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Boundary-Making in the Congolese Conflict

An Analysis of Ethnic, Autochthonous, and Religious Boundaries
in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (2019-2023)

J.G.M. van Vulpen

8792291

Utrecht University

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Abstract

People with similar backgrounds tend to form groups and live within closed-off communities. To differentiate themselves (the in-group) from others (the out-group), boundaries are created. In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) there are many different groups, and in multiple cases, tensions arise between them. Occasionally, these tensions escalate into episodes of violence.

The objective of this study is to explore how boundaries are constructed by different groups to gain a better understanding of the conflict dynamics in the DRC. This will be examined through the following question: 'Which processes of ethnic, autochthonous and religious boundary-making are evident in the final and midterm reports issued by the United Nations Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo between June 2019 and December 2023 and how does this contribute to our understanding of the conflict in the DRC?'

A document analysis of nine Group of Experts reports has demonstrated that ethnic, autochthonous and religious boundaries become manifest. The historiography indicates that while ethnicity and autochthony have received considerable attention in the academic literature, the religious aspect of the conflict remains understudied. By analysing the religious boundary, this research sheds light on the religious element in the Congolese conflict. Furthermore, instead of focusing on one of these aspects, this study advocates for the integration of these three types of boundaries into research. The combination of different perspectives facilitates a more comprehensive understanding of the conflict.

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1 List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Definition
ADF	Allied Democratic Force
AFDL	<i>Alliance des forces démocratiques pour la libération du Congo-Zaïre</i>
CODECO	<i>Coopérative pour le développement du Congo</i>
CNDP	<i>Congrès national pour la défense du peuple</i>
CMC/FDP	<i>Collectif des mouvements pour le changement/Force de défense du peuple</i>
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
FARDC	<i>Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo</i>
FDLR	<i>Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda</i>
IDP	Internally Displaced People
IS	Islamic State
M23	<i>Mouvement du 23 mars</i>
MONUC	United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo
MONUSCO	United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo
NALU	National Army for the Liberation of Uganda
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
RCD	<i>Rassemblement Congolais pour la démocratie</i>
UN	United Nations

2 Introduction

Over the past decades, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has been plagued by violence. Among some devastating clashes in the country's history were the First and Second Congo Wars, which took place from 1996 to 1997 and 1998 to 2003, respectively.¹ It is estimated that during these wars between 3.3 and 4.7 million people lost their lives.² Since then, the DRC has seen an increase in the establishment of armed groups.³ Today, the country, currently under President Félix Tshisekedi, is engaged in a significant battle against the armed group *Mouvement du 23 Mars* (M23) and faces jihadist violence perpetrated by the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), in addition to the numerous militias operating within the DRC.⁴ It is estimated that more than 120 armed groups are active in the DRC today. Most of these groups are concentrated in the east of the DRC, namely in the provinces of Nord Kivu, Sud Kivu, Ituri, and Tanganyika.

The DRC, supported by several countries and international institutions, has attempted to implement peace initiatives. One example is the 'Disarmament, Demobilization, Community Recovery and Stabilization Program' aimed at demobilising armed groups.⁵ However, this programme has not yet achieved considerable success.⁶ One of the main peace initiatives is the peace mission deployed by the United Nations (UN). Beginning in 1999 as MONUC, the mission transformed into MONUSCO in 2010. MONUSCO is mandated to, among others, protect civilians and assist the DRC government in its peace and stabilisation efforts.⁷ Nevertheless, the UN peace mission has faced criticism from the Congolese people.⁸ As a result, MONUSCO began to withdraw from the DRC in December 2023.⁹

¹ Jason Stearns, *The War That Doesn't Say Its Name: The Unending Conflict in the Congo* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021), 38; Filip Reyntjes, 'Briefing: The Second Congo War: More than a Remake' *African Affairs* 98 (1999) 391, 241-250, there 246.

² Milton Leitenberg, *Deaths in Wars and Conflicts in the 20th Century* (New York, Clingendael Institute: 2006), 15.

³ Stearns, *The War That Doesn't Say Its Name*, 5.

⁴ International Crisis Group, 'Crisiswatch - Democratic Republic of Congo' *Crisis Group* (version June 2024) <https://www.crisisgroup.org/crisiswatch/june-trends-and-july-alerts-2024#democratic-republic-of-congo> (accessed 12 July 2024).

⁵ The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, 'Final report of the Group of Experts submitted in accordance with paragraph 6 of resolution 2582 (2021)' (14 June 2022) UN Doc: S/2022/479, an. 48.

⁶ The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, 'Final report (2021)', §83.

⁷ MONUSCO, 'Background' *UN Missions* (version without date) <https://monusco.unmissions.org/en/background> (accessed 12 July 2024).

⁸ The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, 'Midterm report of the Group of Experts submitted in accordance with paragraph 9 of resolution 2641 (2022)' (16 December 2022) UN Doc: S/2022/967, §78-81.

⁹ MONUSCO, 'Press Release: The Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and MONUSCO sign a disengagement plan for the withdrawal of the Mission' (22 November 2023) UN Doc: PR/OSMR/2023, 1.

In addition to the peace initiatives, the UN Security Council has imposed sanctions on designated people within the DRC, with a committee monitoring those sanctions.¹⁰

The conflict in eastern DRC is complex, due to varying motivations, stakes, and actors. The aim of this research is to attain a better understanding of the conflict in the DRC. This will be pursued by utilising a relatively understudied source: the final and midterm reports of the United Nations Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo. The Group of Experts supports the sanctions committee of the Security Council. Their reports have proven to be valuable sources of information as they focus on, inter alia, armed groups, and violations of human rights and international humanitarian law.

For this research, the Group of Experts' final and midterm reports issued between 7 June 2019 and 30 December 2023 were analysed. The final report of June 2019 was chosen as starting point, because it includes the elections of December 2018.¹¹ These elections are seen as an important turning point in Congolese history because they signified a move towards democracy. Even though, the extent to which the elections were free and democratic is debated.¹² The midterm report of 30 December 2023 was the last to be published, so naturally, the analysis ends there.¹³ The midterm report of 29 December 2021 was the only report to be excluded from this research since this report was incorporated in the final report of 2022.¹⁴

2.1 Research Question

This research will address the complexity problem by examining the boundaries that groups create. Individuals with the same background tend to form groups that live in closed-off communities. To distinguish the group from others, boundaries are constructed. This creates a feeling of 'us' versus 'them' and might have an antagonistic, exclusionary character. This antagonism towards the 'out-group', can occasionally escalate into episodes of violence. By attempting to grasp some of the constructed boundaries, this research aims to contribute to a better understanding of the conflict. The analysis of the Group of Experts' reports identified three important types of boundaries:

¹⁰ United Nations Security Council, 'Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1533 (2004) concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo' *United Nations* (version without date) <https://main.un.org/securitycouncil/en/sanctions/1533> (accessed 12 July 2024).

¹¹ The reporting period of this report ended on 18 April 2019, see: The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, 'Final report of the Group of Experts submitted in accordance with paragraph 4 of resolution 2424 (2018)' (7 June 2019) UN Doc: S/2019/469, §8.

¹² Koen Vlassenroot, Aymar Nyenyezi, Emery Mushagalusa Mudinga and Godefroid Muzalia, 'Producing democracy in armed violence settings: Elections and citizenship in Eastern DRC' *Journal of Civil Society* 18 (2022) 2, 165-182, there 178.

¹³ At the time of writing, the final report covering 2023 was published. Considering that this report was not yet published during the selection of the data and analysis, this report was not taken into account.

¹⁴ The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, 'Midterm report of the Group of Experts submitted in accordance with paragraph 6 of resolution 2582 (2021)' (29 December 2021) UN Doc: S/2021/1104, §2-3.

ethnic, autochthonous, and religious boundaries. Therefore, the research question that will be used to address this topic is formulated as follows:

‘Which processes of ethnic, autochthonous and religious boundary-making are evident in the final and midterm reports issued by the United Nations Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo between June 2019 and December 2023 and how does this contribute to our understanding of the conflict in the DRC?’

2.2 Concepts

Some concepts need to be clarified to fully comprehend this study. First, following Andreas Wimmer, ethnicity will be defined as ‘a subjectively felt sense of belonging based on the belief in a shared culture and common ancestry. This believe [sic] refers to cultural practices perceived as ‘typical’ for the community, to myths of a common historical origin, or to phenotypical similarities.’¹⁵ In addition to this definition, this study takes a constructivist stance, meaning that ethnicity is not a given, but is contextual and constructed.¹⁶ This will be further elaborated on in the theory chapter below.

Second, the term autochthony refers to the claim that a certain group of people is ‘born from the soil’, making them the rightful inhabitants of a specific area.¹⁷

Third, while fully acknowledging Brubaker's critique of the concept of ‘group’, it will still be used in this research. Brubaker argues that by using this concept, the ‘group’ is reified rather than studied. His argument will be elaborated on in the theoretical chapter. Nonetheless, ‘group’ is a widely accepted designation for a form of social organisation. So, for the sake of clarity, the term will not be entirely avoided. Throughout the research, Brubaker's argument will be taken into account and the concept will be used carefully.

Finally, several labels pertain to the different appellations for the Rwandan population. First, the term ‘Rwandophones’, refers to speakers of the local language Kinyarwanda.¹⁸ This is a Bantu language that is associated with Rwanda.¹⁹ The Congolese Rwandophones are those who trace their ancestry back to Rwanda but reside in the DRC.²⁰ Within the category of Rwandophones, distinctions are made between different

¹⁵ Andreas Wimmer, ‘The Making and Unmaking of Ethnic Boundaries: A Multilevel Process Theory’ *American Journal of Sociology* 113 (2008) 4, 970-1022, there 973.

¹⁶ Jolle Demmers, *Theories of Violent Conflict. An Introduction* (London & New York: Routledge, 2017), 28.

¹⁷ Judith Verweijen, ‘From Autochthony to Violence? Discursive and Coercive Social Practices of the Mai-Mai in Fizi, Eastern DR Congo’ *African Studies Review* 58 (2015) 2, 157-180, there 158.

¹⁸ Furaha Umutooni Alida, ‘Where do we belong?’ Identity and autochthony discourse among Rwandophones Congolese’ *African Identities* 15 (2017) 1, 41 - 61, there 42.

¹⁹ Nico Nassenstein, ‘Kinyarwanda and Kirundi: On Colonial Divisions, Discourses of National Belonging, and Language Boundaries’ *Modern Africa: Politics, History and Society* 7 (2019) 1, 11-40, there 13.

²⁰ Alida, ‘Where do we belong?’, 42.

ethnicities, mainly between the Hutu and the Tutsi.²¹ These two groups are also called the ‘Banyarwanda’, which means ‘those who come from Rwanda’.²²

A further distinction is made between the Tutsi communities. The Tutsis living in Nord Kivu are often called Banyarwanda or simply Tutsi. Alternatively, the Tutsis from Sud Kivu have adopted the name ‘Banyamulenge’.²³ This means ‘those who come from Mulenge’, which is a region within the DRC.²⁴ The Tutsi community living in this province changed their name to Banyamulenge to claim political and social rights, as it implies that they are from the DRC.²⁵ Considering the subtle differences between the appellations, all of these will be used in the research.

2.3 Relevance

It is necessary to study the ongoing conflict in the DRC since a solution is much needed. The violence in the DRC has disrupted the country. One consequence of the violence is the internal displacement of approximately 6.9 million people. This enormous influx of people into the Internally Displaced People (IDP) camps comes with a multitude of urgent problems, for instance, lack of hygiene and shortages of food and water.²⁶ Besides the dire circumstances in the camps, the eastern provinces have become increasingly unsafe. Militias carry out numerous attacks, and fighting between the Congolese military and militias has intensified. Additionally, there are many incidents of conflict-related sexual violence.²⁷ In short, the situation in the DRC is alarming and affects a significant portion of its population.

This research seeks to raise awareness about the conflict and contribute to the understanding of the complex conflict dynamics in the DRC. By studying the boundaries that are created, it aims to elucidate a group’s criteria for inclusion and exclusion, and whether such boundaries are implicated in the ongoing violence in the DRC. Comprehending these boundaries may create a deeper understanding of motivations and grievances in the conflict. This understanding is essential for finding a solution that fosters sustainable peace in the DRC.

Academically, this research intends to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on boundary-making. The research is grounded in Wimmer’s boundary-making theory,

²¹ Lars-Christopher Huening, ‘Making use of the past: the Rwandophone question and the ‘Balkanisation of the Congo’ *Review of African Political Economy* 40 (2013) 135, 13-31, there 14.

²² Huening, ‘Making use of the past’, 18.

²³ *Ibidem*, 15.

²⁴ Koen Vlassenroot, ‘Citizenship, Identity Formation & Conflict in South Kivu: The Case of the Banyamulenge’ *Review of African Political Economy* 29 (2002) 93/94, 499-515, there 501.

²⁵ Vlassenroot, ‘Citizenship, Identity Formation & Conflict in South Kivu’, 501.

²⁶ International Rescue Committee, ‘Crisis in the DRC: What you need to know and how to help’ *2024 Emergency Watchlist* (version 22 April 2024) [https://www.rescue.org/article/crisis-drc-what-you-needknow-and-](https://www.rescue.org/article/crisis-drc-what-you-need-know-and-howhelp#:~:text=The%20DRC%20is%20currently%20facing,pronounced%20regional%20demand%20for%20aid.)

[howhelp#:~:text=The%20DRC%20is%20currently%20facing,pronounced%20regional%20demand%20for%20aid.](https://www.rescue.org/article/crisis-drc-what-you-needknow-and-howhelp#:~:text=The%20DRC%20is%20currently%20facing,pronounced%20regional%20demand%20for%20aid.) (accessed 16 June 2024).

²⁷ Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, ‘Democratic Republic of the Congo’.

the concept of 'groupness' as proposed by Brubaker, and Kaufman's Symbolist Politics Theory. This study seeks to substantiate this scholarly debate with empirical evidence by utilising Group of Experts' reports. Through these understudied reports, this research will explore boundary-making in the Congolese conflict from a new perspective.

While ethnicity and autochthony have often been the centre of attention, the religious element is understudied. As will be demonstrated in the historiography, scholars have predominantly focused on religion as a means of peacebuilding in the DRC. However, little attention has been given to the creation of religious boundaries. Drawing on data from the Group of Experts' reports, this research aims to uncover the religious boundaries that exist in the DRC and seeks to open up new avenues for further research into this subject. The three types of boundaries will be studied together and their integration is a novel aspect of this research, thereby adding to a deeper understanding of boundary-making in the DRC and the conflict in general.

