

# The Breakdown of Societal Order in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Written by Malene Mortensen

This PDF is auto-generated for reference only. As such, it may contain some conversion errors and/or missing information. For all formal use please refer to the official version on the website, as linked below.

## The Breakdown of Societal Order in the Democratic Republic of Congo

<https://www.e-ir.info/2013/12/08/the-breakdown-of-societal-order-in-the-democratic-republic-of-congo/>

MALENE MORTENSEN, DEC 8 2013

*What's the strategic purpose of putting an AK-47 assault rifle inside a woman and pulling the trigger? Or cutting out a woman's foetus and making her friends eat it? – New York Times, 2012[i]*

### Introduction

The civil war in the Democratic Republic of Congo is one of the biggest headaches of the international community. It involves a multitude of state and non-state actors, a myriad of abbreviations with different motives, fighting methods, and ethnic bases. There is no clear delineation between foreign and domestic actor; civilian and rebel; soldier and terrorist. The conflict challenges the classical categories used for civil wars and the assumptions about rationalities of war.

The first section of this essay will argue that theories of civil war today are insufficient to fully explain the reasons why the violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo [DRC][ii] has reached an intensity and persistence that not even the UN's second-largest peace-keeping force is able to control. The second section provides an investigation of the evolution in social structures in the DRC: during colonialism and independence, before and after the Cold War. This will show how a breakdown of social structures and institutions led to fragile or dysfunctional neopatrimonialism under President Mobutu; and a social structure after the Cold War that revolves around violence. This will lead to a discussion of reasons for the persistence and the character of the violence in the DRC.

The two civil wars have primarily been treated as forms of proxy war during the Cold War, or as a result of Rwandan, Angolan, Ugandan and Burundian conflicts fought on Congolese territory. In the following, this essay will discuss the *Congolese* conflict. This is not to say that the before-mentioned bore no importance in the outbreak and course of violence in the DRC. However, tensions in the DRC, even in the Eastern DRC, are still a part of the Congolese political entity. The Alliance for Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo (AFDL) of Congolese factions emerged in 1996 and joined the RPF, not only to fight Hutu but also to change the political situation in *their* country. The reasons for the Rwandan effect on Congolese political play are to be found in the DRC, not in Rwanda.

### Theoretical Framework

#### *Theories On Civil War*

This section will provide a critical exploration of some of the prevalent theories on civil war. The first, the "Cold War theory", sees conflicts in Africa as a part of the Cold War and, subsequently, as a result of the power void and decline in foreign aid after the Cold War (Keen 1998: 10, Engel & Mehler 2005: 90). Though this explanation certainly accounts for contributory factors to the violence, it neglects specificities of countries and regions. The countries, often described as "puppet states", are perceived as blank, ahistorical social structures. It precludes this theory from dealing with the different levels in violence. For example, why did genocide happen in Rwanda and not in Burundi? The second is the theory of "grievance", arguing that the tensions between ethnic groups were unleashed by the end of the Cold War. This caused an evil, chaotic and aimless violence influenced by superstition and drug use (Keen

# The Breakdown of Societal Order in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Written by Malene Mortensen

1998: 10, Engel & Mehler 2005: 90). While ethnic groups are key actors, these change and intermingle in shifting alliances to a degree, where unleashed ancient hatred is more likely a symptom of a deeper underlying driver for conflict. Lastly, there is the UN approach of the 'vicious circle' of civil war that needs to be broken by *rehabilitation* and *reconstruction* (Keen 1998: 10, Engel & Mehler 2005: 90). In this approach, the conflict is perceived a disruptive event that is essentially different and decoupled from the "normality" and thus, the civil war in the DRC essentially only lasted from 1996 till 2002 and disrupted the country's economy, political unity and local society. One might argue that the country's economy was never sustainable; the political unity was never instituted; and that the local society has never existed as a singular grammatical form. The social structure that pre-existed the civil war was a patrimonial prebendalism (Lewis 1996: 80), based on aid, resource extraction and corruption, which the UN would undoubtedly not want to reconstruct.

