

# MASARYK UNIVERSITY

## Faculty of Social Studies

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### **Armed groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: Driven by greed or grievances? The M23 Rebellion**

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MVZ489 Causes of political violence

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## **Introduction**

This paper tries to explain the high preponderance of armed groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I analyse the underlying motives of these militias and ask to what extent are they pushed into the conflict by legitimate concerns or if they are enticed by the prospect of profits from the war economy. The latter explanation, elaborated upon by Collier and Hoeffler, whose econometric model I'll briefly introduce, seems to be, at first sight a perfect fit for the situation in Congo-Kinshasa, but a closer look will reveal some its shortcomings. My analysis of factors of ethnicity and economy will include with a more general portrayal of Congolese conditions that favour civil war, but I'll also have a special focus on the M23 rebel group as this militia can be considered the most ethnically charged major armed rebellion in recent Congolese history and thus perhaps the most challenging for the model to explain.

## **The M23 rebellion**

The M23 Movement was an armed rebellion against the Congolese government that began in April 2012 and was defeated in November 2013. It had its origins in the CNDP (Congrès national pour la défense du peuple), a Tutsi-dominated militia recruited from soldiers formerly integrated into the Congolese national army (Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo – FARDC).<sup>1</sup> The democratic elections in 2006 ended the power-sharing agreement that gave the biggest rebel groups a vice-presidency each and thus the Rwanda-supported faction of Azarias Ruberwa a bigger slice of power than the demographic share of Banyarwanda and Banyamulenge - ethnic groups whose protection was supposed to legitimize the incursions into Congo led by former Rwanda-based armed groups (RCD) – would have warranted. Only 1.7 % voted for the party led by Ruberwa and Laurent Nkunda, fearful of losing influence, founded the CNDP.<sup>2</sup> The CNDP then laid down arms after an agreement on the 23th of March of 2009 that detailed the integration of rebel soldiers into the FARDC. In April 2012 some 300 former CNDP soldiers split from the Kinshasa-based army, citing poor conditions, delayed payments and lack of promotion opportunities and blaming the Congolese government for not respecting the terms of the agreement.<sup>3</sup> These rebels, called M23, quickly took Goma, a provincial capital of South Kivu, but were soon defeated by the FARDC, aided

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<sup>1</sup> The Economist: Rwanda in eastern Congo. A new sphere of influence? Goma: 2012.08.04 (<http://www.economist.com/node/21559970?zid=304&ah=e5690753dc78ce91909083042ad12e30>)

<sup>2</sup> Stearns, Jason K.: From CNDP to M23 - The evolution of an armed movement in eastern Congo. London: Rift Valley Institute, Usalama project, 2012, pp.18

<sup>3</sup> Stearns, Jason; Verweijen, Judith; Baaz, Maria Eriksson: The national army and armed groups in the eastern Congo - Untangling the Gordian knot of insecurity. London: Rift Valley Institute, Usalama project, 2013, pp. 28

by a much more proactive approach of MINUSCO<sup>4</sup>, the UN peacekeeping force that was woefully ineffective in the past<sup>5</sup>. Although the M23 rebellion was crushed, its centre, the Kivu Regions, remains volatile, with more than 70 small armed groups still existing – most of them locally-based self-defence groups, so-called Mai-Mai-militias.<sup>6</sup>