This thesis continues by outlining the demographic and historical context of the DRC conflict. Thereafter, the methodology, theoretical framework and historiography will be discussed. Subsequently, the ethnic, autochthonous and religious boundaries will be delineated in separate chapters. The research will conclude in the final chapter.

3 Context

3.1 Demography

The DRC is a populous country. In 2023, the country had approximately 102 million inhabitants, and its population is still growing rapidly. Today, the DRC is the fifteenth most populous country in the world and is projected to enter the top 10 by 2050, with an estimated population of 215 million people.²⁸ Moreover, the country is diverse, with around 200 different ethnicities.²⁹

Another important demographic aspect is religion. In 2023, roughly 95.2% identified as Christian, making Christianity the dominant religion in the DRC. Of the remaining part of the population, 2.4% identified as ethnoreligious and 1.5% as Muslim. Smaller groups identified as agnostic or affiliated with other religions.³⁰

3.2 Historical Context

After living under Belgian colonial rule for 75 years, the DRC held its first independent national elections in 1960. These elections were won by Patrice Lumumba, who formed a government together with Joseph Kasavubu.³¹ Their collaboration lasted only several months, leading to a leadership crisis in the newly independent country.³² Mobutu Sese Seko exploited this instability and overthrew the government in a coup in 1975.³³ Zaïre, as the country was now called, remained relatively peaceful under its new leader.³⁴

The Congo Wars

This stability decreased when Mobutu lost his grip on power around 1990. The instability worsened after the Rwandan genocide in 1994, as many Hutu militiamen fled to Zaïre and began destabilising Rwanda from there.³⁵ This prompted the Rwandan government and the Tutsi-dominated rebel movement *Alliance des forces démocratiques pour la libération*

²⁸ Jacques Emina, 'DRC has one of the fastest growing populations in the world – why this isn't good news' *The Conversation* (version 11 July 2023) <https://theconversation.com/drc-has-one-of-the-fastest-growing-populations-in-the-world-why-this-isnt-good-news-209420> (accessed 10 June 2024).

²⁹ CIA, 'DRC - People and Society' *The World Factbook* (version 30 May 2024) <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/congo-democratic-republic-of-the/#people-and-society> (accessed 10 June 2024).

³⁰ Gina A. Zurlo and Todd M. Johnson (eds.), *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023).

³¹ Tony Karbo and Martha Mutisi, 'Ethnic Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)' in: Dan Landis and Rosita D. Albert (eds.), *Handbook of Ethnic Conflict: International Perspectives* (New York: Springer, 2012), 381-402, there 383-384.

³² Stearns, *The War That Doesn't Say Its Name*, 26.

³³ Karbo and Mutisi, 'Ethnic Conflict', 385.

³⁴ Stearns, *The War That Doesn't Say Its Name*, 28; Karbo and Mutisi, 'Ethnic Conflict', 385.

³⁵ Stearns, *The War That Doesn't Say Its Name*, 31.

du Congo-Zaïre (AFDL) to overthrow Mobutu's regime in the First Congo War between 1996 and 1997. The AFDL's leader, Laurent Kabila, became the new head of state.³⁶

Although the First Congo War had ended, the tensions between Kabila and Rwanda remained.³⁷ In addition, many Tutsis who had been integrated into the national army revolted and established the *Rassemblement Congolais pour la démocratie* (RCD), an armed group backed by Rwanda. Furthermore, Rwanda launched an attack against the DRC. This marked the beginning of the Second Congo War, which lasted from 1998 until 2003.³⁸ This war was mostly fought through proxies, leading to an increase in armed groups.³⁹

Armed groups

The peace agreement signed in 2003 was initially met with enthusiasm and marked a period of optimism. Democratic institutions were formed and strengthened, and militias were integrated into the new national army, the *Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo* (FARDC).⁴⁰ However, some groups became dissatisfied, as they stood to lose power because they were unpopular and could not win in the elections. This was specifically true for the Tutsi-dominated movement RCD.⁴¹ The RCD split and the *Congrès national pour la défense du peuple* (CNDP), a militia, was created in its wake, but dismantled by the DRC government a few years later.⁴²

After a couple of years, former members of the CNDP established the *Mouvement du Mars 23* (M23) in 2008, a new armed group active in the eastern provinces of the DRC.⁴³ The M23 became increasingly threatening, triggering the creation of militias that either allied with or fought against the M23. Such local factions, including the so-called Mai-Mai self-defence groups, were supported by the FARDC.⁴⁴ In 2013, the M23 was defeated.⁴⁵ Thereafter, it was estimated that 81 armed groups were active in eastern DRC in 2015.⁴⁶

However, after a few years of dormancy, the M23 reemerged in 2021. They made significant advances and swiftly took over parts of Nord Kivu.⁴⁷ Evidence suggested that

³⁶ Karbo and Mutisi, 'Ethnic Conflict', 386; Stearns, *The War That Doesn't Say Its Name*, 32.

³⁷ Reyntjes, 'Briefing: The Second Congo War', 246.

³⁸ Stearns, *The War That Doesn't Say Its Name*, 33, 41; Reyntjes, 'Briefing: The Second Congo War', 246.

³⁹ Stearns, *The War That Doesn't Say Its Name*, 33-34.

⁴⁰ Ibidem, 33-34, 39.

⁴¹ Ibidem, 41.

⁴² Ibidem, 44, 50.

⁴³ Ibidem, 51.

⁴⁴ Ibidem, 52.

⁴⁵ Ibidem, 145-146.

⁴⁶ Jason K. Stearns and Christoph Vogel, *The Landscape of Armed Groups in the Eastern Congo* (New York: Center on International Cooperation, 2015), 4.

⁴⁷ Ladd Serwat, 'Actor Profile: The March 23 Movement (M23)' *ACLEDD* (version 23 March 2023) <https://acleddata.com/2023/03/23/actor-profile-m23-drc/> (accessed 13 July 2024).

Rwanda has supported the M23 in their operations, which likely contributed to its rapid advances.⁴⁸ The armed group remains active today.⁴⁹

The DRC and Rwanda

The governments of the DRC and Rwanda have often been at odds with each other. These tensions have intensified after evidence suggested that Rwanda supports the M23.⁵⁰ The Tutsis play a central role in the tensions between the countries. The Congolese are wary of the Tutsis because many believe that they are attempting to control the DRC. Conversely, Rwanda claims that the Tutsi minority group is still under attack and must be protected. Furthermore, the DRC has seen a great influx of Hutus after the Rwandan genocide.⁵¹ One outcome of this migration was the creation of the *Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda* (FDLR), a Hutu armed group. The Rwandan government considers the faction a substantial risk to the safety of their country, which drags the Hutu community into the conflict as well.⁵² The Banyamulenge, Banyarwanda and Hutu populations are relatively small, yet they have played and continue to play a considerable role in the conflict.

Motivations

The conflict is about more than the regional tensions mentioned above. Given the range of different actors involved in the conflict, numerous motivations are at play. For some groups, the motivation is the protection of their community, for example, the Mai-Mai groups defending against the threat posed by the M23.⁵³ In other cases, groups clash over land disputes. For instance, the conflict between the armed group CODECO and the Zaïre militia, who claim to represent the ethnic Lendu and the Hema people respectively, is partly based on the feeling that the Hema have stolen the land from the Lendu.⁵⁴

More generally, the enormous amount of resources in the DRC plays a significant role, although it is not a primary cause of the conflict. The lucrative resource trade has been a means to fund the conflict and survival strategy for the poorest people.⁵⁵

⁴⁸ Ladd Serwat, 'Democratic Republic of Congo: Re-elected President Tshisekedi Faces Regional Crisis in the East' *ACLEDA* (version 17 January 2024) <https://acleddata.com/conflict-watchlist-2024/drc/> (accessed 13 July 2024).

⁴⁹ Serwat, 'Actor Profile'.

⁵⁰ Serwat, 'Democratic Republic of Congo'; Oneshore Sematumba, 'In Eastern DR Congo, "The Regional War is Already Happening"' *International Crisis Group* (version 20 March 2024) <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/great-lakes/democratic-republic-congo/dans-lest-du-congo-la-guerre-regionale-est-deja-la> (accessed 13 July 2024).

⁵¹ Davey, 'Rwanda genocide'.

⁵² Stearns, *The War That Doesn't Say Its Name*, 81.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, 52.

⁵⁴ J. Musamba and E. Gobbers, *Armed groups, territorial control, land disputes, and gold exploitation in Djugu, Ituri, Democratic Republic of Congo* (Antwerp: IPIS, 2023), 29.

⁵⁵ Miles Larmer, Ann Laudati & John F. Clark, 'Neither war nor peace in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC): profiting and coping amid violence and disorder' *Review of African Political Economy* 40 (2013) 135, 1-12, there 6.

4 Methodology

The current study has adopted a qualitative, data-driven approach. Through document analysis, this research has tried to gain insight into how boundaries become manifest in the final and midterm reports of the UN Group of Experts. These reports are freely accessible through the Security Council website.⁵⁶

4.1 Document Analysis

In the software NVivo, the content of the reports was coded. The main benefit of coding in NVivo is the ability to identify the main themes in the documents. NVivo requires systematic coding of the data, ensuring that outcomes are not distorted. Coding in NVivo was time-consuming and required vigilance. For example, after reading a substantial part of the reports, a new code was identified. This meant returning to previously coded reports to ensure that content related to the new code had not been overlooked.

This research is also data-driven, as it did not commence with any assumptions, hypotheses or previously acquired knowledge about the boundaries constructed in this context. The data was coded, and conclusions were drawn based on the findings. This approach revealed three prominent types of boundaries in the reports: ethnic, autochthonous and religious boundaries. After the analysis of the reports, academic articles by reputable scholars and reports of local NGOs were studied to verify the data and deepen contextual knowledge and understanding.

4.2 The United Nations Group of Experts' Reports

The Group of Experts is mandated to, among others, gather, examine, and analyse information concerning the implementation of the imposed sanctions in the DRC. This includes a focus on non-compliance, the networks supporting armed groups in the DRC, arms transfers, military assistance, and violations of human rights and international humanitarian law.⁵⁷ To gather information, the Group of Experts relied on documents and statements from eyewitnesses and experts. Additionally, most of their findings were verified by at least three other trustworthy sources.⁵⁸ Notably, until the final report of 2020, the Group of Experts consistently conducted on-site visits to gain first-hand

⁵⁶ United Nations Security Council, 'Reports' *United Nations* (version without date) <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/sanctions/1533/panel-of-experts/expert-reports> (accessed 11 July 2024).

⁵⁷ United Nations Security Council, 'Resolution 2360 (2017)' (21 June 2017) UN Doc: S/RES/2360, §6.a-6.h.

⁵⁸ The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, 'Midterm report of the Group of Experts submitted in accordance with paragraph 6 of resolution 2688 (2023)' (30 December 2023) UN Doc: S/2023/990, §4-6.

knowledge.⁵⁹ During the COVID-19 pandemic, these visits were not possible.⁶⁰ However, after the pandemic, they only mentioned their on-site visits in the final reports, leaving it unclear to what extent field trips were conducted to gather the information for the midterm reports.

The Group of Experts carried out careful, thoroughly corroborated eyewitness-based research, making it one of the most accurate and comprehensive sources on the current situation in the DRC. Especially, since the Group of Experts focused its research on different aspects, such as armed groups, intercommunity tensions, and resource extraction. This combination makes the reports valuable for this thesis. Moreover, since fieldwork in the DRC was not an option, these sources provide the closest perspective to the situation on the ground. Thus, the Group of Experts' reports are well-suited as primary sources.

Critical note

The Group of Experts on the DRC comprises six experts from various countries. Each member of the Group, either individually or in collaboration with another expert, focuses on their area of expertise. The themes are natural resources/finance, arms, armed groups, and humanitarian affairs.⁶¹ The diverse backgrounds of the experts can help to consider multiple perspectives and their specialities enhance the credibility and reliability of the reports.

However, the fact that these experts are not originally from the DRC or neighbouring countries, and the focus on their own speciality can also be a point of critique. This aligns with broader criticisms of peacebuilding missions and the UN in general. Séverine Autesserre has formulated this criticism in her book *Peaceland*. She argues that 'thematic expertise' is preferred over local knowledge.⁶² Additionally, local actors are often not consulted.⁶³

The Group of Experts tries to include local knowledge by incorporating eyewitness testimonies. Nevertheless, the Group of Experts work home-based.⁶⁴ This implies that

⁵⁹ The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, 'Final report of the Group of Experts submitted in accordance with paragraph 4 of resolution 2478 (2019)' (2 June 2020) UN Doc: S/2020/482, §7-9.

⁶⁰ The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, 'Midterm report of the Group of Experts submitted in accordance with paragraph 4 of resolution 2528 (2020)' (23 December 2020) UN Doc: S/2020/1283, §8.

⁶¹ United Nations Security Council, 'Letter dated 27 July 2023 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council, appointing six experts of the Group of Experts for a period expiring 1 August 2024' (28 July 2023) UN Doc: S/2023/567.

⁶² Séverine Autesserre, *Peaceland: Conflict Resolution and the Everyday Politics of International Intervention* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 249.

⁶³ Autesserre, *Peaceland*, 157.

⁶⁴ United Nations Security Council, 'Work and mandate' *United Nations* (version without date) <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/sanctions/1533/work-and-mandate> (accessed 13 June 2024).

they are not living in the DRC, making it challenging to connect with Congolese citizens and hindering the incorporation of local knowledge.

Furthermore, given the mandate of the Group of Experts and its supporting role to the Sanctions Committee on the DRC, their reports primarily focus on non-compliance with and possible violations of the imposed sanctions. Additionally, the experts only concentrate on four different aspects of the conflict. While this mandate and focus allow the Group to uncover numerous violations, this focus sometimes neglects the broader political, social, and economic dynamics in the DRC. These dynamics are crucial factors that influence the actions of sanctioned individuals and groups. To fully grasp the situation in the DRC, it is necessary to take the broader context into account. This is something to be aware of while reading the reports.