## *A Social Approach of War*

In the light of these insufficiencies theories, a new approach to the conflict is required, one that emphasizes the societal context in which the violence happens. Clausewitz (2007: 100) said:

*"Politics, moreover, is the womb in which war develops—where its outlines already exist in their hidden rudimentary form, like the characteristics of living creatures in their embryos."*

Supplementing Clausewitz's most famous quote "war is the continuation of politics by other means", this highlights how civil war is not a sudden violent outbreak, but rather the culmination of a process. A civil war is often preceded by more limited extents of violence prior to military violence, such as boasting, provocations and threats. To perceive a civil war as a process means including in the analysis, history, social organization, societal norms and ways of life, in order to seek new answers as to what determines the stakes of a conflict and the characteristics of the violence. The distinction between war and warfare is irrelevant because both the reasons for the war and the way the war is fought are expressions of the social interactions within a society. The following analysis and discussion will explore which social context the wars in the DRC have been fought and why the violence has been as intense and constant as it seems.

## **Tracing the Breakdown Of a Social Structure**

This section sheds light on the evolution in social structures in the DRC in the last 150 years. Three main events have profoundly changed the social structure in the DRC. Colonization changed the existing social structure rooted in the family and kinship. Then followed the neopatrimonial regime under Mobutu (from 1965-1997) which proved unsustainable and where the economy deteriorated. The end of the Cold War marked an end to the US backing of Mobutu, after which the neopatrimonial system mutated into a multiplicity of patrimonial structures funded by violence and crime.

### *Pre-Colonial Society*

The basic unit of analysis was, and to a great extent still is, the family and the extended family. The Kuba, Luba, Kongo, Mongo, Warega ethnic groups, for example, comprised of patri- or matrilineal extended families with exogenous marriage which tied sub-units of extended families together through monogamy or polygamy. The extended family thereby provided many of the welfare functions of the state, such as care for sick, elders and kids, and redistribution of wealth (Mukenge 2002: 117). The kinship ties were especially strong in rural areas but nonetheless remained in urban areas as solidarity network (Young 1965: 238). The various levels of corporatism or sophistication of Congolese societies are illustrated below. All political entities included, by no means, all of these layers, and the politico-social structures had several common traits, as mentioned above.

Levels of corporatism (Gondola 2002: 14-15, Mukenge 2002: 9-18):

1. Kingdom or Empires: There were two known kingdoms in the DRC. The kingdoms were ethnically diversified. The King derived power from the supernatural.

# The Breakdown of Societal Order in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Written by Malene Mortensen

2. Chiefdom: The chief inherited his authority and was given tribute by his citizens.
3. Village: a network of extended families or direct lineage, often ruled by a council of family elders
4. Extended family or clan
5. Nuclear family

All types of social structures, except the band society of hunter-gatherers, were tied to a certain territory of ancestral lands or villages. The largest majority was, and still is, farmers, but there also existed a substantial group of herders in the Upper Congo and the Kivu region (Mukenge 2002: 7). Land was held collectively; owned and distributed by the traditional chief who granted user rights in a contract to tribesmen, ensuring their loyalty and dependency. Land was inherited by the firstborn son who then redistributed land to the other descendants (Ansoms&Marysse 2011: 29). The chief or clan leader was also often the authority in the religious hierarchy, according to which deceased ancestors were active in the life of their living descendants, with the chief or the witch doctor as the link of communication to the two (Mukenge 2002: 38). The Congolese also believed in a supernatural divine power residing inside each human being that is sovereign and the Creator. The relationship was more of a relationship of dependence than is in Christianity.

## *Patrimonialism In Pre-Colonial Times*

The social system of pre-colonial Congolese societies was traditional patrimonialism. Tradition and religion placed the chief or the clan leader in the top of social hierarchy. The patriarchy or matriarchy of the extended family was thus reflected in the higher level of social organization.

There was no distinction between public and private sphere because all property was communally held and distributed. Personal rewards in land distribution made the community members materially dependent on the clan leader or the chief. The clan leader or chief gained authority from his kinship ties with the ancestors and descendants. He thereby tied the present and the past together ensuring stability and continuation. This restrained violence because the social system of status was fixed and informally institutionalized. One only had a chance at leadership if one were the son of the leader, resulting in a lowered competition for status and land. However, there did exist conflict over borders and land between ethnic groups, which was often settled through councils or intermarriage. This meant that Congolese society had few real limits because extended families were often connected one another through married extended families (Mukenge 2002: 179). Warfare was highly ritualized (Hochschild 1998: 73).

