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Transnational Ethnic Alliances and Armed Conflicts in the DRC: Focus on the M23 Rebellion (2012-2023)

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Abstract

The thesis investigates the protracted and transnational nature of the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo, focusing on the March 23 rebellion from 2012 to 2023. Using the collective action analytical framework that helps to understand why people participate in violent collective actions as has been happening in Congo since the 1990s, the analysis goes beyond the prevailing academic narrative that emphasizes economic factors and proxy explanation for the conflict by highlighting the role of ideology and discursive practices promoting division and perpetuating ethnic division in Congo and the Great Lakes Region. The central argument of this thesis is that the spreading of the Hamitic ideology that labels Tutsi from the Great Lakes Region of Africa as foreigners and invaders is at the root of the protracted conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Three factors linked to the socio-political environment and conditions shaped the possibility and political opportunities of the emergence of the M23 and its predecessors. Notably,(1)) the increasing use of the Hamitic ideological discourse as a framing strategy to spreading anti-Tutsi sentiments in the region; (2) the threat provoked by the presence in Congo of Rwandan Hutu extremists perpetrators of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda—later called the FDLR who continued their project of eliminating Tutsis ; (3) combined with the continued marginalization and the lack of will on the side of the Congolese government to implement different peace agreements and a real unification of the country, increased the belief within Congolese Tutsi that their interests could be defended only through armed rebellion.

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My family: my wife and my son

My mother, my sisters and my brother

Abbreviations

ADFL	Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo
CGLR	Conference on the Great Lakes Region
CNDD-FDD	Conseil National Pour la Défense de la Démocratie /Forces pour la Défense de la Démocratie
CNDP	National Congress for the Defense of the People
CNS	Conférence nationale souveraine
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
EACRF	East African Community Regional Force
FAR	The Forces Armées Rwandaises
FARDC	Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo
FDLR	Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda,
FNL	Forces Nationales de Liberation
FRDC	Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo
FROLINA	Front de Libération Nationale, or
M23	Mouvement du 23 Mars
MONUSCO	The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo
MPR	Movement Populaire Revolutionaire
PALIPEHUTU	Parti pour la Libération duPpeuple Hutu,

RCD	Rally for Congolese Democracy
RED-Tabara	Résistance pour un État de Droit au Burundi-Tabara
RPF	Rwandan Patriotic Front
RTLM	Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines
RTLM	Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines
SADC	Southern African Development Community
UN	United Nations

Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

> *"In brief, my life is war. I was born in Masisi, but I grew up in Rutsuru territory. I joined this struggle 22 years ago when I was a small boy aged 17. I first fought against Habyarimana's regime in Rwanda which wanted to kill all Tutsis. I dropped out of school and decided to travel to Uganda where I underwent military training for six months, before joining the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) in October 1990. During my service in the Rwandan army, I rose to the rank of sergeant and deputy platoon commander. When the war ended in Rwanda, I decided to fight for my country. I relocated from Rwanda to Burundi, where I met Mzee [the father] [Laurent] Kabila. Kabila and I shared the same goal, to liberate Congo from the brutal, corrupt leadership of Mobutu, which had almost destroyed the country. We agreed to fight together after he got strong recommendations from my seniors in the Rwandan army. I fought alongside the Nguruma battalion, which was managed by the Rwandan army. That was in 1996 when we launched the liberation struggle for Congo with Mzee Kabila. At that time, all of us Congolese fought for the same goal. But when we won the war, we were branded Banyamulenge—a disobedient group of Tutsi. We were called foreigners by the same man we had supported and then told us to return to Rwanda where we belonged. This was very painful. We fell apart and decided that we were going nowhere because Congo was, and still is, our home, which we are ready to die fighting for […] In brief, my life is war, my education is war, and my language is war. But I do respect peace and the call from the international community. That's why we signed the 23 March 2009 peace accord in Nairobi."* [1]

This brief interview illustrates the journey of Sultan Makenga the military commander of the March 23 rebel group, which is illustrative of the experiences of numerous Congolese individuals who have been involved in both the 1990-1994 Rwandan civil war, where they fought alongside the Rwandan Patriotic

[1] General Sultan Makenga interviewed by New African Magazine, February 15, 2013, https://newafricanmagazine.com/3565/

Front (RPF), and in the various rebellions that have occurred in Congo. The interview also reveals, on the one hand, the protracted character of conflict in Congo, reflected in the long period Sultan Makenga has been fighting, and on the other hand, it reveals the transnational nature of conflicts that occurred both in Congo and Rwanda, proved by the involvement of the Congolese in the Rwandan war and the Rwandan army in Congo. The core objective of this thesis is to understand the protracted and transnational nature of the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo, with a specific focus on the conflict between the Congolese government and the March 23 rebel group from 2012 to 2023.

The March 23 Movement, commonly known as M23, is a prominent military group operating in the eastern Provinces of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), primarily consisting of Congolese Tutsi Rwandophones. Formed in April 2012 by former National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP) armed group members, the rebel group quickly gained notoriety for its rapid military advances and control over key territories (Stearns 2012). The group's name is derived from the March 23, 2009 peace agreement between the DRC government and the CNDP, which M23 claims was never fully implemented, thus justifying their rebellion. In November 2012, the M23 took control of Goma the capital of Kivu province, and, announced that if the government refused to enter into talks, they would carry on to Bukavu, another major city in eastern Congo (BBC News 2012). Under the auspices of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) and the facilitation of Uganda, negotiations between the Congolese government and the M23 started in December 2012 in Kampala.