4.3 Literature Study

As mentioned above, a literature study was conducted to determine whether the boundaries identified in the Group of Experts' reports were more widely acknowledged. This part of the research used academic articles and books from distinguished scholars. Many of these researchers, such as Koen Vlassenroot and Jason Stearns, have done fieldwork in the DRC.⁶⁵ Therefore, they have a deep understanding of the local dynamics.

Alongside the use of academic sources, reports by local NGOs were also consulted. An example of such an NGO is Ebuteli, a research group based in Kinshasa and Goma that aims to contribute to sustainable conflict resolution in the DRC through research. As local actors, they provide valuable knowledge from the ground.⁶⁶

4.4 Ethics

The use of the reports as primary sources did not pose ethical challenges. The reports are publicly available on the Security Council's website. Consequently, sensitive information, such as personal data of eyewitnesses, was not included. Furthermore, the research did not involve handling any information that was not widely accessible.

4.5 Reflection

The research process and findings may be limited by several factors. The researcher is situated in a European context, which means that the cultural perspectives and norms may differ from those of the local Congolese people. As a result, social practices may be interpreted differently from how they were intended by the local inhabitants, possibly leading to an incorrect representation. In addition, this Western perspective may cause an overemphasis on Western sources. This may be due to several reasons. For example, it

⁶⁵ Vlassenroot, 'Citizenship, Identity Formation & Conflict in South Kivu', 499; Stearns, *The War That Doesn't Say Its Name*, 12-14.

⁶⁶ Ebuteli, 'Who we are' *Ebuteli* (version without date) <https://www.ebuteli.org/about> (accessed 14 June 2024).

is easier to rely on sources that are familiar and accessible. Additionally, not being fluent in the local languages may lead to missing nuances in the text or the exclusion of such sources altogether. The tendency to focus predominantly on Western-oriented sources might disproportionately represent certain views that do not accurately reflect reality.

To effectively deal with these limitations, the researcher constantly reflected on the findings and how they may have been influenced by their background and biases. Moreover, this research sought to incorporate a wide variety of sources, including local Congolese perspectives. Lastly, by discussing this research with fellow academics, the researcher tried to become aware of the biases of the research.

5 Theoretical Frameworks and Historiography

In 1969, Fredrik Barth focused his research on the concept of boundaries. His research among ethnic groups led the anthropologist to assert that groups are defined by boundaries, not by the 'cultural stuff' that the boundary encloses.⁶⁷ A boundary defines the terms of membership and separates the group from other groups and its surroundings.⁶⁸ Barth found that boundaries are maintained even though individuals move across them. In addition, it was discovered that boundaries do not isolate the group from others; rather, social relations are cultivated across these boundaries.⁶⁹ Despite the continuous maintenance of boundaries, they are not a given. A boundary is a constructed concept imposed on the world, therefore falling under constructivism.

Ethnic boundaries

The theory on ethnicity has been characterised by a clear dichotomy: 'primordialism' as opposed to 'constructivism'. Both perspectives view an ethnic group as a community that transcends small social groups, such as clans or families, and is based on a feeling of belonging through a shared history and culture.⁷⁰ The difference between the stances is that primordialists believe that 'certain social categories are natural, inevitable and unchanging facts' that are regarded as human nature and are rooted in biology, theology or morality.⁷¹ Conversely, constructivists view ethnicity as contextual and changeable because it is an 'imagined, constructed community, created through social interaction.'⁷²

Considering this constructivist stance, the question arises when a boundary is imposed and what this means for the actors imposing it.⁷³ Andreas Wimmer's multilevel process theory seeks to answer this question by researching how ethnic boundaries are created. Additionally, he tries to explain why boundary formation processes have yielded different results.⁷⁴

Wimmer begins by outlining various strategies for boundary-making. These strategies include the broadening and contracting of boundaries, reordering the hierarchical order of ethnic groups through boundaries, crossing boundaries by redefining one's participation in the group and blurring boundaries by stressing different

⁶⁷ Fredrik Barth, 'Introduction' in: Fredrik Barth (ed.), *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organisation of Cultural Difference* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1969), 9-38, there 15.

⁶⁸ Barth, 'Introduction', 15; Fredrik Barth, 'Boundaries and connections' in: Anthony Cohen (ed.), *Signifying Identities: Anthropological Perspectives on Boundaries and Contested Identities* (London: Routledge, 1999), 17-36, there 34.

⁶⁹ Barth, 'Introduction', 9-10.

⁷⁰ Demmers, *Theories of Violent Conflict*, 26.

⁷¹ James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, 'Violence and Social Construction of Ethnic Identity' *International Organization* 54 (2000) 4, 845-877, there 848; Demmers, *Theories of Violent Conflict*, 26.

⁷² Demmers, *Theories of Violent Conflict*, 28.

⁷³ Barth, 'Boundaries and Connections', 19-20.

⁷⁴ Andreas Wimmer, 'The Making and Unmaking of Ethnic Boundaries: A Multilevel Process Theory' *American Journal of Sociology* 113 (2008) 4, 970-1022, there 972 - 973.

'crosscutting social cleavages'.⁷⁵ Several factors influence the choice of strategy. These are the institutional networks, position in the power hierarchy and networks of political alliances.

When boundaries are constructed, actors seek recognition of their boundaries by other groups, who may envision different boundaries.⁷⁶ According to Wimmer, these groups will reach a consensus about the boundary.⁷⁷ He asserts that the nature of this consensus influences the boundary's attributes. Wimmer expects that a higher level of ethnic inequality and a broadly accepted consensus will lead to more closure and cultural differentiation. Alternatively, if the consensus is contested, the boundary will become politically salient.⁷⁸ The interaction between institutions, power dynamics, alliances, and consensus, causes the boundaries to shift, making Wimmer's theory processual.⁷⁹

During a symposium, Rogers Brubaker responded to Wimmer's theory on boundary-making. His main point of critique was that Wimmer takes the concept of boundaries too far.⁸⁰ Instead of adding to the 'analytical language of boundaries *per se*', Wimmer has analysed categories.⁸¹ Furthermore, Brubaker argues that the multilevel process theory suggests a broader theory of the formation and disintegration of groups instead of boundary-making specifically.

Autochthonous boundaries

In a case study on the DRC, Stephen Jackson identified that the autochthony discourse functions as an 'in/out qualifier' at four distinct levels.⁸²

First, there is the local scale, which distinguishes between ethnic groups identified in the colonial administrative maps and those that were not.⁸³ Thereafter, Jackson classifies the provincial level. On this level, there is a distinction made between those who are native to a Congolese province and those who are not.⁸⁴ The third level is the national level where the difference is made between those who are Congolese and those who are not, with the Rwandophones being notably excluded.⁸⁵ The final level that Jackson identifies is that of 'megaethnicity'. The autochthones on this level are the Bantu people who are believed to be the original inhabitants of Central Africa. The allochthones are the

⁷⁵ Ibidem, 986, 989.

⁷⁶ Ibidem, 997.

⁷⁷ Ibidem, 998.

⁷⁸ Ibidem, 1008.

⁷⁹ Ibidem, 1009.

⁸⁰ Rogers Brubaker, 'Beyond Ethnicity' *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 37 (2014) 5, 804-808, there 807.

⁸¹ Emphasis in original. Brubaker, 'Beyond Ethnicity', 807.

⁸² Stephen Jackson, 'Sons of Which Soil? The Language and Politics of Autochthony in Eastern D.R. Congo' *African Studies Review* 49 (2006) 2, 95-123, there, 100.

⁸³ Jackson, 'Sons of Which Soil?', 100.

⁸⁴ Ibidem, 102.

⁸⁵ Ibidem, 104.

Nilotes, who supposedly originated from the Horn of Africa and are therefore perceived as the 'invaders'.⁸⁶ On all levels, autochthony and ethnicity are intertwined.

However, Judith Verweijen has noted a distinction between the two concepts. She argues that autochthony lacks substance, as it functions as 'a dichotomy between strangers and original inhabitants that can be operationalized both within and between pre-existing social groups, including those designated as 'ethnic''.⁸⁷ In contrast, ethnicity is characterised by rules of membership, content, and often a common history, making it more substantive than the 'flee-floating trope of autochthony'.⁸⁸

Religious boundaries

Religion can serve as a boundary, because it is a means of 'identifying oneself and others, of constructing sameness and difference and situating and placing oneself in relation to others'.⁸⁹ Resulting of these characteristics, religion might function as a label for groups, trigger group-making, and provide a way to make sense of society.⁹⁰

However, it is debated to what extent religion is different from other forms of identity. There is the particularising position, which argues that religiously informed conflict is fundamentally different from other types of conflict. In contrast, the generalising position contends that religious violence is not different and falls in the same category as political conflict.⁹¹ To address this debate, Brubaker has analysed six violence-enabling mechanisms and modalities of 'religiously informed political conflicts'.⁹²

The first mechanism that Brubaker explains is the creation of 'hypercommitted selves'. These individuals are fully committed to a moral, political or religious cause, perceiving it as an absolute value.⁹³ Thereafter, the researcher examines how religions produce discourses of extreme otherhood and urgent threat through religious categories such as infidel or heretic.⁹⁴ The third mechanism is the 'mobilization of rewards, sanctions, justifications and obligations'.⁹⁵ This is a common process in political violence, but religion may add another layer to this mobilisation, for example through promises of

⁸⁶ Ibidem, 106-107.

⁸⁷ Judith Verweijen, 'From Autochthony to Violence? Discursive and Coercive Social Practices of the Mai-Mai in Fizi, Eastern DR Congo' *African Studies Review* 58 (2015) 2, 157-180, there 159.

⁸⁸ Verweijen, 'From Autochthony to Violence?', 159.

⁸⁹ Rogers Brubaker, 'Religion and nationalism: four approaches.' *Nations and Nationalism* 18 (2012) 1, 2-20, there 4.

⁹⁰ Janine Dahinden and Tania Zittoun, 'Religion in Meaning Making and Boundary Work: Theoretical Explorations' *Integrative Psychological and Behavioral Science* 47 (2013) 2, 185-206, there 194.

⁹¹ Rogers Brubaker, 'Religious Dimensions of Political Conflict and Violence' *Sociological Theory* 33 (2015) 1, 1-19, there 2.

⁹² Brubaker, 'Religious Dimensions', 6.

⁹³ Ibidem, 7.

⁹⁴ Ibidem, 8.

⁹⁵ Ibidem, 9.

rewards in the afterlife.⁹⁶ Brubaker continues by explaining the ‘experience of profanation’ as the fourth mechanism. Profanation is the violation of respect that a certain object, place, time, or activity is deemed to deserve. This experienced profanation may sometimes elicit a violent response.⁹⁷ The following modality that Brubaker defines is ‘translocal expandability’.⁹⁸ Religion often creates a cross-cutting, global imagined community, which may result in the ideological mobilisation of ‘foreign’ fighters, who join the ‘domestic’ battle.⁹⁹ Finally, Brubaker discusses the structure of a religious field. Following Bordieu, the researcher argues that ‘fields generate incentives for different kinds of *position-taking* for those in different *positions* (by virtue of possessing different amounts and kinds of capital)’.¹⁰⁰ This applies to religious fields as well and as a result, different strategies for repositioning emerge. These are ‘heteronomy’, ‘outbidding’ and ‘provocation’.¹⁰¹ Heteronomy refers to the opening of the field to different forms of capital and principles of appraisal. Outbidding involves one group claiming that their form of religion is superior. Provocation is the use of performances to gain acknowledgement and become visible.¹⁰²

Brubaker found that although these modalities and mechanisms are not unique to religious beliefs, practices and structures, they nonetheless ‘provide an important and distinctively rich matrix of such modalities and mechanisms.’¹⁰³ Considering this unique combination of mechanisms and modalities, along with the notion that religion is a way of identifying and constructing sameness and difference, religious boundaries will be distinguished from ethnic boundaries.¹⁰⁴

Turn to violence

When researching how violence arises, the constructivist approach offers several theories. First, there is the instrumental approach. This approach posits that conflict between identity groups is not driven by the grievances of the local population, but is manufactured by elite political entrepreneurs to advance their position, for example by increasing social cohesion or rallying support. From this perspective, conflict functions as a political strategy.¹⁰⁵

In a different approach, Stuart Kaufman stresses the role of symbolic politics in the step towards violence, putting less emphasis on instrumentalism. By examining the violence in Sudan and Rwanda, Kaufman illustrates that violence in these cases was not

⁹⁶ Ibidem.

⁹⁷ Ibidem, 10.

⁹⁸ Ibidem.

⁹⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁰⁰ Emphasis in original. Ibidem, 11.

¹⁰¹ Ibidem.

¹⁰² Ibidem.

¹⁰³ Ibidem, 7.

¹⁰⁴ Brubaker, ‘Religion and nationalism’, 4.

¹⁰⁵ Fearon and Laitin, ‘Violence and Social Construction’, 853.

primarily a way for elites to strengthen their power. Instead, ethnic war was justified and popularised through prevailing discourses. This may not always be the most profitable outcome for the elite, as Kaufman's empirical cases demonstrated.¹⁰⁶ Therefore, Kaufman proposed the symbolist politics theory. This theory postulates that an ethnic group is bound by a 'myth-symbol complex'. This complex 'identifies which elements of shared culture and what interpretation of history bind the group together and distinguish it from others.'¹⁰⁷ The theory hypothesises that 'the more a group's myth-symbol complex focuses group hostility on a particular adversary, the greater the probability of a violent clash with that adversary and the greater the likely intensity of the violence.'¹⁰⁸

Additionally, Kaufman's theory draws on neuroscience research that suggests that people act out of emotions instead of rational choice.¹⁰⁹ The symbolic politics theory builds on this by arguing that individuals follow those who present them with compelling symbols.¹¹⁰ From this perspective, Kaufman establishes a causal theory that explains the development of violence.