## *In the Colonial Era*

Coming from an aristocratic upbringing, King Leopold II instituted an autocratic rule in the Congo Free State in 1885. His goal of colonization was not development, but merely exploitation which was inspired by the Dutch in the Indies (Stanard 2012: 27). Due to internal and external pressure for the territory, his rule was a repressive martial regime (Weiss & Carayannis 2004: 116). Social organization changed profoundly for the livelihoods, family, and religious lives of the Congolese civilian, even if he were not in direct contact with the colonial power. King Leopold II created the function of a European "district commander", who could revoke pre-colonial leaders as they saw fit. Larger chiefdoms were replaced by smaller ones headed by appointed chiefs. These appointees were responsible for the oppression that included expropriation, monopolization of natural resources and forced labor. Not much changed, when the Belgian state took over. The small units split up decades earlier were merged again in 1933 into *secteurs* with an incapacitated leadership with no possibility for resolving conflicts (Mukenge 2002: 22).

The Belgian administration commanded the appropriation of all "vacant" territory (Hochschild 1998:117), which had been land communally held by tribes or clans. Land was redistributed by the colonial administration to individuals or foreign private actors, resulting in commoditization of previously communal lands. In South Kivu, for example, the traditional land contract – the *kalinzi* – was transformed to a contract between any two individual parties. (Ansoms & Marysse 2011: 32). Land was increasingly leased instead of sold, with rent producing a quasi-feudal system. Land shortage soon became what would become a long-term issue in the DRC (Mukenge 2002: 22). In addition, the Force Publique – the colonial army consisting of Congolese men – was used to enforce free labor and ensure that workers

# The Breakdown of Societal Order in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Written by Malene Mortensen

met the rubber quotas through imprisonment, summary executions, and severing of limbs. Originally a way of taxation, the forced labor continued through 1910, when taxes were instituted (Mukenge 2002: 26). Throughout this time, the Catholic Church provided education and virtually controlled the school system (Adelman 1976: 102). The power of the Church was significant, with half of the population as members and 6,000 European missionaries as staff. However, traditional rituals of the ethnic groups continued.

## The Breakdown of Traditional Patrimonialism

Colonization changed the social patterns of the pre-colonial DRC in several ways. First, the legitimacy of traditional leadership was seriously undermined. The appointment of chiefs by the colonial power eradicated the illusion of ancestral line from the clan leader to the past. With it went his legitimate authority. Consequently, the patri- or matriarchal family structure was no longer reflected in society, resulting in a severe inconsistency between the institutional structures of the “state” and the society inhabiting that state. This created tensions with no conflict resolution mechanisms for solving them, because the clan chief no longer held the authority. Second, colonialism separated the public and the private sphere. Most property came to be held by the colonial power, with only some redistributed privately in contracts. The end of communal property further depleted the local authorities. Last, inequality in power grew. The regional leaders supported by the colonial powers became a part of the “haves” that ruled over the “have nots”.

The severe gap between society and the state on all areas – politically, socially, historically and ethnically – caused friction. This meant friction between the illegitimately conquering state and the unaccepting conquered society; friction between local elites that had no conflict resolution mechanism; and fighting among individuals within the family over scarce lands. A forced change of livelihood and social institutions with no incentives for acceptance for the population necessitates great amounts of violence to enforce the dominance in order to force the people to work involuntarily, to insert a new illegitimate leadership, while not wasting money on health care and acceptable work condition.

### *After Independence*

Belgian Congo was the most industrialized colonies but also the least qualified, with only 17 university graduates out of population of 20 million (Prunier 2009: 76). The Belgian colonizers needed a black workforce administered by a European elite. In the wave of British and French decolonization, the Belgians had to flee the country, without preparing for any self-administration. Elections in May 1960 revealed that the social structure of kinship had still survived the colonial era. Elders dominated political life, and the population voted loyal to their tribe. The Assembly, consisting of 26 political parties, was unsurprisingly ineffective and demands for secession followed immediately after. The leader of the majority party – the MNC – Patrice Lumumba was arrested by Colonel Joseph Mobutu and later murdered. In 1965, Mobutu took over the military and declared himself President of the Second Republic. The relation of the military dictatorship to its population was one of management. The aim was to prevent organized uprising by means of ethnic favoring and manipulation; for example by allowing the Banyarwandans (Clark 2007: 30) to take over territories in North Kivu, causing major ethnic conflicts.

Both colonization and the reign of Mobutu thereby increased inequality between ethnic groups. Colonization had brought about a forced modernization, including urbanization and individualization, to a limited extent. The ethnic groups, the merchant groups of Bakongo, and the Congo River tribes (Gondola 2002:10), who were most successful at adjusting to modernity, were the richest. Within ethnic groups, competition increased by the land struggles and displacements. The family was still the primary social structure, but it struggling.