However, because of a divergence in conflict analysis on the part of policymakers, they adopted parallel and contradictory approaches to resolving the conflict, as a result, the negotiations failed in April 2013 (Shepherd 2018:3). The Congolese government, its allies in the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and the UN mobilized security resources to defeat the M23 militarily. They launched an offensive against the M23 and defeated it within a week. The robust armed approach proved ineffective because, at the end of 2016, the M23 rapidly reconstituted and set up a military base in North Kivu, recruited new elements, and sprang into action starting in 2022 capturing swathes of territories in North Kivu, and established parallel governance structures in areas under its control (UN 2022:9).

Since the emergence of the M23, many articles and reports have been produced on the topic, and much of the literature has focused on economic factors such as the exploitation of natural resources, and economic motivations of the actors involved. This narrative often frames the emergence of the M23 as primarily driven by greed and the pursuit of material gain. Another dominant literature focuses on the role of external actors, particularly portraying the M23 as a proxy for Rwanda's regional interests. This narrative suggests that the conflict is largely orchestrated by external actors to influence regional power dynamics. However, despite its significant impact on the protracted conflict in the Congo, few scholars have focused on ideology and discursive practices frequently used as framing strategies for

mobilization for violent collective action in Congo and the Great Lakes Region of Africa. Although economic factors are significant, they are not the sole or primary drivers of the protracted violent conflict, as they do not fully explain the persistent ethnic violence and continual existence of armed groups such as the M23 and several others operating in Congo. Scholars often overlook the extensive history of the M23 and the cycle of violence perpetuated by policymakers' negligence to address the growth of ideological underpinnings that promote ethnic division and exclusion in Congo and the Great Lakes Region, leading to an environment in which conditions for mobilization for violent collective action become possible.

As stated by Demmers (2017:1), behind every analysis of violent conflict is a set of assumptions that explain why and how people resort to violence, these assumptions are usually subjective and form the basis of academic theories of conflict, and indirectly influence the way policymakers and politicians interpret a conflict. Their interpretation of a conflict determines to a certain extent what sort of intervention they design. In this case study, divergent interpretations of the M23's origins, motivations, and legitimacy led to significant confusion in determining the appropriate resolution in 2013. For some, the M23 was an expression of popular frustration, a commitment to fighting for the rights of Rwandophone Congolese who over the past 30 years have suffered, mistreatment, violence, as well as forced displacement into neighboring countries. This line of analysis proposes to treat the M23 as having legitimate grievances amenable to a negotiated resolution. For others, the M23 represents the latest in a long line of Rwandan-linked rebel movements that have served as proxies for the economic ambitions of the Rwandan state. According to them, the M23 was an illegitimate actor requiring a robust military response. This divergence in conflict analysis generated parallel and contradictory approaches to resolving it, leading to the failure of peace talks and the perpetuation of the conflict. Hence the need to fill the gap.

This thesis contributes to the existing academic efforts to explore the question of ethnic-based violence in the Congo and the Great Lakes region by offering an analysis that goes beyond economic and proxy explanations. It emphasizes the importance of ideology and discursive practices often used by political entrepreneurs as framing strategies of mobilization that draw people into action, inducing latent supporters of a cause to participate in an insurgency. Inspired by the renewal of fighting between the M23 rebel movement and the Congolese army since 2022, the research aims to understand why the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo is protracted, and why it often involves neighboring states and cross-border ethnic groups from the Great Lakes Region of Africa. It also seeks to understand why most intrastate conflicts in the Great Lakes Regions since the 1990s have often spilled over borders and taken on a regional character involving transnational alliances based on ethnic ties. The thesis will address two main questions: First, why is the armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo

protracted? Second, why are neighboring states and cross-border ethnic groups involved in the conflict? To answer these questions, I use the collective action analytical framework, which enables me to understand the reasons behind people's participation and involvement in violent collective actions such as the protracted insurgency in Congo.

The central argument of this thesis is that the spreading of the Hamitic ideology that labels Tutsi from the Great Lakes Region of Africa as foreigners and invaders is at the root of the protracted conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Three factors linked to the socio-political environment and conditions shaped the possibility and political opportunities of the emergence of the M23 and its predecessors. Notably,(1)) the increasing use of the Hamitic ideological discourse as a framing strategy to spreading anti-Tutsi sentiments in the region; (2) the threat provoked by the presence in Congo of Rwandan Hutu extremists perpetrators of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda—later called the FDLR who continued their project of eliminating Tutsis ; (3) combined with the continued marginalization and the lack of will on the side of the Congolese government to implement different peace agreements and a real unification of the country, increased the belief within Congolese Tutsi that their interests could be defended only through armed rebellion. In addition, the growth of anti-Tutsi hate speech in Congo facilitates the M23 mobilization efforts, since such rhetoric reinforces the perception of existential threat among Congolese Tutsi, making M23's calls for protection and solidarity more compelling. Regarding the transnational aspect of the conflict, the thesis posits that it is a product of two interrelated factors: first, transnational threats posed by foreign rebel groups operating from Congo to challenge their countries of origin; and second, transnational ethnic alliances influenced by the Hamitic ideology embedded in the region motivating states' leaders and armed groups to intervene in conflicts involving their ethnic kin.

Methodology

This thesis relied on a diverse set of sources collected in different phases to develop a comprehensive understanding of the national and transnational nature of the conflict. The initial phase involved an extensive review of the existing literature on ethnic conflict in Congo. This included reading academic articles, analyzing some reports from international organizations that discuss the situation, press releases related to the conflict from the Congolese government, and from the M23, and all the reports and "Letters from the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo addressed to the President of the Security Council" covering the period of my interest. These sources provided indispensable insights into the broader context of the conflict, covering historical background, political dynamics, and socio-economic factors, from different perspectives. The information gathered from this literature review helped formulate questions for the interviews conducted later in the research process.