He starts by outlining three necessary preconditions. First, both sides must have a group myth that justifies aggression and domination of the enemy. Second, there needs to be a collective fear of the potential extinction of the group. And third, both sides must be territorially grouped and capable of mobilising. Kaufman continues by describing how mobilisation is achieved. Widespread public animosity appears in the media, and there is popular support either for the domination over rivals or for resisting such domination. In addition, the chauvinist elites utilise symbolic appeals to the group myth to heighten fear and animosity among their group to mobilise them.¹¹¹ Finally, a 'predation-driven security dilemma' arises, where the extremism of one side's leaders causes the leaders of the opposing side to radicalise in response.¹¹² Kaufman stresses the importance of investigating whether these elements were causal rather than merely present.¹¹³

'Groupness'

In research that focuses on boundaries, groups are commonly the unit of analysis. Brubaker scrutinises this established concept of groups. According to him, there is a habit of viewing bounded groups—mainly those based on ethnicity, race and nationality—as entities that can be ascribed agency and are the core constituents of society.¹¹⁴ Brubaker

¹⁰⁶ Stuart J. Kaufman, 'Symbolic Politics or Rational Choice? Testing Theories of Extreme Ethnic Violence' *International Security*, 30 (2006) 4, 45-86, there 83-84.

¹⁰⁷ Kaufman, 'Symbolic Politics or Rational Choice?', 50.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibidem*, 51.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹¹⁰ *Ibidem*, 52.

¹¹¹ *Ibidem*, 58.

¹¹² *Ibidem*.

¹¹³ *Ibidem*.

¹¹⁴ Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 2004), 8.

problematizes the tendency to take 'groups' as a unit of analysis because it reifies groups rather than analysing how group feeling crystallises.¹¹⁵ To address this issue, Brubaker suggests that ethnicity, race and nation should be viewed in 'relational, processual, dynamic, eventful and disaggregated terms', without minimising their power and significance on the ground.¹¹⁶

Additionally, Brubaker proposes to focus on the dynamic concept of groupness rather than fixed groups. Considering that groupness is not a given, it can be seen as an event characterised by more cohesion.¹¹⁷ This allows researchers to perceive the making of groups as a 'social, cultural and political project' intended to achieve higher levels of groupness.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, Brubaker argues that group crystallisation and polarisation are often a result of violence instead of its cause.¹¹⁹

By incorporating Brubaker's argument, this research aims to avoid the reification of groups and account for the dynamic processes that are taking place. Moreover, this concept will be utilised to explore the extent to which the manifestation of boundaries contributes to higher levels of groupness.

Overall, the main theoretical frameworks that will guide the analysis are Wimmer's multilevel process theory, Jackson's four levels of autochthony and Brubaker's six modalities and mechanisms of violent religious conflict. Furthermore, this part has outlined how violence arises according to the instrumentalist and symbolic politics approaches and elaborated on Brubaker's concept of groupness.

5.1 Historiography

The existing literature on the conflict in the DRC is extensive. Given the complex nature of the conflict, various perspectives can be adopted for its study, resulting in a diverse range of analyses.

One prominent scholar in this field is Séverine Autesserre. She has specialised in peacebuilding.¹²⁰ In one of her articles, Autesserre argues that there has been too much focus on three dominant narratives concerning the Congolese conflict. According to her, the dominant narratives are the illegal extraction of resources as the root cause of the conflict, sexual violence as the main consequence, and the reconstruction of the state's authority as the solution.¹²¹ This singular focus has caused researchers, peacebuilders and other key stakeholders to neglect the multi-layered nature of the Congolese conflict,

¹¹⁵ Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups*, 10.

¹¹⁶ *Ibidem*, 19.

¹¹⁷ *Ibidem*, 12.

¹¹⁸ *Ibidem*, 13.

¹¹⁹ *Ibidem*, 14.

¹²⁰ Séverine Autesserre, 'Long Bio' *About* (version without date) <https://severineautesserre.com/about/> (accessed 31 July 2024).

¹²¹ Séverine Autesserre, 'Dangerous Tales: Dominant Narratives on the Congo and Their Unintended Consequences' *African Affairs* 111 (2012) 443, 202-222, there 204.

resulting in superficial rather than comprehensive solutions.¹²² While she does not address boundaries, her main findings emphasise the necessity of avoiding a singular focus in the analysis of the Congolese conflict.¹²³

Several studies have examined the role of ethnicity in the DRC conflict. In a recent article by Hoffmann, Muzalia, Tungali, and Nalunva, the relationship between ethnic identity and Congolese politics and conflict is explored. They take a historical approach to argue that conflicts are ethnicised rather than inherently ethnic.¹²⁴ Their analysis traces Congolese history to illustrate how ethnic identity has been employed by authorities for personal enrichment and power accumulation.¹²⁵

In another article, Hoffmann, along with Vlassenroot, Carayannis and Muzalia, argues for a similar approach. They propose that ethnicity can be perceived as 'symbolic capital'. They call this 'ethnic capital' and its value stems from 'people's beliefs about who they are, their origin, their rights, their history and, importantly, their position in society'.¹²⁶ This form of capital 'integrates material, affective and symbolic aspects of conflict into a single analysis of the competition over symbolic and material resources'.¹²⁷ According to this view, ethnic capital is a strategy deployed by various actors in their struggle for resources and power.¹²⁸ The scholars briefly address boundaries in their article, arguing that when boundaries harden, the value of ethnic capital increases.¹²⁹

Both studies adopt an instrumentalist approach and treat ethnic identity as a strategy that is deployed.¹³⁰ However, they put less emphasis on the creation of ethnic boundaries.

The article of Hoffmann, Vlassenroot, Carayannis, and Muzalia also examines the autochthony discourse to understand how boundaries are constructed between the ethnic 'selves' and 'others'. They argue that the concept of autochthony is 'highly flexible and multi-layered'.¹³¹

Likewise, Verweijen delves into the concept of autochthony and researches whether a discourse of autochthony leads to violence through a case study of the Mai-Mai

¹²² Autesserre, 'Dangerous Tales', 221-222.

¹²³ Ibidem, 222.

¹²⁴ Kasper Hoffmann, Godefroid Kihangu Muzalia, César Muhirgirwa Tungali and Alice Mugoli Nalunva, 'Le passé dans le présent: Ethnicité, conflits et politique dans l'est de la RDC' *Insecure Livelihoods* (May 2022), 56.

¹²⁵ Hoffmann, Muzalia, Tungali and Nalunva, 'Le passé dans le présent', 60.

¹²⁶ Kasper Hoffmann, Koen Vlassenroot, Tatiana Carayannis & Godefroid Muzalia, 'Violent conflict and ethnicity: beyond materialism, primordialism and symbolism' *Conflict, Security & Development* 20 (2020) 5, 539-560, there 543.

¹²⁷ Hoffmann, Vlassenroot, Carayannis & Muzalia, 'Violent conflict and ethnicity', 544.

¹²⁸ Ibidem, 552.

¹²⁹ Ibidem, 547.

¹³⁰ Hoffmann, Muzalia, Tungali and Nalunva, 'Le passé dans le présent', 60; Hoffmann, Vlassenroot, Carayannis & Muzalia, 'Violent conflict and ethnicity', 552.

¹³¹ Hoffmann, Vlassenroot, Carayannis & Muzalia, 'Violent conflict and ethnicity', 546.

self-defence groups located in eastern DRC.¹³² She found that while the autochthony discourse is not the primary driver of violence, it does play a role, albeit generally in an ‘indirect and nonlinear’ manner.¹³³ Moreover, in the context of the Mai-Mai militias, the autochthony discourse does not fully mobilise and legitimise violence.¹³⁴ However, the concept is often used to frame other politico-economic objectives.¹³⁵

A relatively small body of literature is concerned with the role of religion in the Congolese conflict. Most of this research attends to religion's contribution to peacebuilding. One notable scholar in this area is Donatien Cicura. In his article *Violence, Peace, and Religion in Congolese Society*, Cicura explores how the introduction of universal religions in the DRC, specifically Islam and Christianity, has influenced both violence and peace in the country.¹³⁶ On the one hand, religious institutions, particularly the Catholic Church, engaged in several peace initiatives.¹³⁷ On the other hand, Cicura argues that the universal religions changed moral responsibility, leading to the emergence of an amoral elite. Previously, individuals were responsible for the members of their clan—those with whom they had a connection—but the universal religions shifted the responsibility to a more universal and abstract notion of ‘neighbour’. Responsibility became a fluid concept and the traditional moral framework broke down, without it being replaced. This permeated every level of society, causing less accountability towards each other.¹³⁸ Cicura argues that the breakdown of these structures contributes to the continuing violence in the DRC.¹³⁹ Although Cicura briefly notes that religions create new identities, which impact the political, societal and economic spheres, he does not delve into how these new identities are created, where the boundaries are set, or how this relates to peace and violence.¹⁴⁰

Religious boundaries have received minimal attention in the context of the DRC. There is one historical case study by David Maxwell that briefly touches upon boundary-making by Protestant missionaries.¹⁴¹ However, Maxwell's study indicates that the missionaries did not establish religious boundaries per se; rather, they helped the Luba people shape their ethnic identity by producing scriptures in their mother tongue.¹⁴²

¹³² Verweijen, ‘From Autochthony to Violence?’, 158.

¹³³ Ibidem, 176.

¹³⁴ Ibidem, 176-177.

¹³⁵ Ibidem, 177.

¹³⁶ Donatien M. Cicura, ‘Violence, Peace and Religion in Congolese Society’ *Peace Review* 30 (2018) 4, 479-487, there 480.

¹³⁷ Cicura, ‘Violence, Peace and Religion’, 484.

¹³⁸ Ibidem, 480-481.

¹³⁹ Ibidem, 483.

¹⁴⁰ Ibidem, 482.

¹⁴¹ David Maxwell, ‘Remaking Boundaries of Belonging: Protestant Missionaries and African Christians in Katanga, Belgian Congo’ *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 52 (2019) 1, 59-80, there 59.

¹⁴² Maxwell, ‘Remaking Boundaries of Belonging’, 60.

Thus, there is a noticeable gap in the literature concerning the construction of religious boundaries that needs to be addressed.

In short, the historiographical section has illustrated that ethnicity and autochthony have been given plenty of attention in the academic literature, however, there has been less focus on these two topics in relation to boundaries. Conversely, religion in the DRC conflict has received considerably less attention, especially regarding boundary-making. This research aims to address these identified gaps.

6 Ethnic Boundaries

In the reports of the Group of Experts, it becomes evident that different groups have constructed ethnically defined boundaries. According to these reports, the boundaries are most apparent when two groups stand in opposition to each other. To illustrate how these boundaries become manifest, this chapter will discuss the ethnic boundary-making processes that can be identified between the Congolese and Rwandans and the Lendu and Hema people.

6.1 Congolese and Rwandans

The data reveals a constructed boundary between the Congolese and Rwandan people. This divide is sometimes manifested between smaller ethnic communities, perceived as being either Congolese or Rwandan. Among those classified as Congolese are the Bafuliiru, Bavira and Babembe ethnicities.¹⁴³ The Mai-Mai self-defence groups claim to represent these communities.¹⁴⁴ Another Congolese ethnicity is Hunde, which belongs to the Bantu mega-ethnicity and is considered one of the original inhabitants of the DRC.¹⁴⁵ Ethnicities viewed as Rwandan are Tutsi and Hutu.¹⁴⁶ Another ethnicity that finds its roots in Rwanda is the Banyamulenge. The militia Twirwaneho claims to protect the Banyamulenge.¹⁴⁷ An ethnicity that is commonly associated with the Hutus, is Nyatura.¹⁴⁸ Therefore, the Nyatura are also designated as Rwandan. The boundary exists on multiple levels, such as the local level and the organisational level, which is dominated by armed groups. All of these levels fit within the overarching boundary that segregates the Congolese and Rwandans.

6.2 Lendu and Hema

Lendu and Hema are the two main ethnic identities in the Ituri province. During the colonial era, the Hema people were favoured by the Belgian colonial authorities. They were granted better opportunities and were able to maintain good positions, which led

¹⁴³ Judith Verweijen, *A Microcosm of Militarization: Conflict, Governance and Armed Mobilization in Uvira, South Kivu* (London and Nairobi: Usalama Project, Rift Valley Institute, 2016), 13; Koen Vlassenroot and Chris Huggins, 'Land, migration and conflict in eastern DRC' in: Chris Huggins, Jenny Clover, Benson Ochieng, Johan Pottier, Koen Vlassenroot, Prisca Mbura Kamungi, Johnstone Summit Oketch, and Herman Musahara (eds.), *From the Ground Up: Land Rights, Conflict and Peace In Sub-Saharan Africa*. (Pretoria: ISS, 2005), 115-194, there 144.

¹⁴⁴ The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, 'Final report (2020)', an 98.

¹⁴⁵ Kwame Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 585.

¹⁴⁶ Karbo and Mutisi, 'Ethnic Conflict', 383.

¹⁴⁷ The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, 'Final report (2020)', an. 94.

¹⁴⁸ United Nations Security Council, 'Children and armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo' (25 May 2018), UN Doc: S/2018/502, §7.

them to dominate the Lendu.¹⁴⁹ This favouritism caused grievances, resulting in multiple clashes between segments of the Lendu and Hema communities. After several battles, for instance, in 1975, 1981, 1992 and 1993, the Ituri War between 1999 and 2003 emerged as the most intense conflict.¹⁵⁰

Fourteen years after the Ituri War, in December 2017, the conflict intensified again, primarily in the Djugu territory of Ituri.¹⁵¹ Two armed groups, *Coopérative pour le développement du Congo* (CODECO) and the Zaïre militia, have ethnicised the conflict and have created ethnic boundaries, by claiming to protect the Lendu and the Hema people, respectively.¹⁵² For CODECO, every Lendu is part of the ‘in-group’ and every other ethnic group, particularly the Hema, is part of the ‘out-group’. The same applies to the Zaïre militia, who perceive the Hema as ‘us’ and the Lendu as ‘them’.

6.3 Boundary-Making Processes

Constructing and defining boundaries

Brubaker argues that organisations are often the main protagonists in ethnic conflict.¹⁵³ This argument is illustrated in the analysed reports. Firstly, FARDC soldiers told some Banyamulenge and Tutsis that they were not Congolese civilians because they spoke a different language and had distinct facial and body features.¹⁵⁴ This exemplifies the creation of an ethnic boundary by an organisation, primarily by explicitly excluding this group.¹⁵⁵

Secondly, in the Lendu-Hema conflict, CODECO and the Zaïre militia have created a boundary through numerous retaliatory attacks. In these reprisals, CODECO and the Zaïre militia intentionally killed citizens associated with the enemy group based on their ethnicity. The Group of Experts documented that the Zaïre militia hunted down the Lendu people to retaliate against the crimes committed by CODECO. One of their tactics involved checking people’s ethnicity at roadblocks and murdering those who identified as Lendu.¹⁵⁶ Conversely, CODECO consistently targeted Hema people in coordinated attacks on villages.¹⁵⁷ Thus, for the crimes committed by the militias, the blame is attributed to the entire Hema and Lendu communities.