Mobutu sought to be an absolutist ruler:

*“I will not be told how to behave,” Mobutu told reporters Sunday. “Nobody can dictate policy to me. . . . Change is me. The process of democratization is me.”<sup>[iii]</sup>*

Resounding the “*L’État, c’est moi*” of the Sun King Louis XIV of France, Mobutu sought to control potential

# The Breakdown of Societal Order in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Written by Malene Mortensen

competitors for power through a combined tactic of neopatrimonialism and divide-and-conquer. Around Mobutu was a network of concentric circles of clients: beginning with an inner circle of 15-20 people of the Ngbandi tribe forming the Presidential brotherhood elite in the MPR and the army; a middle, larger circle of technocrats and courtiers; and an outer circle of regional bosses. Loyalty was ensured through rewards, sanctions and internal divisions and as a result, the turnover rate for political appointees were very high, with an average of just 6 months in office (Gondola 2012: 141)

The realm of religion also became a political battlefield. In November 1973, Mobutu explicitly questioned the need for the churches he did nothing to oppose upon taking office (Adelman 1975: 103) He instituted himself as a Prophet and named party halls "temples". A Kimbanguist Catholic Church explicitly supported Mobutu in the 1980s and was financially guaranteed by Mobutu. It became the third largest organized religious denomination, with hundreds of schools and temples (Gondola 2002: 148). In contrast, the Catholic Church played an important organizing role in the uprising against Mobutu in demonstrations, such as the March of Hope.

Internally there were massive levels of violence. Different rebellion groups were alliances of ethnic groups: Mbunda-Bampenda formed the Kiwu rebellion, Baulero-Babembe formed the Uvira-Fizi rebellion, while the Bakusu formed the MNC-Lumumba leadership, who were repressed politically because of their role in the 1960s civil war. These rebels groups had clashed with native groups, and within ethnic groups the chiefdoms were fighting.

Also the national army was factionalized based on tribal divisions and where the officers had been trained. This factionalization was yet another example of Mobutus divide-and-conquer tactic, but one that ended up harming him. The best soldiers came from the most violent areas, a result from a negative selection process, where the survivors were the absolute gangsters (Prunier 2009: 128). When they didn't receive pay, the military started looting villages (Gondola 2002: 153). They had more in common with mercenaries than a national army, which also that they ran off in sight of battle with the AFDL.

## *Dysfunctional Neopatrimonialism*

The reign of Mobutu fits well into the system of neopatrimonialism. He was placed in the center of a neopatrimonial system, where all power derived from him domestically – financed by the US. It approached absolutism, because he was basically placed above the law. Mobutu still relied on his immediate followers to keep up the systemic elite clientilism, as they were the only ones he was accountable to in his single party state. The economic system sustained this elite clientilism, where property was held by the elite, while the mass of individuals with their land shortage and insecurity had no chance of economic power. However, even though Mobutu partially succeeded in creating a nationalism rooted in his personality, the ties to kinship and tribalism still prevailed. This was revealed when fragmentation happened, and also made elite clientilism the most viable option. The elite of the different ethnic groups became integrated into the political system, through prebendalism. However, the state was not able to sustain itself under Mobutu and this shows how easily state fragmentation happens in a neopatrimonial system, when it malfunctions.

## *After the Fall of Mobutu*

Helped primarily by Uganda and Rwanda, Laurent-Desiré Kabila toppled Mobutu within 8 months. But fragmentation and the involvement of foreign forces produced a mutated version of patrimonialism and a multitude of power bases. This was different from dysfunctional neopatrimonialism because a variety of opportunistic actors now exploited different sources of income, of which the violence itself produced a substantial part. Within the state elite, neopatrimonialism continued with Kabila. He continued the same monopolization of the economy as his predecessor when he signed a 1 billion dollar contract with a US mining company only a few days after Kabila declared himself president of the Democratic Republic of Congo (Prunier 2009: 137). On the other hand, the rebels created an alternative power base. Since the beginning of the war, territory was carved up in relatively stable rebel-held enclaves and violently contested areas. The militias derived from local disputes and conflicts over land and borders (Beneduce et al. 2006: 35). The conflicts and the incapable state led to a dissemination of the monopoly of violence, creating a multiplicity of violence "monopolies", with recruitment based in the aggravated under-employed

# The Breakdown of Societal Order in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Written by Malene Mortensen

population. The rebel-held enclaves were a product of collaboration between rural armed participants, economic entrepreneurs and local administrative authorities (Beneduce et al 2006: 33). This triad was in charge of economic redistribution and right to wealth, but disrupted the traditional leadership still left in the rural areas.