The next phase consisted of conducting interviews to gather first-hand accounts and personal perceptions from Congolese who had experienced some episode of the protracted conflict, while also reading academic articles and book chapters related to the Congolese conflict. I conducted semi-structured and many informal interviews with approximately 30 individuals, most of whom are Congolese refugees residing in various parts of the Netherlands. Some interviewees claimed to have fought within one of the many armed groups operating in Congo, providing valuable insights into the conflict from a combatant's perspective. Others had one or several family members fighting alongside either the M23 or the Congolese army. Additionally, I watched and analyzed interviews with M23 leaders and fighters published by newspapers, and available on YouTube. Furthermore, videos circulating via WhatsApp groups in Burundi, Rwanda, and Uganda were also examined. This analysis revealed how the M23 has been utilizing videos to disseminate its ideology to mobilize supporters.

In addition to interviews, I analyzed social media content, particularly Twitter, to observe the dominant discourse surrounding the conflict, the language, and the rhetoric used to frame it, because as stated by Demmers (2017:100) we need to understand conflict as socially and discursively constructed and, the rhetorical battle for control over what the conflict is about and the way violence is described is as important as the outcomes of specific violent struggles themselves. It consisted of examining specific tweets that glorified the M23 and those that supported the opposing side; the selection was strategic as I chose those with high levels of engagement receiving hundreds of thousands of views, comments, and retweets. Furthermore, I joined several Twitter Spaces organized by M23 supporters/members in which M23 leaders were invited to talk about why they are fighting and to answer questions from the audience. The analysis of discourse on social media complemented the qualitative data generated from interviews by highlighting the narratives and sentiments prevalent among different communities involved in or affected by the conflict. This approach provided an understanding of how the conflict is perceived, discussed, and framed and showed me why ideology embedded in the Great Lakes Region is the most significant factor that explains why the conflict persists.

Despite the inability to conduct fieldwork in the Congo due to security concerns, the combination of literature review, interview, and social media content analysis provided a robust methodological framework for this research. The sources shed light on the protracted war in Congo and its transnational dimension.

Chapter outline

In the second chapter, I present the analytical framework of this thesis. It is divided into two parts. In part one, I use the collective action theoretical framework to discuss why and how people mobilize for

violent collective action. The framework is based on three related elements: the political opportunity structures, mobilizing structures, and framing. Each of these three components is discussed in detail. The second section addresses the transnational dimension of intrastate conflicts. I discuss the escalation and diffusion of conflict at a supranational level and why, how, and when ethnic conflicts spill or spread across national borders. The central argument goes in the same line of thinking as Jackson and Dexter (2014:5) that organized and sustained violent collective action is conditioned on two key facilitating conditions: on the one hand, the presence of a particular set of material and discursive structures including ideology, the military instruments for sustained violence, an economic basis for prosecuting the war and a set of society-wide military norms values and practices. On the other hand, willing and capable agents who can transform the structural potential of the society or group into active participants in violence.

Chapter 3 addresses the historical and ideological roots of the conflict, particularly the impact of colonialism and the propagation of the Hamitic ideology which have contributed to ethnic divisions and conflict in the Great Lakes Region, particularly in Congo. I address the historical circumstances that led to the formation of the M23 rebel group by emphasizing the interplay of colonial legacy, ideological factors, and refugee movements. I highlight the artificial construction of ethnic groups, which sowed the seeds for future ethnic tensions, and the negative impact of the Hamitic ideology coined by the colonial powers as part of the divide-and-rule strategy consisting of the classification of the population in the Great Lakes Region into two broad ethnic categories, designating certain groups as "Indigenous" and others as outsiders or less Indigenous. I argue that the embeddedness of this ideology in the Great Lakes region and its use by political entrepreneurs as a strategy for mobilization is at the root of the protracted conflict in Congo.

In Chapter 4, I delve into the formation, ideology, and power dynamics of the M23 highlighting the immediate causes that led to its creation and exploring its ideological foundations including its political motivations. I also examine how the rebel group mobilizes its supporters and sustains its insurgency, emphasizing the importance of the use of ideology, discursive practices, and framing strategies. I show how the spread of anti-Tutsi hate speech in Congo further facilitates M23's mobilization efforts, since such rhetoric reinforces the perception of existential threat among Congolese Tutsi, making the M23's calls for protection and solidarity even more compelling.

Chap 2: Theoretical Framework

This chapter presents the analytical framework of this thesis. The research aims to understand the protracted armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo, involving neighboring states and cross-border ethnic groups. It seeks to understand why intrastate conflicts in the Great Lakes Region of Africa take on a regional character and involve transnational alliances based on ethnic ties. In other words, I am interested in understanding the mobilization of violent collective actions phenomenon, that take the form of insurgency in the Great Lakes Region, specifically in the Democratic Republic of Congo. I begin by examining why and how people mobilize for violent collective action. The framework I have used for this first part is the collective action theory, an analytical framework based on three related elements: political opportunity structures, mobilizing structures, and framing processes. As this thesis also addresses the transnational dimension of intrastate conflicts, the second part of this chapter discusses the escalation and diffusion of conflict at a supranational level; why, how, and when ethnic conflicts spill across borders.

1. Collective action theory

The framework I use for understanding why and how people mobilize for violent collective action is collective action theory. Why this choice? The reason is that it is a multi-causal approach that combines agency and structure-based theories. It has been recognized that although structural factors such as grievance, ethnicity, and poverty, or structural transformations such as the growth of the modern state system, the development of the global economy set a larger context, they by themselves do not make conflicts (Demmers 2017:84). The ability of structuralist explanations to account for political violence adequately is called into question by three intersecting questions relating to the location and timing of organized political violence (Jackson and Dexter 2014:3). The first question is why do similar societies that share the same structural characteristics such as poverty, ethnic divisions, minority grievances, or low levels of state legitimacy, produce radically different conflict histories? Second, given the longevity and persistence of the structural conditions in most conflict-ridden states, how do we explain the timing of outbreaks of political violence? In order words, why do wars erupt at a certain time but not earlier or later? Third, why do similar kinds of conflicts lead to organized political violence in some types of states but not in others?

