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Intra-State Violence in DR Congo and Human Security – Perspectives from International Relations

Abstract

The aftermath of the Cold War was marked by the shift from inter-state wars to intra-state ones and brought along new issues for international security studies, and for international relations in general. The 1990s were marked by an increase in intra-state armed conflicts and ethno-political strife, but it also witnessed innovations and developments on the field of humanitarian action. Africa represents the illustrative region for the salience of intra-state violence, humanitarian emergencies, proliferation of insurgent armed groups and civilian insecurity. This article presents the complexities of large-scale violence in DR Congo. Also, it shows that the wars in DRC were new types of warfare and explores the intrinsic relation between violent civil wars and human security.

Keywords: Intra-state Violence, New War, Human Security, Societal Security, DR Congo, International Relations, Security Studies

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A Introduction and Structure of the Article

The intra-state violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo displayed enormous human suffering, displacement, and death caused by widespread disease. The Congo wars represented one of the most dramatic humanitarian disasters. The main objectives of this paper are: 1) to analyze characteristics of new forms of civil wars and intra-state violence (and their threats to human security), by correlating them to the DR Congo case-study; 2) to explain the sources of insecurity in the Democratic Republic of Congo during the three Congo wars and the need to shift the understanding of in/security from national to societal and human security. The article is structured in three sections. The first section will explore the dynamics and complexities of the Congo wars during the period 1994-2005. Also, it will stress features of internal violence in DR Congo that pertain to what scholars call "new wars". The second section will briefly present the "widening and deepening debate" on security after the Cold War and will select key tenets of constructivist and critical security studies, as well as the conceptual core of human security,

which can best be correlated to the Congo case study. Finally, the last part will problematize in/security in DR Congo and will explore the potential of certain non-traditional security studies in explaining intra-state violence in DRC.

B Intra-State Violence in DR Congo and Human Insecurity: Between Humanitarian Disaster and New War Scenario

The violent conflict in former Zaire/Democratic Republic of the Congo¹ was one of the most protracted in the post Second World War history. It produced huge displacement and refugee crises and was one of the most tragic humanitarian disasters. The intra-state violence in DR Congo actually comprised three different civil wars, which we will briefly and chronologically present in this section. The huge refugee crises (especially what has become known as the Great Lakes crisis) inflicted suffering on large number of individuals, who were not only living in every-day-life fear and terror, but were also decimated by widespread disease. According to the EU Security and Defence core documents, the violence in DR Congo “reached nearly continental dimensions” and “millions of people died, the whole Great Lakes region was set aflame, decades of development were destroyed and

¹ In this article we will refer to Zaire when we discuss the First Congo War, namely until the removal of Mobutu Sese Seko, and to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (henceforth DR Congo or DRC) when we present the events after 1997.

unaccounted suffering, misery and turmoil was brought upon entire populations”.²

1 Contextualization and Prelude to Congo’s Civil Wars

Zaire had been ruled by Mobutu Sese Seko ever since 1965. From 1965 to 1997, the regime of Mobutu introduced a one-party system, by concentrating state power in Mobutu’s MPR (Mouvement Populaire de la Révolution/Popular Movement of the Revolution), and was characterized by gross human rights abuses and state “kleptocracy” scandals which turned “Zaire into a byword for corruption”.³ According to a 1992 World Bank Report, “64.7 percent of Zaire’s budget was reserved for Mobutu’s discretionary spending”.⁴ Mobutu managed to maintain control over the entire population, by weakening any attempt of separatism and by employing a divide and rule strategy, which implied *inter alia* the transformation of military organizations into his own “private armies”.⁵ During the Cold War period Mobutu sheltered insurgent movements fighting against their government (like FNLA/National Front for the Liberation of Angola or UNITA/Union for the Total Independence of Angola) and allowed Zaire to be used as training ground. He was also

² EU Security and Defence. Core documents, Vol. VII (compiled by Catherine Glière), Institute for Security Studies, European Union, Paris, 2006, 115.

³ Guy Arnold, *Historical Dictionary of Civil Wars in Africa*, The Scarecrow Press, 2008, 236.

⁴ 1992 World Development Report, quoted in: William Reno, *Warlord Politics and African States*, Boulder, London, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998, 153.

⁵ William Reno, *Warlord Politics and African States*, Boulder, London, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998, 160-161.

in good relations with the Hutu-dominated regime from Rwanda and insurrections movements have operated for years out of the Congolese territory against the Museveni-led Uganda.⁶ It is against this background that during the First Congo War “Angola, Uganda and Rwanda coalesced around a common goal – to cripple the insurgency movements challenging their governments from bases in the Congo”.⁷ Due to his anti-communist stand, Mobutu received support from the United States and France⁸ and the widespread Congolese conflict in the post-Cold War period can also “be seen as a direct casualty of the demise of protection provided by the superpowers”.⁹ By the early 1990s the impoverished Congolese society was characterized by mounting animosity against Mobutu and internationally the latter was running out of supporters.

2 The First Congo War

One major cause of the First Congo War¹⁰ was represented by the spill-over effects of the conflict and genocide in Rwanda. When the Tutsi-led Rwandan

⁶ Tatiana Carayannis/Herbert F. Weiss, *The Democratic Republic of the Congo, 1996-2002*, in: Jane Boulden (ed.), *Dealing with Conflict in Africa: The United Nations and Regional Organizations*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, 259-260. See also Nir Kalron, *The Great Lakes of Confusion*, *African Security Review*, 19:2, 2010, 27.

⁷ Carayannis/Weiss, 2003, 260.

⁸ Arnold, 2008, 235.

⁹ Phoebe N. Okowa, *Congo's War: the Legal Dimension of a Protracted Conflict*, *British Yearbook of International Law*, 77, 2007, 207.