### **The Collier-Hoeffler model**

The model is the result of a large-N quantitative study undertaken by Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler that attempts to explain the motivations behind violent conflicts. According to Collier, the oft-cited reasons for going into civil war, that are usually related to some sort of grievance over identity, ethnicity, religion, etc., are just some rationalizing veneer over the real motivation for turning to violence: greed. The statements of the actors citing grievances should not be taken for face value as they are intended to add some legitimacy for turning to arms or to aid recruitment by exploiting kinship terms.<sup>7</sup> In their econometric analysis, the authors have found no evidence for ethnic diversity, often mentioned as a factor raising the chance of conflict, being the root cause of violence; a very high ethnic fragmentation was even correlated to a lowered chance of civil war. Instead, they found positive correlation between the preponderance of lootable resources like gold, diamonds and timber and the outbreak of civil war, the share of young men in the population was also tied to more conflict. The level of education seems to be negatively correlated to violence. This led the authors to explain conflicts in terms of rational choice, expected profit not ideals motivate conflicts.<sup>8</sup> Presupposing that fighters, especially low-educated ones as the model assumes, are cost-benefit calculator machines, might be perceived as far-fetched. And the reduction to a greed v. grievance binary is perhaps also excessive. The biggest strengths of the model are the fact that it doesn't rely on exploring the motives that militias proclaim they are guided by to explain the underlying causes of conflict; secondly, if we assume that grievances can motivate armed conflicts, the Collier-Hoeffler model neatly presents the conditions under which hostility turns into outright violence

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<sup>4</sup> The Economist: Raising the stakes - A more robust United Nations risks roiling neighbourly relations. Nairobi: 2013.08.31 (<http://www.economist.com/news/middle-east-and-africa/21584395-more-robust-united-nations-risks-roiling-neighbourly-relations-raising?zid=304&ah=e5690753dc78ce91909083042ad12e30>)

<sup>5</sup> Ulriksen, Ståle; Gourlay, Catriona; Mace, Catriona: Operation Artemis: The Shape of things to come? International Peacekeeping (13533312). Autumn2004, Vol. 11 Issue 3, p508-525

<sup>6</sup> Stearns, Jason K.; Vogel, Christoph: The Landscape of Armed Groups in the Eastern Congo. New York University Congo Research Group, 2015 December

<sup>7</sup> Collier, Paul, 2000: Doing Well out of War: An Economic Perspective, in: Mats Berdal/David M. Malone (eds.), 2000: Greed & grievance: economic agendas in civil wars, pp. 91-111, p.92

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., pp. 100

instead of staying latent as the success of even “idealistic” armed campaigns depends on modalities to finance them and finding willing recruits.

### **Ethnicity in the DRC**

Congo’s more than 200 ethnic groups certainly make identity-based conflicts possible, it was even argued that holding democratic elections in the country is futile as campaigns don’t run along policy lines but are mere exercises in ethnic mobilization and the winning coalition is nothing more than an ethnic aggregate.<sup>9</sup> While ethnic identity is relevant, it is not the most important factor in Congo. Etienne Tshisekedi, a member of the Luba people that face vast prejudices beyond their Kasai Region<sup>10</sup>, could become the country’s decade-long opposition leader nevertheless, winning elections in the Kinshasa district. Joseph Kabila, the country’s current president could stay in power even without speaking French and Lingala, the two main languages in Kinshasa and having spent his childhood in exile with his father in Tanzania.<sup>11</sup> Mobutu Sese Seko managed to rule over Congo (back then Zaire) even if he belonged to a very small group, the Ngbandi, often mocked for its alleged backwardness as it’s considered a warrior tribe<sup>12</sup>. There are cases when the Congolese army simply sold their weapons to militias representing other ethnicities, like during the Ituri conflict, the economic interest trumped the ethnic belonging.<sup>13</sup>

In the case of the M23, however, ethnicity seems to be particularly important, as 80 % of its senior commanders were Tutsis.<sup>14</sup> The first Rwanda-supported incursions into the Congo were supposed to hunt down the perpetrators of the genocide in Rwanda, a reason that was evoked by the M23 as a reason for fighting as well. Another reason was to protect the communities considered Tutsi-affiliated like the Banyamulenge, often used as scapegoats and discriminated against. They had different fortunes: Mobutu once tried to co-opt them but then the tide turned and they were stripped of citizenship in 1981.<sup>15</sup> That the RCD then went on in 1997 to take Kinshasa on the Western edge of the country, very far from the area of settlement of the

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<sup>9</sup> Prunier, Gerard: Cocktail meurtrier en Afrique centrale. *Le Monde diplomatique*, 2015 november, pp. 8-9