Regarding agency-based theories, one of the main explanations for rebellion against the state revolves around the role of perceived grievance and relative deprivation in driving individuals and groups to mobilize for collective violence (Gurr 2015). Gurr's theory of relative deprivation suggests that when individuals or groups perceive a discrepancy between their actual condition and their expectations or the conditions of others to which they compare themselves, they are more likely to mobilize and engage in collective action, including violent forms of protest. This approach underlines the importance of understanding individuals' subjective experiences and perceptions in explaining their tendency to mobilize and engage in violent collective action as a response to perceived grievances. In the same tradition, Edwar Azar (Azar 1990) developed what is known as the human needs theory, associated with his framework of protracted social conflicts. His theory underlines the idea that unmet human needs, particularly those related to identity (acceptance), security, and participation (access), can contribute to the emergence and perpetuation of conflicts. He argues that grievances resulting from need deprivation are usually expressed collectively. "Failure to redress these grievances by the authority cultivates a niche for a protracted social conflict, [...] collective recognition of individual grievances naturally leads to collective protest "(Azar 1990:12-15).

However, both human needs theory and relative deprivation theory have been criticized because they do not give a sufficient cause as to why, in many cases, politically and economically frustrated people do not embark on violent rebellion. According to Alfred Cuzán (1990:403), grievances and discontent are not the cause of revolutions. If they were, most Third World countries would be in continuous turmoil. While discontent, grievances, frustration, and aggression might be necessary ingredients for armed conflict to erupt, they do not constitute sufficient conditions for explaining sustained movements of collective violence. "Grievances are not what gives rise to revolution, but rather, are important only to the extent that the rhetoric and actions of revolutionaries themselves bring them into play" (Cuzán 1990:403). Therefore, discursive practices must be included in our analysis because they are crucial for mobilization and collective action as they spread information, shape people's perceptions, and motivate and persuade them to act together. Thus, the analysis would involve the examination of how people engage in discursive practices that render violence against the "other" legitimate and inevitable.

To answer the question of how and why people mobilize for violent collective action, it is obvious that both context and actors, and therefore structure and human agency, are important in understanding the phenomenon under study. As explained by Jackson and Dexter (2014:4), agency and structures are interdependent and co-constituted in the sense that structures are the product of social actions and that social actions are shaped and made possible by structures. The interaction of structures, agents, and discursive practices in particular historical and spatial contexts creates the conditions that make insurgency possible (Jackson and Dexter 2014:5).

The collective action theory analytic framework is based on three related elements: the political opportunity structures, mobilizing structures, and framing. Each of these three components will be discussed in detail in this section. In this thesis, I will focus more on the discursive practices and framing processes often used by political entrepreneurs to mobilize and shape people's perceptions and motivations to take action (Demmers 2017: 100-102). Collective action theory will to some extent help understand how in intrastate conflict settings diverse actors come together to pursue their interests and how their actions can have transnational implications.

Political opportunity structures

Political opportunity structures refer to the broader socio-political environment, the socio-economic conditions, cultural contexts, and patterns of social interaction that shape the possibilities for collective action (Tarrow 1998). They can either facilitate or constrain the mobilization of violent collective action. Political opportunity structures are the complex sets of formal and informal political conditions into which a movement, including an ethnic one, must enter when it becomes active (McAdam 1996). It includes what can be considered stable features of the institutional environment, such as the state's propensity for repression or the openness of the political system, and, in the case of ethnic movements, the official recognition of ethnic groups or the existence of special channels for ethnic representation (Vermeersch 2011). It also includes less stable factors such as the presence or absence of elite allies, shifts in political alliances, and, in the case of ethnic movements, for example, the political position of other identity groups (Vermeersch 2011). In this case, it can be transnational alliances based on ethnic or ideological ties (see details in the second part of the chapter).

Prominent figures such as Douglas McAdam, Charles Tilly, and Sidney Tarrow have made significant contributions to the study of political opportunity structures, but there are nuances in their perspectives and interpretations of the concept. Doug McAdam's work (1982;1996) emphasizes the role of political opportunities in shaping the emergence and success of social movements (social movements include, riots, revolutions, etc..). He argues that changes in the political context, such as shifts in government policies, legal rulings, or the availability of resources, can create openings for collective action. Most importantly, McAdam emphasizes the importance of organizational readiness and strategic framing in exploiting these opportunities. Tilly's conceptualization of political opportunity structures is linked to his broader theory of contentious politics, defined as a collective political action aimed at influencing or contesting power relations, a type of political expression involving claiming some form of authority — usually a government (Tilly and Tarrow 2015). In his exploration of political opportunity structures (Tilly

2017), he highlights several key facets such as the interplay between interest and opportunity, contending that a group's inclination towards collective action is intricately linked to the prevailing opportunities and threats it confronts. Secondly, Tilly scrutinizes the dynamics of power and membership (in social and political communities), elucidating how shifts in political power influence a group's composition within the polity, and how forming coalitions with diverse members can mitigate violence. Thirdly, he scrutinizes the government's dual role in suppressing or facilitating collective action, thereby shaping the group's capacity for mobilization. Lastly, Tilly underscores the significance of historical analysis in comprehending the evolution and ramifications of collective action across periods. In brief, his approach is more relational, focusing on how political opportunities are constructed and contested within specific historical and institutional contexts.