¹⁰ Even though the name of the country is still Zaire, most of the authors refer retrospectively to the First Congo War, lasting from 1996 to 1997, or to the first phase of the First African Continental War. See inter alia Carayannis/Weiss, 2003.

Patriotic Front (RPF) defeated the Hutu government in July 1994, a huge refugee flow comprising approximately one million Hutu streamed into eastern Zaire (especially into the two Kivu provinces). Amongst the refugee camps were also the *génocidaires*, members of FAR (Forces Armées Rwandaises/Rwandan Armed Forces) and Interahamwe (Hutu extremists). The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) set up refugee camps in eastern Zaire, but could not prevent or dissuade “the reestablishment [...] of the political and military structures and leadership that were responsible for the genocide in Rwanda”, leading to a situation wherein

“The camps soon replicated the highly organized, hierarchical, and disciplined Rwandan Hutu political and military systems under the *génocidaires*, so that camp residents were led by the same communal authorities they had lived under when in Rwanda. These camps were subsequently used as staging grounds from which these Interahamwe/ex-FAR regrouped and launched offensives against the new Tutsi-dominated government in Rwanda.”¹¹

The huge exodus was soon followed by a cholera epidemic which received ample media coverage and produced major human losses (between 20,000 and 50,000) among the camp residents.¹² The events immediately led to the destabilization of eastern Zaire and the crisis had two major dimensions.

On the one hand, it indicated how refugees become “resources of war” and how the Rwandan “genocide

¹¹ Carayannis/Weiss, 2003, 257.

¹² Ibid.

organizers and killers blended into the refugee camps” and exploited the crisis in order to attract humanitarian aid.¹³ Also, it showed how in this case the refugee crisis was intertwined with refugee manipulation and “refugee militarization”. According to the UNHCR reports, this episode was illustrative for “the changing nature of conflict, with internal and regional wars generating cross-border movements of mixed groups, including military elements” and for how militarized camps raised a huge threat to refugee insecurity.¹⁴

On the other hand, the crisis had negative repercussions on the human insecurity of ethnic-Tutsis (Banyamulenge) living in eastern Zaire. The Banyamulenge had been living in the eastern part of Congo for a long time,¹⁵ but they had become dissatisfied with Mobutu’s policy of divide and rule and with the government’s decision in 1981 to deprive them of Zairean citizenship.¹⁶ The result was their rebellion in 1996. Since the post-genocide Rwandan leaders perceived the refugee camps as major threat, there was soon a coalescence of interests between them and the Banyamulenge.

The First Congo War broke out and displayed the following belligerents and phases. Zaire accused Rwanda of arming and backing up the rebels in the Kivus, while Rwanda accused Mobutu of sheltering the Hutu

¹³ Stephen John Stedman/Fred Tanner, *Refugees as Resources in War*, in: Stephen John Stedman/Fred Tanner (eds.), *Refugee Manipulation. War, Politics, and the Abuse of Human Suffering*, Brookings Institution Press, 2003, 2-3.

¹⁴ UNHCR, *The Security, Civilian and Humanitarian Character of Refugee Camps and Settlements: Operationalizing the “Ladder of Options”*, Doc. EC/50/SC/INF.4, 27 June 2000. Available at <http://www.refworld.org/docid/4a54bc040.html>.

¹⁵ According to the estimations the Banyamulenge had been inhabiting the area for 200 years and their number ranges 25,000 to 400,000. See Carayannis/Weiss, 2003, 258.

¹⁶ Arnold, 2008, 414.

extremists. Local authorities in north Kivu have been resorting to a “quasi-ethnic cleansing campaign”¹⁷ ever since 1993 and in 1996 the Banyamulenge were told they had to leave Zaire or be “exterminated and expelled”.¹⁸ This led to another exodus of people, but one armed group among them (trained and armed by the RPF) started to fight the FAZ (Forces Armées Zairoises/Zairean Armed Forces) and the Hutu militia. Uganda invoked reasons similar to Rwanda’s and joined the latter in the military effort.

Both parties to the conflict invoked security reasons. On the one hand, Zaire accused its neighbours, Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi, of destabilizing its eastern territory (over which it actually had no control) and received military help from the Interahamwe/ex-FAR operating out of the refugee camps. On the other hand, Rwanda and Uganda accused Zaire of protecting the génocidaires and of backing up insurrection movements operating against their governments from eastern Zaire. It never turned into an inter-state war, though it was on the verge to become one. Mobutu accused its neighbours of foreign invasion, while his opposing party tried to show that it was a Congolese action against its government (even though there were many outside troops operating). An indicator to the growing antipathy towards Mobutu was the international reaction, since the United Nations (UN) and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) did not “condemn the invading forces” and “Western press [...] from the start of the war referred to it as a civil war or rebellion”.¹⁹

¹⁷ Carayannis/Weiss, 2003, 258.

¹⁸ Arnold, 2008, 414.

¹⁹ Carayannis/Weiss, 2003, 261.

The FAZ soldiers started to act in disarray and flee the area²⁰ while the anti-Zairean government rebellion gradually seized control and started moving towards Kinshasa. The locally ignited rebellion turned into an extended anti-Mobutu revolution. Laurent-Désiré Kabila, a long-time opponent of Mobutu, emerged as the leader of the rebels and four dissident groups galvanized into the AFDL (Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Congo/Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire). The rebels gained control over Shaba (the mineral-rich province in south-eastern DRC) and later moved closer and closer to the capital Kinshasa. The last phase occurred in May 1997 when Mobutu's regime collapsed.²¹

The First Congo War displayed enormous human suffering, rampage, massacre, and retaliation against the opponent's civilians. We will show how these are features pertaining to dynamics of the new wars later and we will try to exemplify them in all three Congo wars. During the First Congo War, the providers of insecurity were both regular military troops and the irregulars. Mobutu's army retreated, but resorted to looting, raping and massacre. Atrocities were committed by local militias, be it the Hutu extremists (ex-FAR/Interahamwe) against the Congolese Tutsi, or the rebels against Hutu and other "alleged" opponents, military or civilian. Acts of violence were also committed by Serbian mercenaries and UNITA rebel troops, both supporting Mobutu's army.²² The referents of insecurity were individuals, many times civilians. Many of them died of widespread disease in the camps, others because of looting and killing, many people were internally

²⁰ Arnold, 2008, 414.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Carayannis/Weiss, 2003, 261.

displaced. All in all, mounting violence and systematic attacks became the indicator for endemic insecurity.