The war soon became a lucrative business for the army, the rebel soldiers and their elite. After the fall of Mobutu, the Kabilas allies from Uganda and Rwanda stuck around plundering the country as a reward for the help (Clark 2007: 30) and to keep potential threat to *their* power in check. Rwanda and Uganda also contributed to the continuance of the war, by supplying weapons to rebels, while the diamonds export of both countries increased significantly, despite their own diamond production<sup>[iv]</sup> remaining constant. This suggests illicit trading in other countries.

Even the militias were more business ventures than political movements. By 2001, the belligerents were engaging mostly in low level skirmishes and less in direct serious confrontation<sup>[v]</sup>, with only 8 battles fought in the first quarter of 2001<sup>[vi]</sup>, and just 96 battles fought between 1999 and 2001. Fighting within rebel territory became more frequent than official classic warfare between two or more militias. The violence was self-sustaining, too. As the locally based civil management of the distribution of minerals changed to contracts between the militia and foreign companies<sup>[vii]</sup>, the non-violent population was incentivized to join a militia to get their part of the booty. This was strengthened by the innate insecurity of civilians, who were brutalized and forced to dig coltan while guarded by Rwandan soldiers<sup>[viii]</sup>, whose local businesses were shut down. Looting happened in the same pattern regardless of the militia. Soldiers were commanded by an officer to visit farms, facilities, factories or banks in an occupied territory and demand the managers to give access to the resources that were subsequently loaded onto trucks.

The rebel groups and militias thereby gained control of the economy in their controlled areas. But the war also in itself changed the social fabric of a society controlled by elders. The state of war gave power to the young able-bodied soldier, even the child soldier, which proved deeply disturbing to the social organization even within the families (Beneduce et al 2006: 36).

## *Conclusion*

Prior to colonization, social organization in most tribes and clans was based on an ancestral kinship tradition of authority. Land was secured that way for the large majority of farmers. This was weakened by Western oppression and favoritism exercised by colonially selected local leaders. After independence, with a great gap between social structures and governing structures and with only 17 university graduates left to run the country after independence, the country plunged into war and secession. When the strong neopatrimonialist Mobutu seized absolute power, he fragmented the society further and marginalized the rural population. A long-term lack of property rights and access to lands caused frustration, disputes and underemployment in rural areas; all of which contributed to escalation and sustenance of the conflict once it broke out.

This process tracing of the factors leading up to the civil war in the DRC shows how changes in social structures cause frictions and instability. The following discussion will suggest the reasons for the pattern of violence.

## **The Patterns of Violence**

The character of violence must be clarified first. As described previously, neither total nor absolute war can characterize the fighting that is on a fairly limited scale among militias and the military. On the other hand, violence against the civilians is total, with high degrees of abuse and massacre. The constant overtaking of cities with the ultimate goal of Kinshasa does not bear the traits of real conquest, as there is no effort made to institutionalize one's dominance or gain support from the civilian population. The focus will now turn to different motives on different organizational levels of the conflict, discussing the relative importance of the different levels in determining the character of the violence and the persistence.

### *The Elites*

For the elites of the armed groups and the government, the group's status and the negotiation position is highly

# The Breakdown of Societal Order in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Written by Malene Mortensen

important. Status is constantly contested and the way of demonstrating one's status and power is through violence against civilians, who find themselves involuntarily an inherent part of the war. The ethnic fog covering the conflict makes every civilian a potential opposing belligerent. Furthermore, because of the total mobilization, the chances are that most civilians have a family member involved in a fighting group. This encourages the militias to boast in front of the civilians as well, as the more terror one can spread, the stronger one seems. It may serve to inhibit civilians from wanting to fight one's own militia and it might even persuade them to join one's troops or to obey one's orders to gain protection. However, this strategy has weaknesses. First of all, the militias are ethnic as well. This makes it unlikely for a Luluwa to join a Luba-based militia. Second of all, the villages in eastern Congo are attacked by new rebels, militia and foreign military a regular basis in contested areas. This brings an indifference towards whom it is who attacks, and brings rather a malaise towards to entire conflict.