Tarrow's work (Tarrow 1998) offers some distinct insights. He emphasizes the multi-level nature of political opportunity structures, highlighting how opportunities can emerge at local, national, and transnational levels. Tarrow also emphasizes the importance of "political contention" in shaping opportunities, arguing that the mobilization of collective actors can itself create or reshape political contexts. “Once movements are mobilized, they can reshape or modify the systems of institutional power within which they are embedded” (Douglas McAdam and Sidney Tarrow 2018). His approach is more dynamic and process-oriented, focusing on the ongoing interactions between state and non-state actors. While there are differences in emphasis and focus among these prominent scholars, they all share a common interest in understanding how changes in the political context shape the possibilities for collective action.

Overall, the concept of opportunity structures highlights the importance of understanding the contextual factors that shape the dynamics of contentious politics and violent collective action, including the role of political institutions, socio-economic conditions, and patterns of social mobilization. One crucial point to note is that political opportunities are not the results of objective structures; We cannot take for granted the opportunity value of any particular aspect of political structure. Rather, they must be understood as opportunities to mobilize people. For example, while some may intuitively assume that state repression poses a threat to an insurgent movement, insurgent leaders may instead perceive violent state repression as an opportunity to provoke the state into a disproportionate response that will result in its losing legitimacy in the eyes of the population.

The political opportunity structure perspective provides also an important point of support for studying the formation of ethnic mobilization. Scholars writing about ethnic minority mobilization within this perspective have been attentive to the properties of the political context that facilitate or constrain the formation of certain movement identity (Vermeersch 2011:9). Moreover, the theory is compelling because it responds to an intuitive feeling that social movements will act in accord with the institutional

opportunities and constraints with which they are confronted in a given political system. The argument held in common by these researchers is that the shape of the institutional political context is a key variable influencing and fostering the ethnic mobilization of minorities (Vermeersch 2011:9). Regarding my research on the Republic Democratic of Congo case, the political opportunity structure approach is used to analyze the context in which groups emerge and shape their strategies, tactics, and ideologies.

However, it is important to note that political opportunity theory has been criticized for overemphasizing the institutional political context as a causal variable and de-emphasizing other factors that may have contributed to the formation of opportunities (Jenson 1998). Hassan Bousetta (2001:19-20) has shown that formal and informal organizational processes that take place for instance inside an ethnic movement and give rise to certain strategic choices are often left out of sight when exclusive use of the political opportunity structure perspective is employed. In other words, the internal organizational processes should be considered an integral part of the political mobilization, but remain hidden when importance is attached only to the institutionalized processes. Struggles surrounding strategic choices or questions of representation and group boundaries that may take place between actors within the organizational realm are neglected. This leads me to discuss the second component of collective action theory, mobilizing structure.

Mobilizing structures

Mobilizing structures refer to the organizational arrangements and resources that enable individuals to mobilize for collective action. They are preexisting social networks, community institutions, and other mechanisms that dissident leaders utilize to recruit supporters for collective action (Mason 2004). According to Charles Tilly (2017), the concept emphasizes the process by which a group organizes and pools its resources to prepare for and engage in collective action. It involves the internal organization of the group and the mechanisms through which it coordinates and utilizes its members and resources towards a common goal or cause. These preexisting structures are part of the social fabric such as family ties, village associations, religious groups, or neighborhood connections, which have evolved to coordinate behavior and produce mutual benefits (Mason 2004). They can encompass elements such as leadership, formal organizations, networks, communication channels, and strategy/ideology (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2003). Examining how these structures are set up and employed can help to comprehend how violent collective actions are incited and sustained over time.

As we have seen, structural factors by themselves do not make armed conflict, they require human agency. In other words, armed conflicts do not break out simply because conditions happen to be right,

but because they are organized (Richards 2005). Large-scale political violence requires a great number of human agents to participate in the violence as soldiers, doctors, nurses, bureaucrats, suppliers, supporters, and the like (Jackson and Dexter 2014:8). One of the important elements of mobilizing structure and process is participation (of leaders and followers). But we cannot assume that participation simply happens spontaneously and unproblematically. Since armed conflicts involve high stakes such as killing, wounding, and damage that affects the survival of participants (Tilly and Tarrow 2015:136) this prevents violent collective action from occurring spontaneously. This is known as the collective action problem or what Mark Lichbach (1996) terms "rebel's dilemma". It is based on the premise that individuals are rational actors who weigh the costs and the benefits of a course of action, and choose the one that maximizes personal benefits (Mason 2004). The problem posed by the "rational actor" to collective action is that if rational individuals can expect to receive the collective benefits of the actions of others regardless of their own contribution to the effort, then rational individuals will attempt to free-ride on the effort of others (Mason 2004). The rebel's dilemma arises from the fact that, if everyone followed this logic no one would participate in violent collective actions in the form of a revolutionary insurgent struggle, and therefore no revolution would ever occur.

The scholarship on collective action has identified three main sets of different solutions to the collective action problem such as the use of selective incentives (Lichbach 1996) that refer to private benefits that can be withheld from those who do not participate in the collective action. Therefore, selective incentives are available only for those who participate in violent collective action. According to David Mason (Mason 2004), it is safe to say that every revolutionary organization uses selective incentives as part of its mobilization strategy, on the other hand, it is also safe to say that no revolutionary movement has ever succeeded in building a base of popular support sufficient to challenge the regime (much less to overthrow it) by relying exclusively or even predominantly on selective incentives. We can distinguish selective incentives that are tangible goods, such as lootable natural resources like diamonds, gold, or timber. On the other hand, selective incentives can take the form of intangible benefits like power and authority, social advancement, or psychological fulfillment (Fumerton 2021). However, there are limitations to theorizing participation through the rational actor perspective because individuals do not always think and act as cost-benefits rational actors, even when life-threatening risks are involved. Rather, they are influenced by their relational and social environment. In other words, motivation for participation in violent collective action can be based either on selective incentives like power and status or on more emotional motivations like fear, anger, or revenge (through framing processes: see framing section).