3 The Second Congo War

Kabila assumed power and emerged as the new leader of DRC responsible for ousting Mobutu. In order to stress the departure from the latter's era, he renamed the country the Democratic Republic of Congo. For a brief period of time he produced satisfaction among the Congolese. Very soon, though, his authoritarian rule became conspicuous: he "rejected all power-sharing arrangements with the numerous political parties that had been established during the last few years of the Mobutu regime, prohibited all party activity, and refused to cooperate with NGOs".²³

Kabila's takeover of power was in fact due to the Banyamulenge/Congolese Tutsis' support and to the assistance of Rwandan and Ugandan armies.²⁴ It also benefited from tacit approval of the international community, since it was the anti-Mobutu struggle that prevailed in international perception, and not Laurent-Désiré Kabila legitimacy per se. Very soon, though, he managed to antagonize all.

According to Human Rights Watch, Kabila's AFDL "carried out massive killings of civilian refugees and other violations of basic principles of international humanitarian law during attacks on refugee camps in the former Zaire".²⁵ The UN and the Western donors tried to set out a full investigation of massacres, but Kabila "repeatedly denied them access to suspected massacre sites in Goma

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Arnold, 2008, 98.

²⁵ Human Rights Watch Report, What Kabila is Hiding. Civilian Killings and Impunity in Congo, 1997. Available at <http://www.hrw.org/en/reports/1997/10/01/>.

and elsewhere”.²⁶ Therefore, Kabila’s relations with the UN became strenuous. At the same time, he faced domestic dissatisfaction, as well as former supporters’ (foreign and internal) discontent. Since his rebellion was dependent on the Banyamulenge and the armies of Rwanda and Uganda, “there was a reaction against these allies in Kinshasa and, in particular, resentment at the Tutsi”²⁷ and consequently things escalated. Kabila removed Tutsis “from top positions in the military” and the Banyamulenge started to retreat to South Kivu.²⁸ Rwanda understood the misachievements of Kabila, perceiving his fostering of anti-Tutsi feelings and his inability to end “the problem of border insecurity by neutralizing the insurgency groups threatening Uganda, Rwanda, and Angola from the Congo”.²⁹ A mutiny within ADFL ensued and the break-away RCD forces (Rassemblement Congolaise pour la Démocratie/Rally for Congolese Democracy) started fighting against the Kabila government. It was the beginning of the Second Congo War, also called Africa’s Great War or the second phase of the First African Continental War.

The Second Congo War was characterized by a fragmentation of military troops, emergence of other groups, and shifts in alliances. Some former Mobutists and some former FAZ troops joined the rebels while Angola changed sides and joined Namibia and Zimbabwe in their support for Kabila. Another rebel group (MLC/Movement for the Liberation of the Congo) emerged while the Mai Mai resistance fighters³⁰ received the support of Kabila’s government. By 1999 there was intense fighting in eastern

²⁶ Carayannis/Weiss, 2003, 268.

²⁷ Arnold, 2008, 98.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Carayannis/Weiss, 2003, 270.

³⁰ The Mai Mai were armed Congolese groups fighting against the RCD and against Rwandan and Ugandan troops.

Congo³¹ and “anti-Kabila rebels who were caught were massacred [...] and a real pogrom against all Tutsi took hold”.³² The dynamic of the civil war showed further complexities. The RCD split into two factions due to divergent views: the RCD-ML (Mouvement de Libération) was backed by Uganda and the RCD-Goma was supported by Rwanda.³³ By 2000 the Rwandan and Ugandan forces were fighting among themselves and Kabila’s government had no control over Congolese territory (with the exception of the western part).³⁴

Urged by the international community and backed by UN resolutions, the Lusaka process was undertaken by the Southern African Development Community (SADC). The Lusaka process “involved the three major Congolese groups in the conflict, namely the government, the RCD and the [...] MLC, as well as their respective supporters, namely Namibia, Zimbabwe and Angola (governments) and Rwanda and Uganda (rebel groups)”³⁵ and resulted in the Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement. Also, it “called for the deployment of a Chapter VII UN peacekeeping operation in the DRC”.³⁶ The latter was materialized in MONUC (United Nations Mission in the Congo) which arrived in DRC in late 1999.

In January 2001 Laurent Kabila was assassinated by a member of his presidential guard and his son, Joseph Kabila, took over. The latter showed much more flexibility than his father³⁷ and immediately received recognition

³¹ Arnold, 2008, 98.

³² Carayannis/Weiss, 2003, 271.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Arnold, 2008, 100.

³⁵ Sadiki Koko, MONUC and the quest for peace in the Democratic Republic of Congo: assessment of a peacekeeping mission, *African Security Review*, 20:2, 32.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Arnold, 2008, 102.

because of firm actions undertaken to end the violence. Joseph Kabila opened the dialogue with leaders of major Western states and with UN Secretary-General. He was visited by World Bank and International Monetary Fund delegations (thus facilitating aid), replaced military tribunals with commercial courts, and assured Rwanda that “he would disown the Interahamwe on DRC soil”.³⁸ Notwithstanding the positive developments, fighting continued in the eastern part and in April 2001 “six workers with the International Committee of the Red Cross were killed by armed groups near Bunia”³⁹ signalling another tragic phase of the war.