Even if this strategy does fail, conquering a territory in the sheer military sense of the word has one objective: negotiation positions. The timing of the international interventions can "freeze" conflicts at a specific stage in time. The one who is in power in Kinshasa at the time of the internationally forced truce can stay in power – guaranteed by the UN itself. Even if Kinshasa is unobtainable, being in control of strategic cities, such as Goma, brings one to the negotiation table. This negotiation aim can also explain the civil abuse. If a group can threaten with mass rape, they will get a seat at the table. The ultimate goal, seen from an economic viewpoint, is to be included in the national administration to gain access to national income, corruption and aid. However, this explanation assumes a high degree of organization, discipline and strategizing, which does not correspond with the general picture of the conflict[ix]. So even though these might be the motives of the elite, it is largely the people on the ground who decide the course of the conflict.

## *The Soldiers and the Civilians*

From the perspective of the soldiers, the access to natural resources, land and looting is important, because that is their livelihood, as described earlier. Also, participating in the war is a way for the young men to gain social standing over the elders. Local tensions among civilians also feed into the conflict. The concerns about land that escalated during colonization become a source of conflict because land shortage is a threat to the pastoral livelihood. The conflicts lead to recruitment grounds and tensions that feed to, and were exploited by, the armed groups. The first Congo crisis was preceded by a conflict over land between the agrarian native tribes and the semi-nomadic Tutsi tribes that emigrated from Rwanda. The outbreak of war was caused by the Banyamulenge from the latter group that allied with the Rwandan Patriotic Army to attack native Congolese. The civilian land disputes are therefore in the center of the conflict. However, this still fails to explain the extent of the violence and the constant character of the violence. The wars might be the result of land shortage and lack of conflict resolution mechanism as a result of a breakdown of the traditional social structure and the legitimacy of traditional chiefs. But the war has also moved civilians away from their soil and robbed them of their crops, worsening the problem. So why does it continue?

## *The Political Culture*

As John Keegan explains in his book "The History of Warfare", disproportionality of violence and a bias towards violence as solutions, often reflect a country's history and the culture it has formed. The political culture of the DRC has been a quasi-military struggle for absolute power since the colonial era and through its independence. Because independence took place during the Cold War, the leaders could expect external funding to create a coercive force to oppress opposition and an effective patronage system. Their opponents could then mirror this funding and thus emerged the proxy wars. After the Cold War, the funding was merely replaced by illicit trade, and formed but a continuation of the militarized oppressive form of political control during the colonial era. In the colonial period dominance was asserted violently and with little or no benefits to the civilian population. Upon conquering the territory, the local population was not incentivized to adopt its institutional infrastructure. Thus, the conquering was violent, temporary, and constantly contested. In the colonial era and under Mobutu, the military dominance retained the same primary form of dominance. Politics existed within this military frame. Why and how exactly a militarized political system transforms into civil war remains an unanswered question and is outside the scope of this paper.

However, it contributes to an understanding of the bias towards violence as a means to solve political problems in the

# The Breakdown of Societal Order in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Written by Malene Mortensen

DRC. To distort the words of Clausewitz, this political culture makes politics a war by other means (Ellis 2003: 33)

The following figure sums up the discussion, centered around two axes[x]. This figure shows how the elite motives are more rational, while the motives of the civilians and soldiers are more culturally based. As I have shown in the discussion, the civil war is primarily the interaction between soldiers and civilians; the entire conflict is therefore more driven by culture, than rationality.

## Conclusion

This paper has revolved around an explanation of the persistence and the character of the violence still seen in the DRC. The approach of the explanation is historical and sociological, as I have traced the process of transformation in Congolese society from before colonization till today.

The traditional patrimonialism of the pre-colonial DRC was centered around the extended family and the ethnic group encompassing a network of extended families. This organization was profoundly changed by colonization, as the traditional leaders lost their legitimacy, which depleted the society from conflict-resolution mechanisms. The way of life of most Congolese was and still is agricultural, either herders or pastoralists. When the colonial power took the communally held land, they commoditized the land and created a shortage, which threatened the livelihood of the regular Congolese farmer. Moreover, the Congolese went from having a leader you could depend on to having one that you are oppressed by. All this created tension and friction was expressed in violent oppression by the colonial power. With independence the oppression continued within a neopatrimonial structure, where certain ethnicities were favored, which escalated the conflict. Civil war broke out, and became more sustainable for the involved parties than peacetime was. The interests in violence from the soldiers and the local tensions between civilians help sustain the violence, we are still seeing in Eastern Congo.

An interesting aspect not discussed in this article is the secession issue. In a context of an inefficient state and at the same time a decentralized authority structure it is puzzling that state secession of Katanga for example has not been on the table since the 1960s. It might be that it is simply unnecessary when the state is incapable to an extent, where what happens in Katanga is not regulated or controlled in Kinshasa.