<sup>10</sup> Wrong, Michaela: *In the Footsteps of Mr. Kurtz. Living on the Brink of Disaster in Mobutu’s Congo*. New York: HarperCollins, 2001, Chapter 5: Living above the Shop

<sup>11</sup> Stearns, Jason K.: *Dancing in the Glory of Monsters. The Collapse of the Congo and the Great War of Africa* New York: Public Affairs, 2011, Chapter 20: The Bearer of Eggs

<sup>12</sup> Wrong (2001): Chapter 4: Dizzy worms

<sup>13</sup> *The Economist*: Waiting to be rescued - The UN wants to stop the massacres in eastern Congo. But how? Nairobi: 2013.05.15 (<http://www.economist.com/node/1781263>)

<sup>14</sup> Stearns, Jason K.: *From CNDP to M23 - The evolution of an armed movement in eastern Congo*. London: Rift Valley Institute, Usalama project, 2012, pp.11

<sup>15</sup> *The Economist*: The “Jews” of Africa. Bukavu, Goma and Kigali: 2004.08.19 (<http://www.economist.com/node/3113203?zid=304&ah=e5690753dc78ce91909083042ad12e30>)

Banyamulenge, showed that more was at stake than ethnic issues back then, perhaps economic interests were more potent.

### **The economic structure of the DRC**

In the era under Congo's long-serving dictator, Mobutu Sese Seko, the country became a textbook example for the resource-curse.<sup>16</sup> In a normal economy, individuals create the economic value and they have the agency so they can decide who governs. A country cursed by an abundance of resources, is however more often than not based on rent-seeking. There is only so much treasure in the ground so it becomes hugely important who gets to exploit them, closeness to government will pay off, favouring the emergence of networks of cronies, also known as corruption. As all the riches are in the hands of the government and all the income flows to them, there is no reason for it to democratize. In fact, Congo under Mobutu Sese Seko was one such huge network of patronage. His dictatorship was not based on repression or torture, even if sometimes that happened, too, but by effectively bribing anyone who was or could become influential, even if this potential consisted in a mere university degree, by a share coming from the mineral resources, running what was effectively a kleptocracy and ignoring everyone else.<sup>17</sup> This network was huge, so when Laurent Kabila took over power, he famously said, you "you all danced in the glory of the monster".<sup>18</sup> Bureaucratic posts were seen as something of a cash cow, meaning that a lot of fees were charged, somebody calculated that the effective tax rate in Congo was 230 %, taking away any incentive from starting an own business, leaving everybody dependent on the government.<sup>19</sup> The army, seen as an eternal source of coups, was kept deliberately weak, as Mobutu was from a very small tribe, and couldn't rely on the support of his own ethnic group. Indeed, even an army job was seen as something to be milked. Soldiers were rarely paid and were expected, according to the infamous article 15 of the Congolose Constitution consisting solely of "débrouillez-vous", meaning roughly solve it as you can, to "live off the land", offering protection for small favours or in the worst case, loot. Mobutu once said openly: "you have guns, you don't need a salary"<sup>20</sup>, creating an army culture where using weapons for intimidating civilians and

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<sup>16</sup> Basedau, Matthias/Wolfram Lacher, 2006: A Paradox of Plenty? Rent Distribution and Political Stability in Oil States, GIGA Research Program: Dynamics of Violence and Security Cooperation, ([http://www.giga-hamburg.de/de/system/files/publications/wp21\\_basedau-lacher.pdf](http://www.giga-hamburg.de/de/system/files/publications/wp21_basedau-lacher.pdf))

<sup>17</sup> Wrong (2001): Chapter 4: Dizzy worms

<sup>18</sup> Stearns (2011): Introduction

<sup>19</sup> World Bank: Doing Business 2009. Washington: World Bank, 2008, pp. 43

<sup>20</sup> Stearns (2011): Chapter 8: The Dominoes Fall

benefiting materially was accepted. When Mobutu failed, the kingpin in this network cronies, Congo collapsed.