A report released by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) in 2001 estimated that “2.5 million excess deaths have occurred during the 32-month period beginning in August 1998 and ending in March 2001” and showed that the overwhelming majority of deaths were caused by disease and malnutrition.⁴⁰ The report further indicated that

“The ongoing fighting has driven hundreds of thousands of people into forests, jungles and other remote areas, where they have no food, medicine or shelter. Health care systems in the region have been decimated. War-affected areas have been largely inaccessible to aid organizations because of the insecurity.”⁴¹

The Second Congo War displayed similar features to the first one in terms of violence, massacres and

³⁸

Ibid.

³⁹

Carayannis/Weiss, 2003, 282.

⁴⁰

International Rescue Committee Report, Mortality in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, 2001, 3.

⁴¹

Ibid.

looting, and suffering of civilians. The conflict's dynamic pertained to an internal and internationalized war wherein societal and human insecurity prevailed.

4 The Third Congo War

Large-scale violence continued and the Third Congo War was complicated by the eruption of fighting between tribal groups in the northeast area. The Ugandans supported the local Lundu agriculturalists and backed their militias while Rwanda provided support for the cattle-herding Hema.⁴² Clashes between the local militias led to immense human losses. According to Human Rights Watch reports the massacres in Ituri caused 50,000 deaths and 500,000 refugees in 2003, and according to IRC most of the deaths were a result of generalized violence, lack of medical facilities, food insecurity, due to "the disruption of the country's health services and food supplies".⁴³ The prevailing and tragic characteristic is that "the vast majority of deaths have been among civilians and have been due to easily preventable and treatable illnesses".⁴⁴

UN troops found it difficult to maintain order in DRC, because "groups of fighters, some consisting of pre-teen child soldiers, had become accustomed to a lawless life and exacting taxes from the local population".⁴⁵ In 2005, the UN force turned from peacekeeping seekers to providers of insecurity, when "a number of them were accused of rape and sexual abuse of children" and when

⁴² Arnold, 2008, 106.

⁴³ International Rescue Committee Report, Mortality in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, 2004, iii-iv.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Arnold, 2008, 108.

“some 60 cases of abuse involving rape, paedophilia, and prostitution had been raised”.⁴⁶

5 Intra-State Violence and “New War” Features in DR Congo

Over the last twenty years, the scholarly field has witnessed a vivid and refined debate regarding the transformation of warfare.⁴⁷ The underlying observation of such research indicates that in the post-Second World War period the conventional, Clausewitzian model of *inter-state war*⁴⁸ has been gradually replaced by various scenarios pertaining to *intra-state wars (violence)*. Despite regional peculiarities, the recent armed conflicts share traits which amount to certain structural characteristics. Such traits point to: asymmetry of warring forces/belligerents, the gradual privatization of (armed) violence, deviation from the codified rules of war, namely for the *jus in bello* (as accurately described within the Geneva Conventions), and the use of force, in its utmost brutal manner, against civilians, rather than against the

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001; Herfried Münkler, *The New Wars*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005; Michael Ignatieff, *The Warrior's Honor. Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience*, New York, 1997; Martin van Creveld, *The Transformation of War*, New York, 1991; Dietrich/Schlichte, *From Inter-State War to Warlordism: Changing Forms of Collective Violence in the International System*, in: Håkan Wiberg/Christian P. Scherrer (eds.), *Ethnicity and Intra-State Conflict*, Brookfield USA: Ashgate, 1999, 35-51; Mark Duffield, *Global Governance and the New Wars. The Merging of Development and Security*, London and New York: Zed Books, 2001.

⁴⁸ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, Princeton University Press, 1989.

enemy's military troops. Mary Kaldor's thesis on the new wars is that the new type of warfare emerging at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s was interlinked with globalization. Kaldor uses the term war to emphasize its political nature but explains that new wars scenarios make it difficult to distinguish between organized crime, gross human rights violations and war.⁴⁹ Herfried Münkler's thesis on the new wars is centred on the observation that some states seem to lose their *de facto* monopoly on the use of organized violence. Münkler examined several developments: the "de-statization" or privatization of military force, the asymmetry of military force, the autonomization of forms of violence, and the increasing brutality of the new wars.⁵⁰

The wars in DRC displayed most features of the new wars. Former Zaire/RDC was a weak state, completely unable to retain monopoly on the use of organized violence or to control its entire territory. Many armed groups and local militias had free rein in the east part and at some point they also controlled the northeast and south east areas. Moreover, they gained autonomy and resorted to atrocities. The distinction between combatants and civilians was blurred (indicating another feature of Münkler's new type of warfare). The locus of belligerence moved from the military sector to the societal one, thus also pinpointing to the need to reconceptualise security. Most attacks were carried out systematically and deliberately against groups of individuals, without discrimination between civilians and members of the militias. Child-soldiering was present and violence against women was prevailing systematically. Looting, raping, and killing was the bulk of the fighting and on several occasions civilians were used as human shields.

⁴⁹ Kaldor, 2001.

⁵⁰ Münkler, 2005, 1-4.

C Non-Traditional Security Studies and Human Security

The discipline of International Relations (IR) has, ever since its inception, been centred on opposing understandings of security. Basically, different IR theories offer a wide array of answers to salient questions such as: who is the key actor of security? (or who should provide security?); which are the objects (namely the referents) of security?; how is security best attained? The realm of security studies could be roughly subdivided into traditional, military and state-centric views, on the one hand, and non-traditional approaches, on the other hand.