The second set of solutions focuses on preexisting social networks and community institutions as mechanisms to overcome the collective action problem. As argued by David Mason (Mason 2004)

contemporary Third World revolutionary movements were not built from scratch, nor were supporters recruited one-by-one by selective incentives, instead, dissident leaders took advantage of already existing social networks, community institutions, and other mobilizing structures to recruit supporters in groups. Pre-existing community institutions and social networks are institutions such as villages, neighborhoods, tribes, clans, families, schools, universities, trade unions, or social clubs, whose existence, function, and purpose were not originally intended for the service of a revolutionary movement (Fumerton 2021). Marwell, Oliver, and Prahl observe that among scholars of collective action, it is widely agreed that participants in social movement organizations are usually recruited through preexisting social ties and mobilization is more likely when the members of the beneficiary population are linked by social ties than when they are not (Marwell, Oliver, and Prahl 1988). The question that comes to mind is how pre-existing social networks and community institutions help solve the participation problem for insurgent organizations, because, they do not emerge spontaneously from community-based social networks. Many types of pre-existing institutions and social networks already have participants and members who are bound to each other through ties of solidarity, interdependence, coordination, friendship, kinship, and loyalty. They partly solve the collective action problem for themselves. If successfully coopted, they can help ease the task of mobilizing an insurgent organization. This is where the third set of solutions to the participation problem comes in: Leaders and organizations. The challenge is for insurgent leaders to find a way to harness the members, resources, and energies of these pre-existing networks and institutions to support the mobilization of an insurgent movement.

Violent collective action requires leadership and organization to sustain it and coordinate activities among communities. This set of solutions, proposed by the resource mobilization school, emphasizes the importance of social movement organizations as agents that induce latent supporters of a cause to contribute to or participate in their activities (Mason 2004). Resource mobilization theories suggest that for violent collective action to occur, dissident leaders must first establish social movement organizations, to mobilize support from aggrieved individuals and coordinate collective action within their communities (Mason 2004). So how do leaders of an insurgent movement manage to exploit pre-existing social networks and institutions for insurgent activities that are not their reason for existing in the first place? They do this through co-opting the pre-existing social network, ordinarily by infiltrating the network or institution to capture it (Fumerton 2021). In the process, insurgent leaders can try non-violent persuasion or resort to violence to secure the collaboration of the members of the pre-existing network or institution. According to Sharon Erickson Nepstad and Clifford Bob (2006), leaders are central and play a critical role in collective action, shaping movements in numerous ways: they define the goals and advance strategies; they mobilize followers, galvanize indigenous organizations, and forge

coalitions (at the national or regional level: see second section). They influence responses to external repression, and their actions, rhetoric, and style affect conflict outcomes (Nepstad and Bob 2006). In sum, leaders not only help solve the collective action problem but are also essential for drawing people into action by successfully mobilizing pre-existing organizations at opportune political moments through framing strategies. This leads to the discussion of framing processes.

Framing processes

Theorists of the collective action approach define framing as the process by which social/political movements and their leaders construct, present, and promote interpretations of issues, events, and experiences that mobilize potential participants and shape the movement's identity and goals (Benford and Snow 2000). It is a strategic effort to create shared meanings and understanding that resonate with the target audience (sympathizers, potential adherents, opponents, and third parties} and inspire collective action (Snow and Benford 1988). The emphasis on framing helps us understand the interaction between leadership and groups. It can be seen as a mediator between opportunity structures and organization, or between structure and agency in that sense that framing strategies help organizations to recognize and seize opportunities by shaping the way members and potential supporters understand and engage with the political context. In other words, framing bridges the gap between human agency and structure by providing a way for agents (individuals and organizations) to interpret and act within the constraints and opportunities presented by structures. The degree to which political opportunities constrain or facilitate collective action partly depends on how they are framed by movement actors and others (Benford and Snow 2000; Tarrow 1998).

Framing commonly takes the form of discourses and narratives. Discourses provide meaning, cues, and signals that make violent collective action possible and legitimate, within a particular context (Jackson and Dexter 2014). At the same time, narratives can also be understood to produce the audience they wish to speak to, they are simultaneously identity-forming narratives (Jackson and Dexter 2014). As Gurr states "People get the leaders they are prepared to follow" (Gurr cited by Demmers 2017). The capacity for leaders to mobilize support for violent collective action stems directly from their ability to give voice to the collective needs (Azar's Human needs theory) and grievances (Gurr's deprivation theory) of their groups (Demmers 2017). We need to understand conflict as socially and discursively constructed and, the rhetorical battle for control over what the conflict is about and how violence is coded and described is seen as at least as important as the outcomes of specific violent struggles themselves (Demmers 2017:100). Social movement scholars have emphasized that the process of framing does not take place

in a vacuum (Vermeersch 2011). For them, research should not discard the fact that framing is always negotiated and is to a certain degree shaped by the complex, multi-organizational, multi-institutional arenas in which it takes place (Vermeersch 2011:10).

To emphasize the interactive nature of meaning construction, and demonstrate how both leadership and groups are involved in this, Sidney Tarrow introduced the concept of collective action frames. Using Snow and Benford's arguments —asserting that social movements are deeply involved in the work of naming grievances, connecting them to other grievances, and constructing larger frames — Tarrow argues that collective action frames redefine social conditions as unjust and intolerable with the intention of mobilizing potential participants, which is achieved by making appeals to perceptions of justice and emotionality in the minds of individuals (Tarrow 1998). In the same line of thinking, Snow and Byrd (2007) argue that leaders of political movements strategically produce and maintain symbolic and ideological meaning for constituents, opponents, and bystanders by way of free core framing tasks: firstly, diagnostic framing, which involves problem identification and attribution. It addresses the problem of consensus by diagnosing some event or aspect of social life or government system as problematic and needing repair or change, and attributes blame or responsibility. Diagnostic frames provide answers to the questions of "What is or went wrong?" and "Who or what is to blame?". The second, prognostic framing, articulates a proposed solution to the problem. It addresses the identified problem by stipulating specific remedies or solutions and general means or tactics for achieving these objectives. It addresses the question "What to be done ?". Finally, there is motivational framing, which provides a rationale to potential supporters for engaging in the problem-solving action. It involves "the elaboration of a call to arms or rationale for action that goes beyond the diagnosis and prognosis" (Snow and Benford 1988).