## Bibliography

### *Anthologies*

Ansoms, An and Klara Claessens (2011): Land Relations and Local Livelihoods in the Great Lakes Region IN Ansoms, An and Stefaan Marysse (eds) (2011): *Natural Resources and Local Livelihoods in the great Lakes Region of Africa*. Palgrave Macmillan, London, pp. 3-22.

Bach, Daniel: Patrimonialism and Neopatrimonialism: Comparative Receptions and Transcriptions IN Daniel Bach and Mamoudou Gazibo(eds) (2012): *Neopatrimonialism in Africa and Beyond*, Routledge studies on African politics and international relations, New York.

Bruhns, Hinnerk (2012): Weber's Patrimonial Domination and Its Interpretations IN Daniel Bach and Mamoudou Gazibo(eds) (2012): *Neopatrimonialism in Africa and Beyond*, Routledge studies on African politics and international relations, New York.

Devish, René (2005): The Villagisation of Kinshasa and the Christian Healing Churches as People's Means to Domesticate Rampant Violence IN Kastfelt, Niels (ed) (2005): *Religion and African Civil Wars*, Hurst and Company, London, pp. 102-119

Engel, Ulf and Andreas Mehler (2005): "Under Construction": Governance in Africa's New Violent Social Spaces IN Engel, Ulf and Gorm Rye Olsen (eds)(2005): *The African Exception*. Ashgate Publishing, Hants, pp 87-103.



# The Breakdown of Societal Order in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Written by Malene Mortensen

Geenen, Sara (2011): Local Livelihoods, Global Interests and the State in the Congolese Mining Sector IN Ansoms, An and Stefaan Marysse (eds) (2011): *Natural Resources and Local Livelihoods in the great Lakes Region of Africa*. Palgrave Macmillan, London, pp. 149-164.

Longman, Timothy (2005): Churches and Social Upheaval in Rwanda and Burundi: Explaining Failures to Oppose Ethnic Violence IN Kastfelt, Niels (ed) (2005): *Religion and African Civil Wars*, Hurst and Company, London, pp. 82-102

Ona, Innocent Utshudi and An Ansoms (2011): Reconciling Custom, State and Local Livelihoods: decentralized Land Management in South Kivu (DRC) IN Ansoms, An and Stefaan Marysse (eds) (2011): *Natural Resources and Local Livelihoods in the great Lakes Region of Africa*. Palgrave Macmillan, London, pp. 26-47.

Scheper- Hughes, Nancy and Philippe Bourgois: Introduction: Making Sense of Violence IN Scheper-Hughes, Nancy and Philippe Bourgois(eds) (2004): *Violence in War and Peace: An Anthology*. Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, pp. 1-28

van de Walle, Nicolas (2005): The Donor and the State in Africa: How Much has Changed? IN Engel, Ulf and Gorm Rye Olsen (eds)(2005): *The African Exception*. Ashgate Publishing, Hants, pp 69-87.

## Articles

Adelman, Kenneth Lee (1975): The Church-State Conflict in Zaire: 1969-1974 IN *African Studies Review*, vol 18, no 1 (April 1975), pp 102-116.

Lewis, Peter M. (1996): From Prebendalism to Predation: The Political Economy of Decline in Nigeria IN *Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol 34, no 1 (March 1996), pp 79-103.

Beneduce, Roberto et al (2006): Violence with a purpose: exploring the functions and meaning of violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo IN *Intervention* 2006, vol 4, no 1, pp. 32-46.

Clark, Phil (2007): In the Shadow of the Volcano – Democracy and Justice in Congo IN *Dissent* (Winter 2007), pp 29-35.

Ellis, Stephen (2003): The Old Roots of Africa's New Wars IN *International Politics and Society*, vol 2 (2003), pp 29-43.

Emizet, Kisangani N (1999): Political Cleavages in a Democratizing Society: The Case of the Congo (Formerly Zaire) IN *Comparative Political Studies* 1999, no 32, pp 185-228

Maquet, Jacques J. (1949): The Modern Evolution of African Populations in the Belgian Congo IN *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, vol 19, no 4 (October 1949), pp. 265-272.