The ensuing civil war, called the Great War of Africa by Gérard Prunier, can be thus explained in terms of reshuffling the patronage networks for the distribution of the income from mineral wealth. The state depended on giving away mining concessions to dubious companies for a fraction of their worth in a bid to make some quick money to finance the war effort. Indeed, one of the businessmen close to the regime who saw the war in Congo as an investment opportunity, Dan Gertler was so shady, that an offshore bank in Panama refused to deal with him.<sup>21</sup> While the state depended on Gécamines, the state mining company extracting the country's abundant reserves in copper, cobalt and rare earth minerals, rebels could profit from a large amount of lootable resources. Uganda, the traditional ally of Rwanda, has seen a blooming trade that surged thanks to timber and gold looted from the Kivus Region during the M23's reign.<sup>22</sup> Paul Kagame, the Rwandan President spoke in the case of the RCD of a "self-financing war".<sup>23</sup> An estimated of 80 % of the costs associated with the rebellion were covered by looted resources.<sup>24</sup> A long history of conflict brought forth a generation that didn't experience any other profession other than being soldiers. Tellingly, Laurent Kabila, the rebel leader who deposed Mobutu, was killed in 2001 by his own desperate child soldiers, who feared that he was about to sign a peace accord and make them redundant.<sup>25</sup> Founding a business is prohibitively difficult in Congo, running is even more as the danger that somebody with a weapon grabs the revenues is real. Decades of conflict left the schools of the Kivu Region in a parlous state: 47 % of children never attended school.<sup>26</sup> The situation is hardly better in other regions of the DRC: just 1.6 % of the GDP is spent on education which means that 156 countries of the world spend a larger share.<sup>27</sup> There is a whole generation whose only chance of making a living is to take up arms, waging a war for war's sake. In resource-rich Congo, this can be a profitable enterprise, at least for those at the top. Bosco Ntaganda, the leader of the

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<sup>21</sup> Tilouine, Joan: « Panama papers » : Dan Gertler, roi du Congo et de l'offshore. *Le Monde*, 2016.04.18

<sup>22</sup> WWF 2012: Timber movement and trade in eastern DR Congo and destination markets in the region ([https://d2ouvy59p0dg6k.cloudfront.net/downloads/regional\\_timber\\_movement\\_and\\_trade\\_\\_summary\\_\\_english.pdf](https://d2ouvy59p0dg6k.cloudfront.net/downloads/regional_timber_movement_and_trade__summary__english.pdf))

<sup>23</sup> Fruchart, Damien: United Nations Arms Embargoes. Their Impact on Arms Flows and Target Behaviour – Case Study: Democratic Republic of the Congo. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2007, pp.3

<sup>24</sup> United Nations, Final report of the Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, UN Document S/2002/1146, 16 Oct. 2002, pp. 14–15.

<sup>25</sup> Stearns (2011): Chapter 18 – The Assassination of Mzee

<sup>26</sup> UIS. (2010). Education aid flows to conflict-affected countries. United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0019/001912/191244e.pdf>)

<sup>27</sup> CIA World Factbook (<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/cg.html>)

M23, who made his name in the Ituri conflict (around 2003), used his military control over Goma, the trading centre of the Kivus to establish a lucrative smuggling network of looted minerals. He had his own businesses, hotels and villas.<sup>28</sup> Perhaps the strongest point for the greed theory is the fact, that the poor conditions in the Congolese army first became unbearable enough for Ntaganda's soldiers to start a mutiny when Kinshasa wanted to post them to another part of the country, away from the hub of their business dealings.<sup>29</sup>