The concept of framing has offered a useful contribution to the study of ethnic mobilization. Concerning political movements based on ethnicity, it can be argued that such an identity is created through framing (Vermeersch 2011: 9-11). As Sayyid and Zac stated (cited in Demmers 2017:143), group boundaries are constructed discursively. Groups are collectively constructed representations of the "self "in relation to the other. It is through deeply engrained institutional and discursive continuities that people situate the self and the other in certain categories of belonging. The large majority of contemporary conflicts revolve around a discourse of origins, where us and them divide is formulated along reified, mythical, and unified notions of culture, ethnicity, and religions (Demmers 2017:143). To illustrate this, the example of the "Bantu" vs. "Hamitic" false races in the Great Lakes region of Africa will be discussed in detail in the following chapter . Some actors have the power to define than others and can make, a violent incident such as a family dispute, a bar room fight, or a land dispute, become ethnic if the recognized ethnic difference is coded. That means that "the ethnic quality of ethnic violence is not

intrinsic to the act itself: it emerges through after-the-fact interpretative claims" (Horowitz cited in Demmers 2017). As highlighted by Roger Brubaker, one of the proponents of the constructivist approach, " ethnic conflicts—or what might better be called ethnicized or ethnically framed conflict need not, and should not, be understood as conflict between ethnic groups, just as racial or racially framed conflict need not be understood as conflict between races, or nationally framed conflict as conflict between nations" (Brubaker 2004), but as socially constructed as such through framing and discursive practices.

According to Horowitz, frames of violence are often contested, creating a conflict over the nature of the conflict, and, this struggle to define may itself generate future violence (Horowitz cited in Demmers 2017). As Paul Brass stated, the causes do not matter in understanding violence, it is the framing of the events and the meanings attached to them, which in the end explain the dynamics of violent conflict (Paul Brass cited in Demmers 2017). Similarly, Richard Jackson and Helen Dexter (2014) emphasize (in their work for understanding intrastate war and organized political violence,) how framing discursive practices employed by conflict entrepreneurs to construct and enable political violence, can make certain actions seem legitimate and commonsensical, while others appear impossible. According to them, conflict entrepreneurs deliberately construct narratives and discourses to legitimize their violent aims and create a consensus for organized political violence against a perceived "other". This involves framing certain actions as necessary or justified, often through the use of victimhood narratives, demonization, and dehumanization of the enemy, and the suppression of anti-violence voices (Jackson and Dexter 2014). Jackson and Dexter provide an example related to the genocide against Tutsi in Rwanda demonstrating how it was preceded by a deliberate construction of narratives and discourses that dehumanized the Tutsi minority, characterizing them as " inyenzi" (cockroaches) and as alien interlopers with origins from the North, based on a mistaken anthropological theory. These narratives were used to justify the genocide and to create a sense of victimhood and fear among the Hutu population. Jackson and Dexter also mention the use of media to spread hate speech and incite violence against the Tutsi. Additionally, they describe how Hutu leadership used civil defense organizations to give people experience in conducting activities like roadblocks and house searches, which were later used during the genocide (Richard Jackson and Helen Dexter 2014:15:16).

To sum up, the collective action analytical framework provides a comprehensive lens to examine the complex interplay of motivations, resources, opportunities, and strategies in studying socio-political movements and collective behavior. As discussed, armed insurgencies do not happen as the inevitable outcome of cognitive and emotional motivations (like fear, hate, or grievances,) and also not simply as the result of structural conditions (like poverty or discrimination), rather, they are the products of human choice and coordinated efforts that mobilize human, material, technological and ideological resources

for violent collective action (Fumerton 2021). In other words, armed conflicts do not break out simply because conditions happen to be right, but because they are organized (Richards 2005). I argue in a similar line of thinking as Jackson and Dexter ((2014:5) that organized and sustained violent collective action is conditioned on two key facilitating conditions: on the one hand, the presence of a particular set of material and discursive structures including ideology, the military instruments for sustained violence, an economic basis for prosecuting the war and a set of society-wide military norms values and practices. On the other hand, willing and capable agents who can transform the structural potential of the society or group into active participants in violence.

2. Transnational dimension of intrastate conflicts

As this thesis addresses the transnational dimension of ethnic conflict, this section discusses the escalation and diffusion of conflict at a supranational level, and how and when ethnic conflicts spill or spread across national borders. Diffusion can be defined as the process through which ethnic conflicts in one country influence and potentially provoke similar conflict in other countries (Lake and Rothchild 1998). According to Lake and Rothchild, diffusion occurs when ethnic violence in one state increases the probability of conflict in a second and occurs largely through the information flows that condition the beliefs of ethnic groups in other societies. In other words, if a conflict in Rwanda incites similar violence directly or indirectly in Burundi, the conflict will have diffused. Escalation, on the other hand, is driven by alliances between transnational kin groups as well as by intentional or unintentional spillovers, irredentist demands, attempts to divert attention from domestic problems, or by predatory states that seek to take advantage of the internal weaknesses of others; in other words, it occurs when a conflict in one country brings in new, foreign belligerents—whether neighbors or great powers with global reach (Lake and Rothchild 1998).