Merriam, Alan P. et al (1959): The Concept of Culture Clusters Applied to Belgian Congo IN *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, vol 15, no 4 (Winter 1959), pp. 373-395

Oroguin, Paul S. (2002): Crisis of Government, Ethnic Schisms, Civil War, and Regional Destabilization of the Democratic Republic of Congo IN *World Affairs*, vol 165, no 1 (Summer 2002), pp. 25-41

Weiss, Herbert F. and Tatiana Carayannis (2004): Reconstructing the Congo IN *Journal of International Affairs*, vol 58, no 1, (Fall 2004), pp. 115-141

Wrong, Michela (2000): The Emperor Mobutu IN *Transition* no 81/82 (2000), pp. 92-112.

# **The Breakdown of Societal Order in the Democratic Republic of Congo**

Written by Malene Mortensen

## *Books*

Clausewitz, Carl von (2007): *On War*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 1-281

Hochschild, Adam (1998): *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa*. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, pp.61-140

Keen, David (1998): *The economic functions of violence in civil wars*. Oxford University Press, London.

Gondola, Didier (2002): *The History of Congo*. Greenwood Press, Westport, pp. 1-183.

Mukenge, Tshilemalema (2002): *Culture and Customs of the Congo*. Greenwood Press, Westport, pp 1-185.

Pilisuk, Marc (2008): *Who benefits from global violence and war: Uncovering a destructive system*. Praeger Security International, Westport. Pp. 95-130, 199-227.

Prunier, Gérard (2009): *Africa's World War*. Oxford University Press, New York

Roosens, Eugeen E ( 1989) *Creating Ethnicity: The Process of Ethnogenesis*. Sage Publications, Newbury Park, pp 117-127.

Stanard, Matthew G. (2011): *Selling the Congo: A History of European Pro-Empire Propaganda and the Making of Belgian Imperialism*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, pp 27-47.

Stearns, Jason (2011): *Dancing in the Glory of Monsters: The Collapse of the Congo and the Great War of Africa*. Public Affairs, New York.

Young, Crawford (1965): *Politics in the Congo: Decoloniation and Independence*. Princeton University Press, Richmond, pp 140-204.

Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: *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*, April 12, 2001.  
<http://www.un.org/News/dh/latest/drcongo.htm>, last retrieved May 2013.

Zaire: *The Durability of the Patrimonial State*. [www.country-data.com/cgi-bin/query/r-15005.html](http://www.country-data.com/cgi-bin/query/r-15005.html), last retrieved May 2013.

Gettleman, Jeffrey: *The World's Worst War* IN *New York Times Sunday Review*, December 15, 2012.

## *Internet sources*

[http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/16/sunday-review/congos-never-ending-war.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/16/sunday-review/congos-never-ending-war.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0), last retrieved May 2013.

Autesserre, Severine: *The Only Way to Help Congo*. IN *New York Times Opinion pages*, June 22, 2012.  
[http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/23/opinion/the-only-way-to-help-congo.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/23/opinion/the-only-way-to-help-congo.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0), last retrieved May 2013.

Weiner, Tim: *America's Ally Mobutu Thrives On Corruption As His Nation Crumbles*, at *Philly.com*, October 30, 1991: [http://articles.philly.com/1991-10-30/news/25812893\\_1\\_president-mobutu-sese-seko-zaire-kinshasa-last-week](http://articles.philly.com/1991-10-30/news/25812893_1_president-mobutu-sese-seko-zaire-kinshasa-last-week), last retrieved May 2013.

# The Breakdown of Societal Order in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Written by Malene Mortensen

[i] Jeffrey Gettleman for New York Times 2012: [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/16/sunday-review/congos-never-ending-war.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/16/sunday-review/congos-never-ending-war.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0).

[ii] I refer to The Democratic Republic of Congo[DRC] as the territory that it signifies today throughout the paper regardless of the historical context in order to avoid any confusions.

[iii] Tim Weiner for Philly.com 1991: [http://articles.philly.com/1991-10-30/news/25812893\\_1\\_\\_president-mobutu-sese-seko-zaire-kinshasa-last-week](http://articles.philly.com/1991-10-30/news/25812893_1__president-mobutu-sese-seko-zaire-kinshasa-last-week)

[iv] <http://www.un.org/News/dh/latest/drcongo.htm>, table 2 and table 5

[v] <http://www.un.org/News/dh/latest/drcongo.htm>.

[vi] *ibid*

[vii] <http://www.un.org/News/dh/latest/drcongo.htm>.

[viii] *ibid*

[ix] Autesserre in New York Times 2012: [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/23/opinion/the-only-way-to-help-congo.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/23/opinion/the-only-way-to-help-congo.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0)

— *Written by: Malene Mortensen*  
*Written at: University of Copenhagen*  
*Written for: Vivek Sharma*  
*Date written: June 2013*