Kinshasa: l'ONU demande une Enquête Indépendante*, in «Radio Okapi», 27th September 2016: <http://www.radiookapi.net/2016/09/27/actualite/societe/violences-kinshasa-lonu-demande-une-enquete-independante>). In addition, despite the limited participation, the Dialogue reached a compromise in mid-October (*Dialogue en RDC: l'Accord Politique reporte les élections d'ici à Avril 2018*, in «Jeune Afrique» (on-line), 17th October

2016: http://www.jeuneafrique.com/366166/politique/dialogue-rdc-adopte-pleniere-laccord-politique-renvoie-presidentielle-avril-2018/?utm_source=Newsletter_JA_Actu&utm_medium=Email&utm_campaign=Newsletter_JA_Actu_19_10_16). However, that same agreement was deeply redefined by the end of December, through the mediation of the CENCO (Conférence Episcopale Nationale du Congo), calling for an *interim* governmental board (led by the main opposition party, the UDSP, the Union for Democracy and Social Progress) to lead the country and the government itself towards general elections, to be held in April 2018 (*Accord en RD Congo: qui sont le gagnants et les perdants?*, in «Jeune Afrique» (on-line), 19th January 2017: http://www.jeuneafrique.com/mag/390639/politique/accord-rd-congo-gagnants-perdants/?utm_source=Newsletter_JA_Actu&utm_medium=Email&utm_campaign=Newsletter_JA_Actu_20_01_17). Kabila's MP agreed, obtaining in exchange the nomination of a new Prime Minister for the whole transitional period.

7 - It is noted that rents from natural resources provide leeway to develop a patronage system that strengthens extractive institutions; "[...] (r)ents are typically transferred to elites in leading areas, such as capitals. Local patronage can thus undermine national cohesion [...]" (ADB 2015: 184, emphasis added). It follows that transparency and accountability are defined as key to challenge some aspects of the political economy. It is stressed that regions that are rich in natural resources may fail to develop, given the 'locked-in' condition in productive specialisation, with a declining productivity eventually leading to a competition of rival groups over rents; in addition, "[...] abundant resources can intensify the 'reward' for controlling [...] institutions [...]" (*ibidem*).

8 - In both the Congo Wars, but also right after the 1960 independence, conflicts erupted in the Eastern regions (North and South Kivu, Ituri and Katanga), from the 1960 Katanga secession (which led to the violent end of Lumumba's government) to the 1996 AFDL campaign against Mobutu's regime (Reyntjens 1999, 2001, 2007). The CRD counterinsurgency movements were based in the Kivus and Ituri (see note 5). From 2006 onwards, then, the Eastern regions witnessed a series of low-intensity conflicts (Reyntjens 2007; Vlassenroot, Raeymaekers 2009; Vlassenroot 2013; Stearns *et al.* 2013), which undermined the process of local pacification and stabilisation.

9 - Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo, the Congolese national army.

10 - The first Congolese independent nationalist movement, the Association des Bakongo pour le Maintien de l'Unité et l'Expansion et la Défense de la Langue Kikongo (re-named Alliance des Bakongo in 1958), was founded by Joseph Kasavubu in 1950 - the ethnic referring is clear (Gentili 2008).

11 - The post-conflict interpretative frame is said to have structured the international approach, to the point that a level of 'acceptable', normalized violence was set as a limit-point after which the international intervention becomes unavoidable. Only exceptionally gruesome violence, a self-evident example of the 'Congolese national failure', would trigger the international community (Autessere 2009).

12 - The undifferentiated listing by the European Commission/EuropeAid of two completely different (historically and socially speaking) local militias ("Raia Mutomboki, Mai-Mai Yakutumba, etc.") (European Commission/EuropeAid 2015: 4) underlines the underestimation of local complexities once again.

13 - The Simba warriors used to fight completely - or almost - naked, moistening their bodies with a mystical water (the Mayi), which granted them invulnerability.

14 - In the southern area of South Kivu.

15 - Supported by the European mission in the DRC (the EUSEC mission: http://www.eeas.europa.eu/csdp/missions-and-operations/eusec-rd-congo/index_en.htm), the *brassage* is said to have transferred a series of patrimonialistic, 'ethnified' networks from one place to another - for a deeper analysis, see Eriksson-Baaz, Verweijen (2013).

16 - Arbitrary arrests and the widespread of violence in the Hautes Plateaux region in South Kivu (where both the FRF and the Mayi-Mayi Yakutumba operate) among the Banyamulenge population started in 2009, when the *Kimia II* ('Silence II') - later re-named *Amani Leo* (Stearns *et al.* 2013) - was launched. The FARDC/MONUC operation led to the *in situ* integration of the Banyamulenge forces in the FARDC; however, the inter-communal tensions were not solved (Stearns *et al.* 2013; Eriksson-Baaz, Verweijen 2013).

17 - The M23 Rebellion - started in North Kivu in April 2012 - was led by FARDC mutinies and former CNDP combatants, unsatisfied by the outcomes of the 2008 Bukavu Peace Conference and by the *brassage* process as well (Stearns *et al.* 2013). The movement soon split internally and eventually signed a cease-fire agreement in 2014, leading to a new process of *brassage* intended to integrate the M23 troops with the FARDC (European Commission/ EuropeAid 2015).

18 - For an analysis of the historical trajectory of the Banyamulenge community, see Vlassenroot (2013).

19 - The MONUSCO Mission took over from the United Nations Organization Mission in Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) on 1st July 2010. In addition to the civilian, judiciary and correction components,

"[...] a maximum of 19,815 military personnel, 760 military observers, 391 police personnel and 1,050 members of formed police units [...]" (monusco.unmission.org). The military personnel was reduced to 18,000 units in 2016 (*RD Congo: l'ONU Renouvelle le Mandat de la Monusco contre l'Avis des Autorités Congolaises*, in «Jeune Afrique» (on-line), 31st March 2016, <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/314549/politique/rd-congo-lonu-renouvelle-mandat-de-monusco-contre-lavis-autorites-congolaises/>).

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