¹⁴⁹ International Crisis Group, *DR Congo: Ending the Cycle of Violence in Ituri, Africa Report 292* (Nairobi/Bunia/Kinshasa/Kampala/Brussels: International Crisis Group, 15 July 2020), 3.

¹⁵⁰ Stearns, *The War That Doesn't Say Its Name*, 197; International Crisis Group, *DR Congo*, 3.

¹⁵¹ International Crisis Group, *DR Congo*, 5.

¹⁵² Martins Abadias do Nascimento and Richard Apau, *CODECO Violent Extremism Activities in Eastern DRC: Analysis of Vulnerabilities, Response, and Resilience* (Alger: African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism, 2023), 6.

¹⁵³ Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups*, 13.

¹⁵⁴ The United Nations Group of Experts, ‘Midterm report (2022)’, §75.

¹⁵⁵ Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups*, 13.

¹⁵⁶ The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, ‘Final report (2021)’, §105.

¹⁵⁷ The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, ‘Final report (2022)’, §128.

Thirdly, similar reprisals occurred between Mai-Mai self-defence groups and the Twirwaneho militia, located in the Hauts-Plateaux.¹⁵⁸ Both groups have attacked people whose ethnicity could be linked to that of the enemy armed group.¹⁵⁹ These back-and-forth assaults caused a significant portion of the Banyamulenge community to flee. The Banyamulenge grouped in the Mikenge IDP camp and Minembwe locality, where they were protected by UN peacekeepers. Consequently, the geographical boundaries became increasingly ethnically defined.¹⁶⁰

A final example of this boundary-making process can be identified during a M23 raid on the town of Kisheshe in November 2022. The assailants associated those who spoke the Kinyarwanda language with the FDLR. If an individual spoke Kihunde or Kinande, they were considered part of the Mai-Mai group, either as a combatant or collaborator.¹⁶¹

These examples demonstrate that organisations are the main protagonists in constructing ethnic boundaries.¹⁶² Moreover, by ethnicising the conflict in the aforementioned manner, the organisations impose the same ethnic categories on both the people and armed groups. This is a form of group-making and boundary-making.¹⁶³

According to Wimmer, when a consensus about a constructed boundary is reached, the boundary becomes politically less salient, which leads to more closure.¹⁶⁴ This is exemplified by boundaries that are imposed by actors external to the conflict. An example provided by the Group of Experts illustrates this. Some soldiers of the Congolese army found the identity card of a Lendu woman and informed her that ‘they did not want to see any Lendu, because Lendus are CODECO’.¹⁶⁵ This demonstrates that there is a broader consensus concerning the boundary between the Lendu and Hema.¹⁶⁶

On the local level, strategies of boundary-making are also evident. Wimmer argues that contracting boundaries is such a strategy.¹⁶⁷ This can be observed in the hostilities towards the Banyamulenge community articulated by the Congolese Bavira, Bafuliiru, and Babembe communities. According to the Group of Experts’ reports, there was a relatively strong anti-Banyamulenge sentiment among constituents, politicians and civil society leaders of these Congolese communities. Frequently, they perceived the Banyamulenge as Rwandans instead of Congolese.¹⁶⁸ This is an illustration of the contraction of boundaries,

¹⁵⁸ The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, ‘Final report (2020)’, §132.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, §147-150.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, an. 108.

¹⁶¹ The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, ‘Final report (2022)’, an. 40.

¹⁶² Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups*, 13.

¹⁶³ Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups*, 13.

¹⁶⁴ Wimmer, ‘The Making and Unmaking of Ethnic Boundaries’, 1008.

¹⁶⁵ The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, ‘Final report (2021)’, an. 68.

¹⁶⁶ Wimmer, ‘The Making and Unmaking of Ethnic Boundaries’, 1008.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibidem*, 987.

¹⁶⁸ The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, ‘Final report (2020)’, §153.

as the Banyamulenge, who have lived in the DRC for a considerable amount of time, are excluded.¹⁶⁹

Strengthening boundaries

Wimmer's theory posits that those who have successfully presented themselves as the 'ethnic other' and monopolised economic, political or symbolic resources may attempt to police the boundary, making it difficult to cross.¹⁷⁰ Although the data does not indicate the extent to which CODECO was able to monopolise these resources, the analysed reports provide examples of the militia policing the ethnic boundary between the Lendu and the Hema. For instance, one woman who identified as Lendu reported being raped by a faction of CODECO as punishment for having a Hema husband.¹⁷¹ Similarly, CODECO fighters disapproved of a Lendu girl and a Hema girl travelling together. One fighter told the Lendu girl that 'Lendus had issues with the Hemas and that, as a Lendu, she should stay with them to be their wife.'¹⁷² These examples illustrate that the CODECO combatants have attempted to hinder relationships that cross the constructed ethnic boundary between the Lendu and the Hema, thereby both guarding and hardening the boundary.¹⁷³

In the case of the Congolese and Rwandans, the boundary is also strengthened, although not through policing the boundary. The M23 and the Rwandan government hardened the boundary between the Rwandans, especially the Tutsi community, and the Congolese.¹⁷⁴ They reinforced the boundary by claiming that the DRC government is committing genocide against the Tutsis, and more broadly, the Rwandophones.¹⁷⁵ This rhetoric solidifies the ethnic boundary, by portraying the Congolese as the enemy attacking their community, causing the exclusion of the Congolese. In turn, the Group of Experts noted that this narrative, combined with the existence of the M23, 'accentuated ethnic rifts among the warring sides'. Additionally, they argue that the M23 crisis has led to an increase in hate speech and xenophobia targeting the Rwandophones.¹⁷⁶ Thus, through these hostilities on both sides, the boundary is increasingly characterised by exclusion.¹⁷⁷

¹⁶⁹ Wimmer, 'The Making and Unmaking of Ethnic Boundaries', 987; Vlassenroot, 'Citizenship, Identity Formation & Conflict in South Kivu', 502.

¹⁷⁰ Wimmer, 'The Making and Unmaking of Ethnic Boundaries', 1002.

¹⁷¹ The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, 'Final report of the Group of Experts submitted in accordance with paragraph 4 of resolution 2528 (2020)' (10 June 2021) UN Doc: S/2021/560, §85.

¹⁷² The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, 'Final report (2020)', an. 67.

¹⁷³ Wimmer, 'The Making and Unmaking of Ethnic Boundaries', 1002

¹⁷⁴ Stearns, *The War That Doesn't Say Its Name*, 121.

¹⁷⁵ The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, 'Final report (2022)', an. 53.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibidem*, §100-101.

¹⁷⁷ Wimmer, 'The Making and Unmaking of Ethnic Boundaries', 979.

Blurring the boundary

Wimmer identifies the strategy of ‘boundary blurring’, which occurs when a different social cleavage becomes more important than the ethnic divide.¹⁷⁸ This strategy becomes clear in an example of the boundary between the Congolese and Rwandans. While the constructed boundary between the two nationalities seems to have ossified, it is still being crossed through the blurring of the boundary. In this case, this crossing occurs on a relatively large scale. In the fight against the Tutsi-affiliated M23, the FARDC is collaborating with the Hutu-affiliated armed group *Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda* (FDLR). The Group of Experts has noted multiple instances of collaboration between the army and the armed faction. For example, in the final report of 2023, it is mentioned that the FDLR received ammunition and weapons from the Congolese army and that they had fought alongside each other to defend against M23 attacks.¹⁷⁹ Several months later, during heavy clashes with the M23, the FARDC was supported by the FDLR.¹⁸⁰ The ethnic boundary between the FARDC and the FDLR became less significant because they had a common enemy in the M23. Thus, for the FARDC and the FDLR, combining resources to fight a mutual adversary, takes precedence over excluding each other on ethnic grounds. This results in the blurring of the boundary, making it easier to cross.¹⁸¹

Groupness

Brubaker argues that often the crystallisation of groupness and polarisation is caused by violence rather than the other way around.¹⁸² In the case of the violence between the Lendu and Hema people, the data does not provide direct examples of increased groupness. However, the numerous retaliatory attacks that CODECO and the Zaïre militia carried out against each other’s communities may increase a sense of groupness among the Lendu and Hema.¹⁸³

A similar trend can be observed as a result of the clashes between the Mai-Mai self-defence groups and the Banyamulenge-affiliated Twirwaneho. The tit-for-tat attacks between the militants resulted in the ethnicisation of territory, as the Banyamulenge fled the area and grouped in two protected localities. The Group of Experts noted in June 2023 that the ongoing violence continued to reinforce ‘the ethnicization of territory and the radicalization of opinions.’¹⁸⁴ Although the data does not indicate to what extent groupness has materialised, this suggests an enhanced feeling of groupness and

¹⁷⁸ Ibidem, 986 and 989.

¹⁷⁹ The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, ‘Final report (2023)’, §89-90.

¹⁸⁰ The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, ‘Midterm (2023)’, §25.

¹⁸¹ Wimmer, ‘The Making and Unmaking of Ethnic Boundaries’, 986 and 989.

¹⁸² Brubaker, *Ethnicity Without Groups*, 14.

¹⁸³ Ibidem.

¹⁸⁴ The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, ‘Final report (2021)’, §152.

polarisation between the opposite sides. Thus, this corresponds with Brubaker's argument.¹⁸⁵

Finally, the rhetoric used by the M23 and the Rwandan government may increase groupness as well. These organisations present the DRC government as a threat to the Rwandans, and especially the Tutsis. Through the perception that the community is under attack, groupness may increase. While the data does not provide concrete examples, it is plausible that such rhetoric may lead to the crystallisation of groupness.¹⁸⁶

Incitement to violence

As mentioned above, the ethnic boundary between the Congolese and the Rwandans appears to have hardened, which is likely the result of increased hate speech and incitement to violence. Especially given that violence causes groupness.¹⁸⁷ In June 2022, hate speech against the Rwandans spiked. Some instigators of this hate speech aimed to manufacture a raid to forcibly expel the Rwandans from the DRC. An audio recording circulated via WhatsApp intended to mobilise the local people with the following message, as translated by the Group of Experts: 'We will clean up. Wherever there is a Rwandan, he shall go. And if you house a Rwandan, start chasing him to return home. And if you know where he lives and he bought a house and he is your neighbor, go with a machete, a stick, an arrow to hunt him.'¹⁸⁸ A similar audio message was more radical: 'What do you wait for? Take a machete and slaughter the Rwandans or take some petrol and burn their houses [...].'¹⁸⁹ According to the Group of Experts, such hate speech was not only propagated by local actors but also by members of civil society and political characters. This hateful discourse directed against the Rwandophones led to violence multiple times, including arbitrary killings, lynching and mob violence.¹⁹⁰

In the increased hostilities between the Congolese and Rwandans, elements of Kaufman's symbolist politics theory can be identified. Kaufman argued that there are three preconditions for ethnic war: the existence of a group myth that legitimises animosity, a fear that the group's existence is endangered, and the opportunity to mobilise.¹⁹¹ In the Congolese case, the group myth is intertwined with the threat of their existence being exterminated. The myth they rely on is that their country, or at least the eastern provinces, will be taken over by Rwanda, known as the 'Balkanisation' of the

¹⁸⁵ Brubaker, *Ethnicity Without Groups*, 14.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹⁸⁸ The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, 'Midterm report (2022)', an. 54.3.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibidem*, an. 54.1

¹⁹⁰ The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, 'Final report of the Group of Experts submitted in accordance with paragraph 9 of resolution 2641 (2022)' (13 June 2023) UN Doc: S/2023/431, §102-103.

¹⁹¹ Kaufman, 'Symbolic Politics or Rational Choice?', 52-53.

DRC.¹⁹² This sentiment has been documented several times in the analysed reports and is often propagated by elite actors. For instance, the Catholic Bishop of Bunia stated that the Rwandans had come to occupy the Congolese land and extract their resources.¹⁹³ Another elite figure who reinforces these narratives is national politician Justin Bitakwira.¹⁹⁴ On multiple occasions, Bitakwira claimed that the Banyamulenge were trying to take control of the DRC. Bitakwira also warned that history would take revenge for the group's alleged crimes, likely referring to the Rwandan genocide.¹⁹⁵ These instances illustrate the existing group myth and the fear of eradication.¹⁹⁶

As demonstrated, this hateful discourse has resonated with the local population. The Group of Experts also notes that the hashtag '#DeRwandalisation' was increasingly used on social media and that the narrative of Rwandan infiltration was more broadly adopted.¹⁹⁷ In Kaufman's theory, the public acceptance of this discourse is evidence of mass hostility, a process leading to ethnicised war.¹⁹⁸ Thus, two of the three preconditions for ethnic war are observed. While the precondition of political opportunity is less apparent, the violent incidents suffice as evidence that the Congolese can be mobilised. Furthermore, the mass hostility seems to be caused by the group myth and fear of extermination. Therefore, episodes of violence align with the causal framework proposed by Kaufman, leading to a hardened boundary.¹⁹⁹

6.4 Summary

To summarise, this chapter has outlined various processes of boundary-making concerning the Congolese and Rwandans and the Lendu and Hema. These processes include constructing and defining boundaries, strengthening boundaries through policing and exclusion, and blurring the boundary in the case of the collaboration between the FARDC and the FDLR. Other delineated processes involve the creation of groupness and how violence arises between the Congolese and Rwandans, fitting into Kaufman's symbolic politics framework.

¹⁹² Balkanisation means the split of one political entity into multiple entities, see: Godefroid Muzalia and Thierry Rukata, 'The "Balkanization" of the Democratic Republic of Congo: heated debates and conspiracy theories in greater Kivu area' *Insecure Livelihoods* (December 2022), 9-10.

¹⁹³ The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, 'Midterm report (2020)', an. 38.

¹⁹⁴ The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, 'Midterm report (2022)', an. 53.2.

¹⁹⁵ The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, 'Final report (2020)', §154; see also an interview with Bitakwira in The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, 'Final report (2023)', an. 34.

¹⁹⁶ Kaufman, 'Symbolic Politics or Rational Choice?', 52-53.

¹⁹⁷ The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, 'Final report (2022)', an. 56.