Gunhild Hoogensen Gjørsv identified some leading conceptions of security within the field of International Relations (IR) and distinguished between 1) “those stating that the concept can only be employed by the state with regard to immediate, existential threats”, and 2) “those that see security as the foundation of social life or as a human good”.⁵¹ Barry Buzan and Lene Hansen focused on the disciplinary boundaries of International Security Studies to see “where ISS ends and other academic disciplines, particularly IR, begin” and underlined that “[t]he boundary between ISS and IR is difficult to draw”.⁵²

In their master work *The Evolution of International Security Studies*, Buzan and Hansen formulated four pivotal questions that constitute the pillars of ISS: 1)

⁵¹ See Gunhild Hoogensen Gjørsv, *Security by any other name: negative security, positive security, and a multi-actor security approach*, *Review of International Studies*, October 2012, 38:4, 835-839.

⁵² Barry Buzan/Lene Hansen, *The Evolution of International Security Studies*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, 16.

“Whose security should be protected and studied?” or “whether to privilege the state as the referent object”; 2) “Should the military be considered the primary sector of security?” or, in other words, “whether to expand security beyond the military sector and the use of force”; 3) “Should security be concerned exclusively with external threats or also with domestic ones?”; and 4) “Is the only form of security politics one of threats, dangers and emergency?”⁵³ These questions helped to structure debates within ISS since the late 1940s⁵⁴ and were framed departing from four key elements: the referent object of security, the location of threats, the security sector, and the view of security politics.

Traditional Security Studies are often equated with Strategic Studies developed during the Cold War. The latter have strong connections with Realism and Neo-realism in IR. The traditionalist perspective is based on state-centrism, materialism, and the use of force which refers to the use of military force by states and implies the prevalence of military threats that states are confronted with.⁵⁵ Therefore, in Realist Strategic Studies the concept of security defines the “state as the referent object, the use of force as the central concern, external threats as the primary ones, the politics of security as engagement with radical dangers and the adoption of emergency measures”.⁵⁶ Realist Strategic Studies employ a positivist and rationalist epistemology.

The Realist postulates have been dominating the field of Security Studies throughout time and especially during the Cold War, when national security became the centrepiece of concern. The realist account on national security entailed the materialist-loaded conception of

⁵³ Ibid., 10-13, 21.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 10.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 16.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 21.

states' ability to maximize the military capabilities in order to address security issues.

The Neorealist understanding of an international system governed by anarchy implied an international order wherein security from outside threats (due to the ubiquity of conflict/violence/attack) was the essence of rational thinking. The international anarchical condition turned statism and self-help into overriding principles. Such thinking cum decision-making was designed to protect the state and maximize its power. Herein power was exclusively and overwhelmingly centred on military capacity.

It has often been argued that the poverty of Realism does not capture a complex dynamic of violence (as is the case with most African new wars) wherein weak states are confronted with internal fragmentation and proliferation of militias, civil war, the spill-over effects of conflicts in neighbouring states, and the incapacity to protect citizens who become tragic victims of humanitarian disasters. The reductionist worldview of Neo-realism includes, firstly, the isomorphism and the unitary state-centric approach, which solely aims at state's defence. Here, security is understood as freedom from threat and rules out the freedom to (meaning the enabling attribute of freedom). The groups' and the individuals' security is not primarily addressed since the state is the political unit of concern and the provider of internal security. Secondly, there has been an extensive focus on the reductionist materialist dimension built on a security-weaponry-military strength dimension which rules out other types of threats (and consequently neglects ontological security), and thirdly on the understanding of negative security with its primary concern for use of force in order to attain desecuritization.

Many attempts have been made to counterweigh the realist ontology and there is a valuable "literature in security studies that moves away from neorealist

formulations in directions that could be called ‘critical’ or ‘constructivist’.⁵⁷ Such alternative theorizing includes a diverse range of sub-views, but overall they all focus on certain key ideas. Barry Buzan and Lene Hansen traced the growth and evolution of the “widening-deepening side of ISS” and explored the non-traditional branches of Security Studies, categorized as follows: Constructivist Security Studies (further sub-divided into Conventional and Critical), The Copenhagen School of Security Studies, Critical Security Studies, Feminist Security Studies, Post-colonial Security Studies, Poststructuralist Security Studies, and Human Security.⁵⁸

There are several basic claims that Constructivist Security Studies, Critical Security Studies and the Copenhagen School of Security Studies share. Firstly, “that ‘security’ is not an objective condition”, secondly, “that threats to it are not simply a matter of correctly perceiving a constellation of material forces”, and thirdly, “that the object of security is not stable or unchanging”.⁵⁹ Therefore, central to these approaches are questions such as “how the object to be secured (nation, state, or other group) is constituted, - and how particular issues (economic well-being, the risk of violence, environmental degradation) are placed under the ‘sign of security’”.⁶⁰

The Copenhagen School scholars theorized the binary concepts securitization and desecuritization and analyzed security as a speech act. Securitization is the process of making an issue a ‘security’ issue. The securitization process transfers issues from ‘normal’

⁵⁷ Keith Krause/Michael C. Williams, *Broadening the Agenda of Security Studies: Politics and Methods*, in: Barry Buzan; Lene Hansen (eds.), *International Security* (Vol. III, *Widening Security*), London: Sage Publications, 2007, 150.

⁵⁸ Buzan/Hansen, 2009, 35-38, 187-225.

⁵⁹ Krause/Williams, 2007, 151.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

(accountable/democratic) politics to 'emergency' politics. Therefore, securitization refers to the following core feature of security: "The way in which threats are discursively tackled and presented".⁶¹ The concept entails the construction of threats following a "grammar of security" (in Barry Buzan's terms) which indicates "an existential threat, a point of no return, and a possible way out".⁶² The essence of the securitization idea is that no issue is a threat per se, but that "anything could be constructed as one".⁶³ The twin concept desecuritization focuses on "moving out of security"⁶⁴ or "the shifting of issues out of emergency mode and into the normal bargaining process of the political sphere"; Barry Buzan argues that this is the "optimal long-range solution".⁶⁵ As Huysmans observed, "the speech act of security draws upon a historically constituted and socially institutionalized set of meanings".⁶⁶

Many constructivist approaches on security are essentially preoccupied with human security.⁶⁷ Also, critical security studies, feminist security studies and human security share certain concerns and both challenged the narrow neorealist scholarship, and most

⁶¹ Jonathan Bright, Securitization, terror, and control: towards a theory of the breaking point, *Review of International Studies*, October 2012, 38:4, 863.