### **External factors**

One of the most important aspects that the Collier-Hoeffler model seems to neglect is that of external influence. Rwanda had control and command over the M23 rebellion<sup>30</sup> and benefitted, alongside its ally, Uganda, from most of the trade emanating from the war-torn Kivu Region. As Rwanda relies in a large part on aid, it is susceptible to pressure from donor countries. Indeed, the CNDP agreed to lay down arms when a UN report called the Rwanda-backed RCD's push to Kinshasa an attempt at counter-genocide and donor countries, above all Britain put Rwanda under huge pressure to cease and further support of armed groups in Congo.<sup>31</sup> As Rwanda feared for a loss of revenues, Laurent Nkunda, the leader of CNDP was put under house arrest in Kigali. In the case of the M23 rebellion, the international community had a role, too. Against Bosco Ntaganda, its leader, an arrest warrant was issued by the International Criminal Court citing several crimes against humanity during his role in the Ituri-conflict, where he got the nickname "Terminator". The huge loss of reputation wreaked by the arrest warrant made Ntaganda's position untenable and a leadership crisis ensued.<sup>32</sup> Ntaganda then turned himself in at the US embassy in Kigali, becoming the first person with an ICC arrest warrant to give himself up voluntarily. The M23 rebellion could have clearly not happened without the (denied) support of Rwanda providing arms, logistical and planning expertise. Lutable resources and a youth without perspectives were clearly significant factors, but the model doesn't relate to the role external powers willing to exploit a weak state and their dependence on foreign aid.

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<sup>28</sup> The Economist: A surprising surrender. Nairobi: 2013.03.19 (<http://www.economist.com/blogs/baobab/2013/03/bosco-ntaganda?zid=304&ah=e5690753dc78ce91909083042ad12e30>)

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> UN Security Council Report 2012.11.15 ([http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s\\_2012\\_843.pdf](http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2012_843.pdf))

<sup>31</sup> McGreal, Chris; Rice, Xan; Davies; Lizzie: Leaked UN report accuses Rwanda of possible genocide in Congo. The Guardian: 2010.09.26

<sup>32</sup> Stearns, Jason: Strongman of the Eastern DRC: A profile of General Bosco Ntaganda. Rift Valley Institute Briefing, 2013.03.12

## Conclusion

The Collier-Hoeffler model provides a much more potent explanation for the proliferation of armed groups in Congo than the usual identity-based approaches. An economy based on rent-seeking enabled Mobutu Sese Seko to have a loose rule over a vast territory by cultivating a huge patronage network but his system couldn't resist the cessation of Western support after the end of the cold war and spillover effects from neighbouring Rwanda led to its collapse. With an army deliberately kept weak fled through the country, the central government couldn't afford even a modicum of security to its population in the East, in these regions at least, Congo was effectively a failed state. The abundance of lootable resources as well as the high share of jobless young men favoured the proliferation of small armed groups aiming to fill the power vacuum and to have a share of the natural treasure themselves. In this respect, the model explains the M23 rebellion as well. Economic and demographic aspects certainly played a huge part in at least fuelling the armed rebellion. The flourishing gold trade in Uganda - a close ally of Rwanda - that sprang up in Kampala after the M23 took over Goma, as well as the personal wealth of rebellion leader Ntaganda attest to the war economy being a powerful reason for the continuation of war. What the real motivations of the M23 leaders were, stays of course debatable, but the econometric model clearly outlines under which conditions such a rebellion can prosper and when hostility turns into violence. It doesn't account for the role of external actors, however. Natural resources were still up for grabs for the Kivus' poorly educated youth when the M23 surrendered – the loss of Rwandan support is was the important reason for laying down arms but such elements are not built into the model.

Regardless that they produce violence or not, the grievances of the Banyamulenge are real. They are still often pointed out as aliens on a land that they inhabited since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Playing the Tutsi-card can still garner some votes for unscrupulous politicians, indeed, this ethnic groups is sometimes referred to as the Jews of Africa. These grievances have to be addressed, in the best way by a decentralization of the Congolese state. Collier and Hoeffler are probably right that policy-makers should turn to economic aspects first if they want to reduce the chance of an outbreak of violence. However, a violence-free society doesn't mean that there are no legitimate grievances. Reducing the profit actors can gain from waging a war can help eliminate violence. Addressing grievances can help fight injustice.



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\*All electronic sources last accessed on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of June 2016