¹⁹⁸ Kaufman, 'Symbolic Politics or Rational Choice?', 53.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibidem*, 58.

7 Autochthonous Boundaries

After the First and Second Congo Wars, the use of the ‘autochthony’ discourse has increased.²⁰⁰ As Stephen Jackson has argued, this discourse exists on four different levels in the DRC: local, provincial, national and mega-ethnic.²⁰¹ In the Group of Experts’ reports, this discourse is evident in relation to boundary-making. Utilising Jackson's framework, this chapter will analyse how autochthonous boundaries are created on the local, provincial, national and mega-ethnic levels. The focus will be on the constructed autochthonous boundaries between the Rwandans and Congolese and the Lendu and Hema people.

7.1 Congolese and Rwandans

The local level

During Belgian colonisation, the Kivus were characterised by a system of indirect rule. This system entailed the establishment of ethnically defined territories and governance of their populations through traditional ‘native rulers’ under the control of colonial officials.²⁰² Groups that were not granted their own land and were subjected to another community’s chief had even less autonomy than others. This was the case for the Tutsis and Banyarwanda.²⁰³ Those people who did not have their own territory and ruler were seen as allochthons.²⁰⁴ Jackson determines the difference between the autochthons and allochthons in this sphere of society at the local level, which he relates to ethnicity. He argues that this level is still influenced by the system of indirect rule and the divisions established in that era.²⁰⁵

In the analysed reports, autochthonous boundaries at this level are rarely mentioned. One example, however, is observed in the final report of June 2021. This example concerns the previously mentioned Mai-Mai self-defence groups, which primarily affiliate themselves with the Bafuliiru, Babembe and Bavira communities, and the Twirwaneho armed group, which claims to represent the Banyamulenge community.²⁰⁶ Of these communities, the Bafuliiru and the Bavira have their own chiefdom, a legacy of the colonial system of indirect rule.²⁰⁷ All of the Mai-Mai groups

²⁰⁰ Jackson, ‘Sons of Which Soil?’, 96.

²⁰¹ Ibidem, 100.

²⁰² Verweijen, ‘From Autochthony to Violence?’, 163.

²⁰³ Ibidem.

²⁰⁴ Jackson, ‘Sons of Which Soil?’, 100-101.

²⁰⁵ Ibidem, 100.

²⁰⁶ The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, ‘Final report (2020)’, §138, an. 93, an 98, and an. 101.

²⁰⁷ Verweijen, *A Microcosm of Militarization*, 13.

claim that they are the ‘autochtones’²⁰⁸ and frame the Banyamulenge armed groups as foreign enemies.²⁰⁹ Although the Babembe community does not have their own chiefdom, unlike the Bafuliiru and Bavira, this is still an example of autochthony at the local level, as Jackson argues that the discourse is also employed between ethnic groups.²¹⁰ Thus, this autochthonous boundary created between the ‘indigenous’ Mai-Mai groups and the ‘foreign’ Twirwaneho militia is evident at the local level.²¹¹

The provincial level

The data in the analysed reports does not suggest that the provincial level plays a significant role in the creation of the autochthonous boundary between the Congolese and Rwandans. At this level, there is a recurring fear of balkanisation, which is mentioned several times in the reports.²¹² This fear encompasses concerns that the Kivu provinces will be taken over by the Rwandans.²¹³ While this fear does imply that the Congolese view themselves as the autochthonous inhabitants of the provinces to some extent, it does not serve as a foundation for constructing the autochthonous boundary in the reports, especially given that there are no references to autochthony based on provinces.²¹⁴

The national level

The autochthonous boundary between the Congolese and Rwandans becomes primarily evident on the national level. This boundary is manifested primarily through rhetoric. One significant manifestation of the boundary is in terms of infiltration. For instance, the Group of Experts reported on the arrests of Banyamulenge and Tutsi FARDC soldiers that occurred in May and June 2022. These soldiers were detained due to rumours that Rwandans had infiltrated the Congolese administrative and political systems, as well as the defence forces. Seven of the detainees were accused of infiltration because they were not perceived as citizens of the DRC. Additionally, they were told that all who spoke Kinyarwanda should be sent back to Rwanda.²¹⁵ This event demonstrates that the Tutsi and Banyamulenge soldiers were viewed as foreigners, rather than Congolese.

According to the Group of Experts, the infiltration discourse has spread in the DRC and has been used both in public protests and by elite figures in the media and on social media. An example is Justin Bitakwira’s call upon every Congolese citizen to identify ‘... all

²⁰⁸ This is the French word for ‘autochthon’, see: The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, ‘Final report (2020)’, §138.

²⁰⁹ Ibidem, an. 101.

²¹⁰ Jackson, ‘Sons of Which Soil?’, 101.

²¹¹ Ibidem, 100.

²¹² The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, ‘Midterm report (2020)’, an. 38; The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, ‘Final report (2020)’, §154; The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, ‘Final report (2023)’, an. 34.

²¹³ Muzalia and Rukata, ‘The “Balkanization” of the Democratic Republic of Congo’, 10.

²¹⁴ Jackson, ‘Sons of Which Soil?’, 102.

²¹⁵ The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, ‘Midterm report (2022)’, an. 56.

infiltrators who are accomplices with our enemy...'²¹⁶ Bitakwira refers to Rwanda and the M23 by calling them 'our enemy'. Furthermore, the Group of Experts has linked his use of 'infiltrators' to the Rwandophone population. The rhetoric has also been employed by individuals targeting Rwandophones or those perceived as Rwandophones.²¹⁷ It has resonated with the population, as is evident through the popular hashtag '#DeRwandalisation' discussed in the previous chapter.²¹⁸

The term infiltrator implies an outsider moving into a community that is not theirs, and they do not fit into. Thus, by portraying Rwandophones as infiltrators, they are framed as outsiders who do not belong in the group but have manoeuvred themselves in. This vocabulary aligns with what Jackson has identified as the 'language of autochthony', which is found at every level.²¹⁹ Hence, this rhetoric represents a manifestation of the autochthonous boundary by emphasising the dichotomy between the in-group and the out-group.²²⁰

Another example of the constructed autochthonous boundary is found in a WhatsApp audio message circulated among local inhabitants. In the audio, the speaker said: 'I am speaking to all the natives from Uvira and Fizi. [...] I exhort you, from tomorrow, to stay unified and act together to show Rwandans that Congo does not belong to them, but that it is for Congolese...' He further stated: 'We have the force to chase all the Rwandans out until they return at home in Rwanda.'²²¹ This statement calls on the 'natives of Uvira and Fizi', implying the presence of non-native people, who are, in his view, the Rwandans. By calling on the native people, he reified the autochthonous boundary, since he explicitly distinguished between natives and non-natives. He further strengthened the boundary by claiming that the DRC belongs to the Congolese, excluding Rwandans from the 'us' group and implying that they are foreigners whose home is in Rwanda.

These examples illustrate the creation of an autochthonous boundary on the national level mainly because the boundary is formulated in terms of 'Congolese' and 'Rwandans' or 'Rwandophones', referring to nationalities instead of specific ethnicities. Therefore, this is evidence that the constructed autochthonous boundary operates on the national level as identified by Jackson.²²²

The mega-ethnic level

The final level that Jackson identifies is the mega-ethnic level, characterised by an antagonism between two 'mega-ethnicities'.²²³ On the one hand, there are the Bantu people, who are associated with the 'self-styled autochthonous groups' of the DRC. On the

²¹⁶ Ibidem, an. 53.2.

²¹⁷ Ibidem, §72-73.

²¹⁸ The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, 'Final report (2022)', an. 56.

²¹⁹ Jackson, 'Sons of Which Soil?', 109.

²²⁰ Ibidem.

²²¹ The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, 'Midterm Report (2022)', an. 54.2.

²²² Jackson, 'Sons of Which Soil?', 104.

²²³ Ibidem, 106-107.

other hand, there are the Nilotes, associated with the Tutsis and Banyamulenge.²²⁴ The autochthonous boundary between the Congolese and Rwandans on this level is scarcely reflected in the Group of Experts' reports.

There is one notable reference to the autochthonous boundary at the mega-ethnic level. In an interview with Justin Bitakwira, the politician asserted that the Bantu tribes were the legitimate Congolese and framed the Tutsi and Banyamulenge as foreigners and refugees. He further claimed that the conflict in the eastern provinces of the DRC was a problem between the Bantu and Nilotes.²²⁵ This attitude corresponds with Jackson's mega-ethnic level.²²⁶ However, minimal data indicates the importance of autochthony at this level.

7.2 Lendu and Hema

The local level

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Belgian authorities granted the Hema people better opportunities. This placed the Hema in a position where they dominated the Lendu people.²²⁷ Because of the Hema's advantageous position, they were able to integrate some Lendu villages into their kingdoms. Additionally, they benefitted from the General Property Law of 1973, which declared all land to be state property, thereby abolishing customary rule. Since the Hema were relatively well-placed within the bureaucracy, they were able to take over vast plots of land that the Lendus considered their property.²²⁸ This process of land acquisition by the Hema continued at least until the Second Congo War, resulting in the impoverishment of the Lendu, as they were driven off their land.²²⁹

As a result of this history, both ethnic and autochthonous boundaries have been constructed between the Lendu and Hema. The autochthonous boundaries are mainly created by the Lendu and the armed group CODECO. An example of the manifestation of this boundary is found in the midterm report of December 2019. It describes how Lendu militias carried out attacks targeting the Hema population.²³⁰ The Group of Experts documented that the attackers threatened to kill the Hema citizens if they did not admit that their villages were 'not Hema land, but Lendu land'.²³¹ Consequently, the Hema people were forced to leave their village and those who attempted to return were attacked and chased away.²³² This demonstrates that the Lendu militia claims that the land is theirs

²²⁴ Verweijen, 'From Autochthony to Violence?', 164; Jackson, 'Sons of Which Soil?', 107.

²²⁵ The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, 'Midterm report (2023)', an. 34.2.

²²⁶ Jackson, 'Sons of Which Soil?', 106-107.

²²⁷ International Crisis Group, *DR Congo*, 3.

²²⁸ Stearns, *The War That Doesn't Say Its Name*, 197.

²²⁹ Musamba and Gobbers, *Armed groups, territorial control, land disputes, and gold exploitation*, 29.

²³⁰ The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, 'Midterm Report (2019)', §78-79.

²³¹ *Ibidem*, §80.

²³² *Ibidem*.

and perceives themselves as the rightful inhabitants. Additionally, they actively exclude the Hema from the land. This is an illustration of autochthony at the local level because the Hema maintained a chiefdom within the system of indirect rule and the autochthonous boundary was created between two ethnic groups.²³³

The provincial, national and mega-ethnic levels

In the case of the autochthonous boundary between the Lendu and the Hema people, the analysed reports provide no evidence that this boundary exists on the provincial, national, or mega-ethnic levels. This is mainly because the two groups are seen as part of the same group at the higher levels. Provincially, both communities reside within the Ituri province.²³⁴ Furthermore, no data suggests that, at the national level, the Lendu and Hema people are not seen as Congolese. Therefore, it is plausible that at this level, both groups are perceived as sharing the same Congolese nationality. This contrasts with the mega-ethnic level where Jackson explains that the Hema people are often perceived as Nilotes and the Lendu as Bantu.²³⁵ However, the data did not provide evidence that these two groups have created an autochthonous boundary based on mega-ethnicities.

Thus, the provincial, national, and mega-ethnic levels do not play a significant role in the creation of the autochthonous boundary.²³⁶ This is either because the Lendu and Hema are considered part of the same community, or because the data does not provide any evidence of the autochthonous boundary being created at these levels.

7.3 Groupness

It is difficult to determine whether the constructed autochthonous boundaries in the aforementioned cases have resulted in a higher degree of groupness since there are no direct examples. In the case of the Congolese and Rwandan people, some events do suggest that the social cohesion among the people, especially among the Congolese, may have increased. First, there is the widespread use of '#DeRwandalisation' on social media. One specific video shows one man who is surrounded by a large group of people. The man speaks to the group and advocates for the expulsion of the Rwandans from the DRC. The people around him cheer loudly, which may indicate a temporarily heightened sense of groupness.²³⁷ Furthermore, the fact that the hashtag is increasingly echoed on social media demonstrates that more Congolese people share the same view regarding the Rwandophone population, possibly resulting in a stronger feeling of interconnectedness.²³⁸

²³³ Jackson, 'Sons of Which Soil?', 100.

²³⁴ International Crisis Group, *DR Congo*, 1.

²³⁵ Jackson, 'Sons of Which Soil?', 107-108.

²³⁶ *Ibidem*, 102, 104, 106-107.

²³⁷ The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, 'Final report (2022)'. an. 56.

²³⁸ Brubaker, *Ethnicity Without Groups*, 12.

Second, the circulated audio recording, along with the recordings discussed in the chapter about ethnic boundaries, may have also increased a feeling of groupness. This feeling may crystallise primarily because the speaker explicitly called upon the native people to unite against the Rwandans and collectively force them out of the country.²³⁹ Although the Group of Experts did not focus on the result of the mobilising speech, it is conceivable that such statements may increase groupness.²⁴⁰

In the case of the Hema and Lendu people, some indicators of increased groupness have also been observed. The Hema people were actively chased away from their villages by the Lendu and were attacked upon return. Consequently, the Hema now live in closer proximity to each other, for example in IDP camps.²⁴¹ The fact that they are living together and facing threats, may cause the group's feeling of unity to increase, according to Brubaker.²⁴²

7.4 Incitement to Violence

In the audio message discussed under the heading of autochthony at the national level between the Congolese and Rwandans, the speaker explicitly calls on the natives to expel the Rwandans from the DRC. Additionally, the man encouraged his listeners to take up arms to force the Rwandans out of the country.²⁴³ In another audio recording, a similar message was conveyed: 'Patriots, being native does not mean to demonstrate without conducting any actions, without the revenge of shedding the blood of Rwandans, the uncivil.'²⁴⁴ This incitement to violence coincides with Kaufman's preconditions and processes that were identified in the chapter on ethnic boundaries. Thus, the group myth, fear of eradication and ability to mobilise have the same foundation, only in these instances, the violence is based on autochthony.²⁴⁵ Therefore, autochthonous boundaries also instigate violence.