⁶² Barry Buzan/Ole Waever/Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1998, 33.

⁶³ Bright, 2012, 866.

⁶⁴ Lene Hansen, Reconstructing desecuritization: the normative-political in the Copenhagen School and directions for how to apply it, *Review of International Studies*, July 2012, 38:3, 526.

⁶⁵ Buzan/Waever/de Wilde, 1998, 4, 29.

⁶⁶ Jef Huysmans, *The Politics of Insecurity. Fear, Migration and Asylum in the EU*, London and New York: Routledge, 2006, 25.

⁶⁷ See details in Edward Newman, *Human Security and Constructivism*, *International Studies Perspectives*, United Nations University, 2, 2001.

specifically “the state-centric orthodoxy of conventional international security, based upon military defence of territory against ‘external’ threats”.⁶⁸ One constructivist approach on security shall be explored since it provides a useful understanding of the complexities in DRC. Jennifer Mitzen showed that the realist survival (understood in terms of physical survival) led to people’s tendency to think “about security monolithically, as physical security, or security of the body” but she emphasized that “there is another fundamental form of security, ontological security, or security of one’s identity”.⁶⁹ For Mitzen, then,

Ontological insecurity is the deep, incapacitating fear of not being able to get by in the world, not knowing which dangers actively to ward off [...]. When you are ontologically insecure, all your energy gets bound up in immediate need-meeting, because you cannot organize your threat environment.⁷⁰

At individual level, traumatic daily experiences in an armed conflict environment or in war-torn society lead to the individuals’ perpetual anxiety and their inability to go back to who they were before the dreadful events that marked their selves, be it their physical well-being, be it their knowledge about who they are. African humanitarian disasters such as DR Congo showed that a large number of individuals lived in a paralyzing fear and were not only

⁶⁸ Edward Newman, *Critical human security studies*, *Review of International Studies*, 36, 2010.

⁶⁹ Jennifer Mitzen, *Ontological Security in World Politics and Implications for the Study of European Security*, paper prepared for the CIDEL Workshop, Oslo, 22-23 October 2004, 2.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

unable to protect themselves physically, but also incapacitated to control the threat environment and to acknowledge whether they were targets, victims, security referents, or waves of refugees creating a security issue.

According to Mitzen, the opposite of ontological insecurity (and inability to control the threat environment) is ontological security which

is the condition that obtains when an actor feels he has reliable knowledge, even if probabilistic, about the means-ends relations that govern his social life. Armed with ontological security, the actor knows how to act and therefore how to be himself. Ontological security is the platform of agency.⁷¹

The concept of human security emerged in the mid 1990s. In 1994, The United Nations Development Program, through its Human Development Report, established as chief theme the shift “from nuclear security to human security”, or to “the basic concept of human security”, defined as safety from “such chronic threats as hunger, disease and repression” and “protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions”,⁷² A year later, the International Commission on Global Governance was the exponent of vertically extended security⁷³ and stated that “global security must be broadened from its traditional

⁷¹ Jennifer Mitzen, *Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma*, *European Journal of International Relations*, September 2006:12, 341-370.

⁷² *Human Development Report 1994*, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994, 3, 22-23.

⁷³ Emma Rothschild, *What is security?*, in: Buzan; Hansen (eds.), *International Security (Vol. III, Widening Security)*, 3.

focus on the security of states to the security of people and the planet”.⁷⁴ In 1995 the United Nations Secretary-General called for a “conceptual breakthrough”, going “beyond armed territorial security” (as in the institutions of 1945) towards enhancing or protecting “the security of people in their homes, jobs and communities”.⁷⁵ In 2001, the Commission on Human Security was set up and in 2003 it released its report wherein it stated that “the demands of human security involve a broad range of interconnected issues”; consequently, the Commission has concentrated on

distinct but interrelated areas concerned with conflict and poverty, protecting people during violent conflict and in post-conflict situations, defending people who are forced to move, overcoming economic insecurities, guaranteeing the availability and affordability of essential health care, and ensuring the elimination of illiteracy and educational deprivation and of schools that promote intolerance.⁷⁶

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has associated human security to several salient issues: economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political. Ramesh Thakur defined human security as follows:

⁷⁴ The Commission on Global Governance, *Our Global Neighbourhood*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995, 78.

⁷⁵ Boutros Boutros-Ghali, “Let’s get together to halt the unravelling of society”, quoted in Rothschild, 2007, 3.

⁷⁶ Commission on Human Security, *Human Security Now*, Commission on Human Security, New York, 2003, iv.

Human security is concerned with the protection of people from critical and life-threatening dangers, [...] whether they lie within or outside states, and whether they are direct or structural. It is 'human-centred' in that its principal focus is on people both as individuals and as communal groups. It is 'security oriented' in that the focus is on freedom from fear, danger and threat.⁷⁷

Edward Newman captures four different approaches on human security. The first one, wherein "scholars of human security argue that for many people in the world [...] the greatest threats to 'security' come from internal conflicts, disease, hunger, environmental contamination or criminal violence"; in this approach, the focus is on the individuals' confrontation with the threats which from their own state and not from an 'external' adversary. A second "approach to human security is narrower, and focuses on the human consequences of armed conflict and the dangers posed to civilians by repressive governments and situations of state failure"; in this understanding, the "increasing brutality" (if we borrow Herfried Münkler's phrase) of the modern armed conflicts indicates that civilians are deliberate targets and conflict is associated with refugees flows, humanitarian disasters, child-soldiering, and human displacement. It follows then, that "conventional security analysis is woefully inadequate for describing and explaining the realities of armed conflict and its impact upon humanity".⁷⁸ The third approach is

⁷⁷ Ramesh Thakur/Edward Newman, Introduction: Non-traditional security in Asia, in: Ramesh Thakur/Edward Newman (eds.), *Broadening Asia's Security Discourse and Agenda: Political, Social, and Environmental Perspectives*, Tokyo: UN University Press, 2004, 4.