In the Lendu-Hema conflict, violence has been perpetrated by the Lendu based on the idea that they are native to the land, as illustrated above. In this context, one of Kaufman's preconditions for violence can be identified: the existence of a group myth that justifies animosity towards the other group.²⁴⁶ In the attacks perpetrated by Lendu militias, they pressured the Hema people to acknowledge that their land was 'not Hema land, but Lendu land', otherwise they would be killed.²⁴⁷ This demonstrates that, for the Lendu, violence against the Hema was justified because they believed that the Hema had

²³⁹ The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, 'Midterm report (2022)', an. 54.2.

²⁴⁰ Brubaker, *Ethnicity Without Groups*, 12,

²⁴¹ The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, 'Midterm report (2023)', §78

²⁴² Brubaker, *Ethnicity Without Groups*, 13.

²⁴³ The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, 'Midterm report (2022)', an. 54.2.

²⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, an. 54.1.

²⁴⁵ Kaufman, 'Symbolic Politics or Rational Choice?', 58.

²⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, 58.

²⁴⁷ The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, 'Midterm Report (2019)', §80.

acquired their land. Thus, the group myth of the Lendus is that they are the rightful inhabitants of the stolen land. The data does not indicate that the other preconditions and processes of war, as identified by Kaufman, exist in this context.²⁴⁸

7.5 Autochthony and Ethnicity

As Verweijen has argued, the autochthonous and ethnic boundaries exhibit similarities, as is evidenced by the overlap between the chapters on ethnic and autochthonous boundaries.²⁴⁹ However, they are not identical. Ethnicity is based on elaborate rules of membership, while autochthony can be employed both within and between social groups to exclude people by labelling them as ‘foreigners’.²⁵⁰ This distinction becomes clear in these chapters. For example, in the chapter on ethnic boundaries, individuals were excluded based on different bodily features or language, which are specific characteristics related to particular ethnicities and terms of membership.²⁵¹ In contrast, the autochthonous boundary is rooted in the idea that one community is indigenous to the land and others should be excluded because they are not.²⁵² This chapter has illustrated that autochthonous boundaries can be constructed on different levels, such as national and local. This corresponds with Verweijen’s argument that autochthony can be manifest within as well as between various groups.²⁵³ Overall, the ethnic boundary is based on a more profound understanding of membership than the autochthonous boundary.²⁵⁴

7.6 Summary

In conclusion, this chapter has outlined how autochthonous boundaries have become manifest in the cases of the Congolese and Rwandans and the Lendu and Hema. The Group of Experts’ report were analysed through Jackson’s framework, which found that, between the Congolese and Rwandans, the autochthonous boundary is constructed at the local, national and mega-ethnic levels. Between the Lendu and Hema, the autochthonous boundary is primarily created at the local level. Additionally, this chapter highlighted that the social cohesion within the groups may be enhanced due to the employment of autochthonous boundaries. Moreover, how this type of boundary serves as a basis for violence was briefly delineated. Between the Congolese and Rwandans, the incitement of violence exhibited a large overlap with that of ethnic boundaries. In the case of the Lendu and Hema, the existence of a group myth was the one precondition for violence that could be identified. Finally, this chapter compared the ethnic and

²⁴⁸ Kaufman, ‘Symbolic Politics or Rational Choice?’, 58.

²⁴⁹ Verweijen, ‘From Autochthony to Violence?’, 159.

²⁵⁰ *Ibidem*.

²⁵¹ The United Nations Group of Experts, ‘Midterm report (2022)’, §75.

²⁵² Verweijen, ‘From Autochthony to Violence?’, 158.

²⁵³ *Ibidem*, 159.

²⁵⁴ *Ibidem*.

autochthonous boundaries through Verweijen's assertion that ethnic boundaries are based on a deeper understanding of membership than autochthonous boundaries.

8 Religious Boundaries

A type of boundary that has received less attention in the literature, particularly regarding the conflict in the DRC, is the religious boundary. Religion as a means of ‘identifying oneself and others, of constructing sameness and difference and situating and placing oneself in relation to others’, can function as a boundary and can create a sense of groupness.²⁵⁵ Using Brubaker’s six mechanisms and modalities of ‘violent religiously informed political conflicts’, this chapter will explore how religious boundaries become manifest.²⁵⁶ Given the reports’ focus on armed groups and violations of the sanctions imposed, the data particularly highlights the religious boundary constructed by the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), an Islamist armed group. Therefore, this chapter will discuss the boundary that the ADF has constructed and will reflect on its implications for groupness.

8.1 The ADF

In 1995, the Allied Democratic Forces, an Islamist armed group led by Jamil Mukulu, emerged from a Ugandan Muslim faction that sought to overthrow the Ugandan government because of a perceived disregard for Muslim rights. After the Ugandan army discovered their plans, the group fled to Zaïre.²⁵⁷ On Congolese soil, the ADF allied with the National Army for the Liberation of Uganda (NALU) and created the ADF-NALU alliance.²⁵⁸ The group continued to conduct attacks in Uganda. The Ugandan army actively fought the group, leading to ADF-NALU’s complete withdrawal from Uganda in 2003.²⁵⁹ After the withdrawal, the group started to transform. The ADF-NALU alliance disintegrated, as the NALU joined a demobilisation programme.²⁶⁰ Additionally, the ADF began enforcing a strict interpretation of the Sharia in its camps and recruiting among the Congolese population.²⁶¹

The Islamic armed group has divided its combatants over several camps, with the main camp, Madina at Tauheed Wau Mujahedeen, serving as the group’s headquarters. Most of the camps had to relocate several times due to the attacks of the Congolese army. The camps are primarily situated in the Beni territory.²⁶²

²⁵⁵ Brubaker, ‘Religion and nationalism’, 4.

²⁵⁶ Brubaker, ‘Religious Dimensions’, 6.

²⁵⁷ Tara Candland, Adam Finck, Haroro J. Ingram, Laren Poole, Lorenzo Vidino and Caleb Weiss, *The Islamic State in Congo* (Washington D.C.: Program on Extremism, March 2021), 14; Abdulhakim Nsobya, ‘Uganda’s Militant Islamic Movement ADF: A Historical Analysis’ *The Annual Review of Islam in Africa* 12 (2016) 30-39, there 35.

²⁵⁸ The Congo Research Group, *Inside the ADF Rebellion. A Glimpse into the Life and Operations of a Secretive Jihadi Armed Group* (New York: Center on International Cooperation, 2018), 5.

²⁵⁹ Candland et al., *The Islamic State in Congo*, 15.

²⁶⁰ The Congo Research Group, *Inside the ADF Rebellion*, 6.

²⁶¹ Candland et al., *The Islamic State in Congo*, 15.

²⁶² The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, ‘Final report (2020)’, an. 3

Following the collapse of the ADF-NALU alliance, the ADF radicalised and grew increasingly aggressive toward civilians.²⁶³ Around 2015, leadership changed because Jamil Mukulu had been arrested. The new leader, Musa Baluku, envisioned a more extremist future for the ADF. He aspired for the armed group to join the Islamic State and move towards Jihadism.²⁶⁴ By posting videos in which IS rhetoric and imagery were adopted, Baluku, and the ADF, sought to align with IS ideology.²⁶⁵ A relationship between the two organisations appeared to be established when, in April 2018, IS claimed responsibility for an attack carried out by the ADF.²⁶⁶ This was soon followed by a video in which ADF leader Baluku pledged allegiance to the Caliph and referred to the ADF as ‘the Islamic State of Central Africa’.²⁶⁷

Although the ADF is often characterised as a secretive organisation, it has expressed its goal as a fight to spread Islam in the DRC.²⁶⁸ According to the Group of Experts, a source informed the IS news agency, Amaq, that the attacks carried out by ADF ‘... are within the context of the practical application of the Qur’an and Sunnah, which states to fight the Christians until they submit to Islam or pay Jizyah to Muslims.’²⁶⁹ Additionally, a former abductee of the ADF told the Group of Experts that an ADF officer mentioned that ‘... they attacked to spread Islam and that all non-Muslims should be killed unless they converted.’²⁷⁰

8.2 Six Modalities and Mechanisms

Some of the modalities and mechanisms outlined by Brubaker can be identified in the data concerning the ADF. These mechanisms and modalities help to understand how the religious boundary becomes manifest.

Hypercommitted selves

The first mechanism that Brubaker discusses is the creation of ‘hypercommitted selves’, which entails a radical commitment to a cause—in this case, a religious one.²⁷¹ This commitment can result in both the infliction and suffering of violence.²⁷² A clear example of the creation of hypercommitted selves within the ADF can be found in a recording obtained by the Group of Experts. In this recording, an ADF preacher emphasised the utmost importance of constantly carrying a suicide belt as an ADF leader. He stated: ‘It is

²⁶³ Candland et al., *The Islamic State in Congo*, 16.

²⁶⁴ Ibidem, 17-18.

²⁶⁵ Ibidem, 20.

²⁶⁶ Ibidem.

²⁶⁷ Ibidem, 22.

²⁶⁸ The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, ‘Final report (2018)’, §31; The Congo Research Group, *Inside the ADF Rebellion*, 19.

²⁶⁹ The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, ‘Final report (2022)’, an. 3.

²⁷⁰ The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, ‘Final report (2020)’, an. 18.

²⁷¹ Brubaker, ‘Religious Dimensions’, 7.

²⁷² Ibidem, 8.

better for infidels to find your dead body other than finding you alive! (...) Pray Allah makes it possible for you to die with a suicide vest that blows hundreds of infidels'.²⁷³ This statement illustrates both the willingness to endure violence and the intent to inflict violence during their final act. Additionally, it demonstrates that, according to the preacher, the commanders are deeply committed to the Jihadist goals of the armed group, valuing death for that cause over the risk of revealing secrets. Thus, this speech exemplifies the radical commitment to the religious cause of Jihadism and encourages to adopt the same level of dedication. This process aligns with the concept of hypercommitted selves.²⁷⁴

Extreme otherhood and urgent threat

Brubaker argues that religion has access to a diverse range of resources that are 'at once symbolic, discursive, ritual, and organizational'.²⁷⁵ These resources facilitate the creation of extreme modes of otherness and justify violence against others. According to Brubaker, many religions employ particular, religious categories, such as infidel and heretic, to construct these extreme others.²⁷⁶ In the case of the ADF, these categories and extreme otherhood are evident.

On 15 January 2023, the ADF detonated an explosive device at the Lubiriha Pentecostal Church in Kasindi during an outdoor service.²⁷⁷ After this attack, the Group of Experts received and verified an audio recording in which an ADF combatant told a collaborator: 'If you received the news from Kasindi, we did it to avenge our children that the Kafirs killed and then they burned their bodies. That is why we are in a state of anger, because it is a commandment from Allah. This is the retribution of the Kafirs.'²⁷⁸ In this recording, the combatant refers to the Christians as *Kafirs*, an Islamic term for infidels. The Group of Experts do not clarify whether this statement was based on factual events or intended to demonise Christians. However, it still constitutes extreme otherhood, as Christians are categorised as infidels, justifying the violence against them.

The construction of extreme otherhood is also evident in the IS claims of ADF attacks. Although these claims are likely authored by IS members, the ADF has demonstrated alignment with IS at various times. Thus, it is plausible that the ADF adopts IS rhetoric. In the claims of attacks, victims are often referred to as 'unbelieving'²⁷⁹ and 'infidel' Christians.²⁸⁰ This constitutes 'othering' rhetoric, which excludes victims, and Christians in general, by emphasising their belonging to the unbelieving out-group.

²⁷³ The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, 'Final report (2021)', an. 20.

²⁷⁴ Brubaker, 'Religious Dimensions', 7.

²⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, 8.

²⁷⁶ *Ibidem*.

²⁷⁷ The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, 'Final report (2022)', §22.

²⁷⁸ *Ibidem*, §26.

²⁷⁹ *Ibidem*, an. 6.

²⁸⁰ *Ibidem*, an. 3.

Furthermore, the ADF designated their victims as Christians, which may not correspond to their self-identified religion. By labelling their victims as Christians, the ADF and IS engage in ‘othering’. This discursive practice of creating extreme otherhood demonstrates how boundaries are constructed and reified.²⁸¹

Additionally, Brubaker asserts that religions have access to resources which can create an urgent threat, mobilising and justifying action against it.²⁸² The joint military operation between the Congolese and Ugandan armies aimed at defeating the ADF represents such a threat.²⁸³ Although the Group of Experts do not provide any examples of how the ADF used this urgent threat to mobilise fighters, the data indicates that following the military operation, the ADF attacks intensified, often in retaliation.²⁸⁴ Thus, this threat may serve to legitimise violence, aligning with the concept of urgent threat.

Rewards, sanctions, justifications and obligations

Although rewards, sanctions, justifications and obligations are not exclusive to religion, Brubaker states that religion can imbue these concepts with deeper meaning.²⁸⁵ For the ADF, rewarding the fighters through the use of heroic terms featured prominently in the reports.

In the IS claims of ADF attacks, the combatants of the armed group are celebrated in heroic terms. For example, the ADF fighters who participated in freeing approximately 800 prisoners during a jailbreak in August 2022 were hailed as ‘the warriors of Islamic State’.²⁸⁶ Similarly, after killing three members of the Congolese army, the attackers were referred to as ‘soldiers of the Caliphate’ in the IS claim.²⁸⁷ A final example of this honouring of the ‘us’ group is observed in a claim of a suicide bombing that occurred on 27 June 2021, where the assailant was called ‘one of our martyr knights’.²⁸⁸

Thus, the ADF and IS mobilise a set of rewards that is characteristic of religion.²⁸⁹

Profanation

Brubaker describes profanation as the ‘experienced or claimed violation—whether intended or not—of the required respect’ for ‘sacred objects’ as well as ‘places, times, or activities’ which can result in a violent reaction.²⁹⁰ This mechanism is not reflected in the Group of Experts’ reports. This absence may be attributed to the focus of the reports, as

²⁸¹ Brubaker, ‘Religious Dimensions’, 8.

²⁸² *Ibidem*, 9.

²⁸³ The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, ‘Final report (2022)’, §11; The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, ‘Midterm report (2022)’, §16-18.

²⁸⁴ The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, ‘Final report (2022)’, §19-20.

²⁸⁵ Brubaker, ‘Religious Dimensions’, 9.

²⁸⁶ The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, ‘Midterm report (2022)’, an. 2

²⁸⁷ The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, ‘Midterm report (2020)’, an. 3.

²⁸⁸ The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, ‘Final report (2021)’, an. 17.