⁷⁸ Newman, 2010, 80-81.

lacking theoretical insight, but is widespread in policy circles and “uses human security as an umbrella concept for approaching a range of ‘non-traditional’ security issues – such as HIV/AIDS, drugs, terrorism, small arms, inhumane weapons such as anti-personnel landmines, and trafficking in human beings – with the simple objective of attracting greater attention and resources for tackling them.” Finally, a theoretical approach on human security is concerned with “the nature of security threats, referents, and responses to insecurity” and problematizes sources of insecurity and criticizes the nature of the institutions which provide security. Within this final approach, the gendered aspects of security and insecurity are tackled.⁷⁹

D Problematizing In/Security in DR Congo

Following the genocide in Rwanda (in 1994), the Democratic Republic of Congo was plunged into three violent conflicts (in 1996, in 1998 and 2002) which exhibited all dramatic features of the new wars. In what follows, violence in DRC will be explained through international security studies’ conceptual lenses. Firstly, the realist reductionist view shall be examined and its shortcomings in capturing complex and fragmented dynamics of intra-state war. Secondly, the potential of certain non-traditional approaches on security for explaining the selected case study shall be explored.

One first argument seeks to underline the poverty of realism in understanding intra-state violence and the complex dynamic in DR Congo. The contention is that Congo is simply not a “like-unit”, in the terminology of

⁷⁹

Ibid.

neorealist Kenneth Waltz.⁸⁰ The Congolese state had no control over the territory (except for the western one third of the country); Congo was a state with non-functioning administrative structure; it was a weak state with absolutely no monopoly over the de facto use of organized violence (parts of the Congolese army defecting and joining rebel groups), and several overlapping security concerns (defence) and economic interests (looting) were involved. The wars in DRC were regional (or internal and internationalized), but the neighbours' reaction was spurred by DR Congo's state weakness and unwillingness/incapacity to suppress the insurrection movements operating out of its eastern part.

One could argue that the war and violence in DR Congo is not solely intra-state, since beginning with 1996 since the armies of five neighbouring countries (Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Zimbabwe and Namibia) were directly involved. Besides, the probability of an inter-state war between DR Congo and Rwanda was imminent. And yet, the complex dynamic of the violence was not echoing a classical inter-state armed conflict (over a territorial dispute for instance). Rather, former Zaire became a victim of intra-state conflicts occurring in neighbouring states and the locus of their spill-over effects (especially the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, the one million refugees who fled to eastern Congo, the attacks organized by the Hutu génocidaires against the new government in Kigali etc.) Phoebe Okowa is accurately synthesizing the complexity of the armed conflict: "It has involved rebel groups of varying degrees and levels of organization, either acting independently or as surrogates of the participating states [and] the presence of several foreign armies, internal Congolese rebels, as well as foreign

⁸⁰ Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, Reading: Addison Wesley, 1979.

insurgents [...] resulted in a conflict which has aspects of a civil war, a rebellion and an interstate conflict at the same time.”⁸¹

Besides, it was highly difficult to determine exactly how many battlefield-related deaths were direct consequences of the armed conflict. In fact, the violence in Congo is illustrative for a “new war” scenario, and not for a conventional war.

At some point, the crisis escalated because a cholera epidemic broke out in the refugee camps of eastern Congo, prompting the largest intervention in Médecins sans Frontières’s history.⁸² Other sources indicate that at the end of the chaotic year 2004, another humanitarian organization, International Rescue Committee, reported that the instability in DR Congo was the “deadliest crisis” in the world and estimated that the widespread conflict was responsible for 1.000 deaths a day, of which 98 % were caused by malnutrition and disease.⁸³

One major merit of the Copenhagen School is the revisiting of the realist mindset by distinguishing between state and society. Barry Buzan and Ole Waever argued that security studies required the incorporation of a “‘duality’ of security: that it [should] combine state security, which is concerned with sovereignty, and societal security, which is concerned with identity”.⁸⁴ It follows then that “at its most basic, social identity is what enables the word ‘we’ to be used as a means by which to identify collectively the ‘thing’ to be secured”.⁸⁵

⁸¹ See Okowa, 2007, 209.

⁸² Chris Stout, *The New Humanitarians*, London: Praeger, 2009, 15.

⁸³ Arnold, 2008, 109.

⁸⁴ Ole Waever et al. quoted in: Krause/Williams, 2007, 152.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

With respect to the Copenhagen School's approach on security (as illustrative for the case of Congo), it has been already argued that it is best applied on the Western states, and not on weak-states or "quasi-states" (in Robert Jackson's phrase).⁸⁶ Buzan focused on state managed domestic order, which was a defining characteristic of his "strong state"; in his framework, the concept of a strong state rested on the subordination of society to the state and this is not applicable to the fragmented and weak state of DR Congo. The process of securitization implies an issue that needs to be securitized, a speech acts that point to it, a political elite that explains the securitization issue to an audience, and the "optimal solution". In this theorizing the audience represents the society, but this pinpoints to a cohesive body of the population; in the case of Congo this was hardly the case since part of the population was suffering from disease and hunger, another part was forming local warring parties whose daily routine represented looting, and other groups had volatile loyalties to outsiders. According to the Copenhagen School securitization studies aim to gain an increasingly precise understanding of who securitizes, on what issues (threats), for whom (referent objects), why, with what results, and, not least, under what conditions (that is, what explains when securitization is successful).⁸⁷ According to such an approach, securitising the issue of refugees does not lead to positive outcomes for the human rights of such people. Huysmans stresses that "the securitization of immigration or refugees depends on instituting credible claims that they are an important factor endangering the survival of political units".⁸⁸ The counter-effect is that many

⁸⁶ Robert Jackson, *Quasi States: Sovereignty, International Relations and the Third World*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

⁸⁷ Barry Buzan/Ole Waever/Jaap de Wilde, 1998, 32.

⁸⁸ Huysmans, 2006, 47.

times “society is not just mobilised through security; it can be mobilised against a particular group, which in a way aids the construction of a unified identity”.⁸⁹ When attempting to correlate this to the problem of Tutsi refugees located in eastern Congo, the following observation is conspicuous: they became the provider of threats since the Congolese government declared them object of the securitisation process. The result is that when their mere existence is turned into a securitising issue, their own human security is neglected, if not completely annulled as concern.

Post-colonial security studies are preoccupied with wars in the Third World and are centred on domestic conflict. The latter was closely linked to concerns about weak or failed states or with the rise of humanitarian interventions and peace-keeping operations. These approaches “thus reinforc[ed] the long-standing interest within Peace Research about the relationship between development and (in)security”.⁹⁰ Buzan and Hansen showed that “one body of Post-colonial ISS overlapped with social theory and historical sociology, and hence with Critical Constructivism, in pointing to the need for conceptualisations of security that acknowledged the specificity of the Third World”. Also, the scholars stressed that Post-colonial theories “point to the Western-centrism of ISS” and argued “that the study of the non-Western world requires security theories that incorporate colonial history as well as the attention to the specific state formations in the Third World”.⁹¹ A post-colonial study on Congo would employ a different account of state building and would show the institutional weakness, coupled with

⁸⁹ Ibid. and Bright, 2012, 865.

⁹⁰ Buzan/Hansen, 2009, 176-177.

⁹¹ Ibid., 37, 176-179, 200-202.

Cold War geopolitics, and the long and corrupt rule of Mobutu.

In this article the contention is that human-centred approaches are more relevant for complex dynamic of intra-state violence. As already argued, physical security of Congolese is threatened on a daily basis, but ontological insecurity completes the tragic picture; the plight leads to the individuals' perpetual anxiety and their inability to go back to who they were before the dreadful events that marked their selves, be it their physical well-being or be it their knowledge about who they are; the perpetuating, paralyzing, intractable fear makes them unable to protect themselves physically, but also incapacitated to control the threat environment and to acknowledge whether they were targets, victims, security referents, Banyamulenge attached to Rwandan-Tutsi or Congolese citizens, refugees who needed protection or waves of refugees creating a security issue. Therefore, I believe that constructivist approaches and the concept of ontological security offer a more accurate and larger perspective on how threats are constructed and on how enemies are depicted. Thus, violence against civilians (though sometimes random) is based on the identification of threat (belonging to opposing group).

Also, what needs to be stressed are the merits of societal security approaches and the gendered approaches on security and insecurity, since in the case of DR Congo the referents of insecurity were groups, individuals, and mostly female: the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) was supposed to provide desecuritization and to protect civilians, but to a certain extent in 2005 the Bangladeshi troops became the source of gendered insecurity. As Guy Arnold indicated that "the first months of 2005 proved a damaging time for the

reputation of the United Nations forces in DRC”,⁹² when the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) reported that MONUC troops had sexually abused women and girls.⁹³ Arnold showed that “a report by Human Rights Watch on 7 March claimed that tens of thousands of young girls and women had been raped or subjected to other sexual violence during the 1998-2003 civil wars” and that “Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) had treated over 2,500 rape victims at its hospital in Bunia since June 2003”.⁹⁴ A gendered security approach is highly relevant in showing how women and girls are deliberate targets during violent civil wars and that their torturing and raping is systematic. In the case of Congo, the providers of security turned into malice threats.

The civilian suffering in DR Congo does not only pertain to physical violence (even though a high percentage of Congolese are affected by it), but also to psychological distress. Traditional Security Studies do not refer to the latter type of insecurity, but the concept of ontological security is meant to capture this dimension of DR Congo’s new war scenario. Within this highly volatile security framework, individuals’ needs are both material/physical and psychological, and women are deliberately and systematically targeted. As a result, the ICRC “supplied and supported 44 counselling centres providing psychological support to victims of sexual violence in the Kivus” in 2011 and “helped 496,577 longer-term IDPs, returnees and residents recover/preserve their food/economic security through livelihood-support

⁹² Arnold, 2008, 109.

⁹³ A/59/661, 5 January 2005, Report on investigation into allegations of sexual exploitation/abuse in MONUC, The website of the Office of Internal Oversight Services http://www.un.org/depts/oios/pages/other_oios_reports.html.

⁹⁴ Arnold, 2008, 110.

initiatives, while improving access to water/sanitation for 335,531 such people”⁹⁵.

E Conclusion

The intra-state violence in DRC comprised three brutal armed conflicts and exhibited scenarios of new wars. The traditional conception of security is attached to statism and does not capture complex dynamics of internal wars. The widening-deepening debate on security provided impetus for the re-conceptualisation of security and shifted the concern from state security to societal and human security. This was illustrated by the case of DR Congo and the article tried to explore the potential of certain non-traditional security studies in explaining intra-state violence in DRC.

During the Cold War, Third World security issues were addressed only to the extent they had a relevance for the proxies of superpowers. After the Cold War, certain constructivist security studies, critical security studies, and especially human security gained ground, since they were human-centred and tried to target the plight of the individuals due to armed conflicts. The analytic framework of non-traditional approaches to security provides a complex understanding of the nature and traits of the Congo wars.

⁹⁵ ICRC Annual Report 2011, The Democratic Republic of the Congo, 109. Available at <http://www.icrc.org/>.