²⁸⁹ Brubaker, ‘Religious Dimensions’, 9.

²⁹⁰ *Ibidem*, 10.

they primarily serve the sanctions committee. Despite this, acts of profanation might still motivate the ADF to conduct attacks, making it important to document such instances if they occur. Therefore, it is difficult to claim that profanation does not play a role. Nevertheless, profanation cannot be identified in the analysed reports.

Translocal expandability

Dahinden and Zittoun argue that emphasising the universal character of religion can be a strategy of boundary-making, whereby reinforcing that boundary allows religion to serve as a resource for self-worth and identity. In this manner, religion can be 'transnationally anchored'.²⁹¹ This corresponds with Brubaker's concept of translocal expandability, which suggests that because religion crosscuts boundaries, outsiders can become involved in domestic conflicts.²⁹²

In the Group of Experts' reports, the religious boundary constructed by the ADF exemplifies how the universal character of religion transcends ethnic and nationalist boundaries. This is particularly evident in their strategy of ideological recruitment. From 2015 onwards, after Baluku became the ADF's new leader, the armed group published an increasing number of videos on social media, displaying both the military and ideological capacities of the ADF.²⁹³ Besides demonstrating the ADF's capacities, the videos depict how ADF combatants live together in the camps and practice their shared faith. The aim of showcasing the religious aspect of the ADF was to recruit radicalised and jihadist individuals.²⁹⁴ In addition to finding like-minded recruits, the armed group also recruited in mosques and schools.²⁹⁵ Furthermore, ADF extended its recruitment efforts beyond national borders, placing recruiters in Burundi, Kenya, and Tanzania, among other countries.²⁹⁶

The recruitment based on ideology indicates that the ADF recruits along religious rather than ethnic or nationalist lines, illustrating the construction of cross-cutting religious boundaries that attract individuals who align with the group's religious ideas. This bottom-up, ideological recruitment on an international scale underscores the translocal character of the boundary.²⁹⁷

The structure of religious fields

The final modality that Brubaker discusses is the hypercompetitiveness of religious fields, which can result in radicalisation. Following Bourdieu, Brubaker asserts that in a religious

²⁹¹ Dahinden and Zittoun, 'Religion in Meaning Making and Boundary Work', 197.

²⁹² Brubaker, 'Religious Dimensions', 10.

²⁹³ The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, 'Final report (2020)', §29.

²⁹⁴ The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, 'Final report (2021)', an. 13.

²⁹⁵ The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, 'Final report (2022)', §14; The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, 'Final report (2021)', §35.

²⁹⁶ The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, 'Final report (2021)', §35.

²⁹⁷ Dahinden and Zittoun, 'Religion in Meaning Making and Boundary Work', 197; Brubaker, 'Religious Dimensions', 10.

field, people possess different kinds and amounts of capital, leading to heteronomy and strategies of outbidding as well as provocation. Brubaker argues that new actors in the field may employ these strategies to enhance their position.²⁹⁸ In the analysed reports, this modality mainly becomes evident through the propaganda and attacks carried out by ADF. This fits with the provocation strategy, which intends to increase visibility and acquire recognition.²⁹⁹

The provocation can be viewed in light of ADF's alignment with IS. In the religious field that both organisations find themselves in, IS holds a dominant position. By aligning its ideology, propaganda, and modus operandi with that of IS, the ADF may seek to improve its position relative to the established organisation IS, thus aligning with Brubaker's concept.³⁰⁰

8.3 Groupness

Brubaker argues that group-making is a 'social, cultural and political project' carried out by 'ethnopolitical entrepreneurs', which can crystallise groupness.³⁰¹ The data indicates that the ADF leadership seems actively engaged in group-making. The Group of Experts noted that the aforementioned videos were intended not only as propaganda but also as a means to strengthen the 'discipline, unity and morale' of the group.³⁰² Additionally, most of the video materials were only screened within the ADF camps to instil fear in the combatants and create stronger discipline among the fighters.³⁰³ These propaganda videos can foster a sense of groupness among the ADF fighters.³⁰⁴

In addition to showing the videos, the combatants, and especially the recruits, were subjected to lessons about the Qur'an.³⁰⁵ This was also the case for children. Multiple children who had escaped from the ADF camps informed the Group of Experts that they had participated in religious ceremonies, studies and prayers. Additionally, they were given new Muslim names.³⁰⁶ These ceremonies, sermons, and prayers were held in a mosque or large prayer areas found in every camp.³⁰⁷ Such communal sites bring people together physically to practice their religion, likely increasing groupness.³⁰⁸

In the case of the ADF, groupness was not solely created from the inside out but may also have resulted from an external threat. As illustrated above, the ADF was targeted

²⁹⁸ Brubaker, 'Religious Dimensions', 11.

²⁹⁹ Ibidem.

³⁰⁰ Ibidem.

³⁰¹ Brubaker, *Ethnicity Without Groups*, 12-13.

³⁰² The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, 'Final report (2020)', §29.

³⁰³ Ibidem, an. 20.

³⁰⁴ Brubaker, *Ethnicity Without Groups*, 13.

³⁰⁵ The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, 'Midterm report (2019)', §24.

³⁰⁶ The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, 'Midterm report (2023)', an. 12.

³⁰⁷ The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, 'Final report (2020)', an. 3.

³⁰⁸ Brubaker, *Ethnicity Without Groups*, 12-13.

by a military operation conducted by the Congolese and Ugandan armies. Such threats may have a positive effect on the group's feelings of unity.³⁰⁹

Thus, in addition to the threat posed by the military operation, the ADF leadership appears to construct a communal feeling among the inhabitants of their camps through videos, teachings, and communal prayers, among others. It is difficult to determine to what extent this group feeling crystallised, especially given the secretive nature of the ADF. However, the data indicates that several factors at play may increase groupness.

8.4 Incitement to Violence

In the violence perpetrated by the ADF, the existence of a group myth can be identified.³¹⁰ This group myth also relates to Brubaker's modality of the creation of extreme otherhood.³¹¹ The myth that the ADF relies on is that all non-believers should be fought or killed unless they convert to Islam. This articulated goal of the armed group was reported to the Group of Experts several times.³¹² Additionally, through constructing extreme others, primarily by calling Christians *Kafirs*, violence against them is justified.³¹³ Thus, this group myth incites violence.³¹⁴

Other elements of Kaufman's framework could not be observed.³¹⁵ However, in the case of the ADF, Brubaker's mechanism of the production of hypercommitted selves also incites violence.³¹⁶ The speech of the ADF preacher, outlined under the header of hypercommitted selves, calls upon his listeners to '... Pray Allah makes it possible for you to die with a suicide vest that blows hundreds of infidels'.³¹⁷ As mentioned, the Jihadists are deeply committed to their goal, making them willing to inflict as much violence as possible when they die. This demonstrates that the production of hypercommitted selves within the ADF facilitates violence.³¹⁸

8.5 Summary

This chapter has demonstrated that out of Brubaker's six modalities and mechanisms of violent religious conflict, five can be identified in the analysed reports regarding the ADF: the production of hypercommitted selves, the construction of extreme otherhood and urgent threat, the mobilisation of rewards, translocal expandability and the

³⁰⁹ Ibidem, 14.

³¹⁰ Kaufman, 'Symbolic Politics or Rational Choice?', 58.

³¹¹ Brubaker, 'Religious Dimensions', 8.

³¹² The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, 'Final report (2022)', an. 3; The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, 'Final report (2020)', an. 18.

³¹³ The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, 'Final report (2022)', §26.

³¹⁴ Kaufman, 'Symbolic Politics or Rational Choice?', 58.

³¹⁵ Ibidem.

³¹⁶ Brubaker, 'Religious Dimensions', 7-8.

³¹⁷ The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, 'Final report (2021)', an. 20.

³¹⁸ Brubaker, 'Religious Dimensions', 8.

provocation strategy. Moreover, the data indicates that, in addition to the enhancement of groupness by external threats, the ADF leadership actively engages in fostering such sentiment. Lastly, this chapter examined the relationship between religion and the incitement to violence. This was mainly exemplified in their underlying group myth of fighting unbelievers and the hypercommitment of Jihadists, making them willing to inflict violence.

9 Conclusion

This research has examined boundaries in the Group of Experts' reports using the following question: 'Which processes of ethnic, autochthonous and religious boundary-making are evident in the final and midterm reports issued by the United Nations Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo between June 2019 and December 2023 and how does this contribute to our understanding of the conflict in the DRC?'

Following a document analysis of nine reports, three main types of boundaries were identified: the ethnic, autochthonous and religious boundaries. Each boundary has been discussed in a separate chapter.

Ethnic boundaries

The reports of the Group of Experts have illustrated that ethnic boundaries are created between the Lendu and the Hema people, as well as between the Congolese and Rwandans. In creating these boundaries, various strategies of boundary-making were identified, such as the blurring of boundaries and the strengthening of boundaries, which aligns with Wimmer's theory on boundary-making. Additionally, the concept of groupness was examined concerning ethnic boundaries. Moreover, between the Congolese and Rwandans, hate speech and incitement to violence began to increase and as a result, the boundary became reified. These processes fit into the framework of Kaufman's symbolist politics theory.

Autochthonous boundaries

The autochthonous boundaries were studied through Jackson's multilevel approach. The boundary constructed between the Congolese and Rwandans was observed at the local, national, and mega-ethnic levels. Autochthony at the local level was primarily articulated as an antagonism between the Bafuliiru, Babembe and Bavira communities and the Banyamulenge. Nationally, there were tensions between the Congolese and Rwandan people, and at the mega-ethnic level, this was expressed as a dichotomy between the 'autochthonous' Bantus and 'foreign' Nilotes.

In the case of the Lendu and Hema people, autochthony was only found at the local level, mainly because these two ethnic groups are commonly perceived as part of the same group on the provincial and national levels. On the mega-ethnic level, the Lendu are perceived as Bantu and the Hema as Nilotes; however, no evidence was found that these groups have created an autochthonous boundary at this level.

Religious boundaries

The historiographic section has shown that the role of religion in the Congolese conflict has predominantly been studied in relation to peacebuilding. Religious boundaries have received considerably less attention. Nevertheless, the findings of this research demonstrated that the ADF has constructed a religious boundary, which is part of the conflict. The Islamist armed group created a boundary between Muslims and non-

Muslims. Combined with their objective to spread Islam, they contribute to the conflict dynamics, by being willing to kill, abduct, and force individuals to convert to achieve their goals.

Using the six modalities and mechanisms outlined by Brubaker, the religious boundary constructed by the ADF became evident through its ability to produce hypercommitted selves, create extreme otherhood and urgent threat, mobilise rewards, exhibit a translocal character and employ the strategy of provocation in a highly competitive religious field. Overall, the religious boundary, and religion in general, should not be overlooked in the literature, because the data has indicated the boundary exists and has significant consequences for the conflict. So, this research has shed new light on the conflict by examining the construction of religious boundaries.

Integration

To answer the main research question, how the ethnic, autochthonous and religious boundaries become evident in the analysed reports have become manifest, is summarised above. These boundaries demonstrate the terms of membership of the group and provide valuable insights into grievances and motivations. In addition, through the use of violence, boundaries can be reified, leading to the stronger exclusion of the other group

Furthermore, Autesserre has argued that a focus on single aspects of the Congolese conflict is undesirable, as this overlooks the conflict's multilayered nature and results in superficial rather than comprehensive solutions. This study aimed to avoid such a narrow focus by integrating the three types of boundaries. This integrative approach provides new insights into the conflict dynamics, highlighting overlaps and differences. While the ethnic and autochthonous boundaries displayed similarities, for example in where the boundaries were set and their relation to violence, the religious boundary was different, as it focussed on a different actor with distinct goals and mechanisms. Therefore, integrating religious boundaries into research is crucial, as it demonstrates different methods of boundary formation, presents alternative motivations and justifications for actions and offers particular means of creating groupness. Including the religious aspect in future studies will contribute to a deeper understanding of the DRC conflict, which is essential for devising a sustainable solution to peace.

Limitations

This study relied on the Group of Experts' reports. As previously elaborated, these reports aim to uncover violations of human rights and help to monitor the sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council. Given this mandate, the Group of Experts primarily focused on four aspects of the conflict and sometimes neglected the broader political, social and economic dynamics that also influence the situation in the DRC. Additionally, the positions of the Group of Experts seem to be home-based. This hinders the collection of local knowledge, even though this is as important as other sources.

After carefully considering this critique, the reports were still used as primary data because these are the most extensive sources available. To deal with the aforementioned

critique, this research aimed to verify the information from the Group of Expert's reports, using academic articles and reports from NGOs.

Relevance

Through researching the ethnic, autochthonous and religious boundaries, this study has tried to contribute to academic literature. This was achieved by using the Group of Experts' reports, a relatively understudied source, and by explicitly integrating the religious boundary into the research. The role of religion has received insufficient attention in the literature, despite its significance in the conflict, as illustrated by this research.

Next to highlighting the religious aspect, the current research also added to the academic literature, by providing an overview of the three main types of boundaries, rather than focussing on just one. By combining research into the ethnic, autochthonous and religious boundaries, this study illuminated different aspects of the conflict which helped to identify both different and coherent dynamics.

Moreover, the study has advanced knowledge about the conflict. This is essential considering the grave humanitarian crisis that the DRC is undergoing. It is crucial to continually strive to better grasp the situation in the country because this will help in finding a durable solution to the conflict.

Future studies

Further research might explore the religious dimension of the Congolese conflict, as it has become evident that this is one driver of the conflict. This study has mainly focused on the Allied Democratic Forces due to the available sources. It would be valuable to approach the religious aspect from a local level and study how religious boundaries are constructed on the ground. This is important since the role of religion is understudied. More generally, a local approach to the construction of boundaries in the DRC conflict would be of significant interest to future studies.

Closing remarks

In conclusion, this study has presented an extensive analysis of the ethnic, autochthonous, and religious boundaries evident in the reports of the United Nations Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo. By examining these boundaries, this research contributes to a more in-depth understanding of the DRC conflict. It underlines the importance of integrating these types of boundaries into research to fully grasp some drivers of the conflict. This study has opened up avenues for further research into the religious aspects of the conflict as well as the local perspectives of boundary-making. Such research will enhance understanding of the conflict, which is vital for finding the solution that is desperately sought in the DRC.

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