As noted by the two authors, both processes can occur simultaneously in practice, although analytically distinct. For instance, in 1996 the conflict in Rwanda diffused to neighboring Zaire when Tutsi-related rebel groups there emerged to challenge the state; the conflict also escalated when Tutsi-led Rwanda government forces intervened on an informal basis in support their ethnic brethren and in an effort to check the extremist Hutus harbored in the refugee camps along its borders after perpetrating the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi (Lake and Rothchild 1998). A similar example occurred when, after their defeat in 1994, in South Kivu in Zaire, Hutu rebels Ex FAR (Forces Armees Rwandaise) formed alliances with Burundian Hutu armed groups CNDD-FDD and PALIPEHUTU which they believed they shared a common cause; the ex-FAR shared its military expertise with these two Burundian armed groups, co-

operated on intelligence and training, and the Rwandans Hutu were able to use CNDD-FDD strongholds in Burundi to infiltrate Rwanda (Rafti 2006).

In an attempt to provide a theoretical framework for understanding transnational alliances in the context of Africa, Henning Tamm (2016:151) defines transnational alliances as formal or informal arrangements for security cooperation not only between sovereign states but also between states and non-state armed groups from different states. He criticizes the state-centrism of the alliance literature for its limited relevance to contemporary armed conflicts, which often involve non-state actors such as rebel groups. According to him, this state-centrism has led to a neglect of relations between states and foreign rebel groups, which are crucial for understanding the dynamics of many modern conflicts. Thus, his broadened definition of alliances includes both interstate alliances and transnational alliances, the latter referring to cooperative security arrangements between states and nonstate armed groups from different states.

Henning Tamm introduces a strategic theory that identifies three main causal mechanisms: (1) transnational threat, (2) resource opportunity, and (3) transnational affinity (Tamm 2016). The first is linked to the internal threat of a rebellion: " if a ruler believes that a neighboring ruler's support to his domestic foes is imminent or has already occurred, he is likely to respond by forming a preemptive (or retaliatory) alliance with neighbor's armed opposition" (Tamm 2016). The second, the resource opportunity mechanism highlights the role of natural resources and explains how rulers may form alliances with foreign rebel groups to exploit natural resources in the rebel's area of operations. This mechanism is driven by the ruler's desire to provide private benefits to key support coalition members, thereby ensuring their loyalty and preventing coups. The third, the transnational affinity mechanism suggests that rulers may form alliances with foreign rebel groups due to shared ideological commitments or ethnic ties. He provides examples such as Chad's alliance with Sudanese rebels in Darfur in 2000s, which was influenced by ethnic affinities between President Deby' 's government and the rebels, or the case of cooperation between, on the one hand, the former president of the Democratic Republic of Congo Joseph Kabila and Rwandan Hutu rebels (ex-FAR/Interahamwe, FDRL), and on the other hand, alliances between the president of Rwanda Paul Kagame and Congolese Tutsi rebels (AFDLR). The transnational affinity mechanism thus highlights the role of non-material factors, such as ideology and ethnicity, in the formation of transnational alliances. By analyzing alliance decisions made by the rulers of Angola, Rwanda, Uganda, Sudan, and Zimbabwe during the two Congo wars (the first Congo War 1996-1997, the second 1998-2003) Henning Tamm demonstrates how the strategic theory effectively explains the formation of transnational alliances. The central argument of his strategic theory is that the formation of transnational alliances between states and foreign groups is a strategic response by rulers to threats to their political survival. From the rebel group's perspective, transnational alliances

with foreign rulers are a means to secure the resources and support needed to challenge the government and achieve their political objectives, as explained in the collective action theory section.

David R. Davis and Will H. Moore have made significant contributions to the literature on the transnational dimension of civil war by investigating the impact of transnational ethnic alliances—what they define as ethnic ties across state boundaries—on the international interactions of states. In their study, Davis and Moore (1997:172) develop and test an argument about the linkage between the ethnic structure of states (pairs of states or dyads) and international hostility. It is what they call an "ethnicity as attribute" argument. According to them," two types of dyads will experience higher levels of conflict than other dyads: (1) those where an advantaged minority in state A has an ethnic tie to a non-advantaged minority in state B, and (2) those with a transnational ethnic alliance where the group in one of the states is politically mobilized". In addition, they claim that ethnopolitical mobilization plays an important role to the extent that if members of an ethnic group are politically organized and active in challenging their status within a state, this mobilization is likely to attract the attention of their co-ethnics in another state, potentially leading to increased conflict between the states involved.

Although scholars discussed above argue that transnational ethnic networks make states likely to intervene in conflicts involving their ethnic kin, the reason why conflicts tend to cluster in particular areas has yet to be explained; it is still not clear why violence in one country should spread to another, as stated by Idean Salehyan and Kristian Skrede Gleditsch (2006). According to them, population movements such as refugee flows are an important mechanism by which conflict spreads across regions (Salehyan and Gleditsch 2006:336). As shown by these scholars, refugee flows are not only the consequence of political turmoil, the presence of the refugee populations can also increase the risk of subsequent conflict in host and origin countries: First, refugee flows may imply the direct importation of combatants, arms, and ideologies from neighboring states that facilitate the spread of conflict. Refugees from violence often maintain ties to their homeland and continue to play an active role in conflicts at home, thereby physically extending rebel networks across space through their geographic mobility. Several refugee communities have been in their host countries for decades, and as an alternative to life in camps, have engaged in economic activities and formed political organizations—— in their host countries. Thus institutions in the diaspora form a bridge between dissidents inside and outside the country (explained in detail while discussing the role played by leaders, preexisting social networks, and community institutions in the mobilization process). They may also expand social networks by establishing contacts with locals in their host countries, particularly those of similar ethnic groups or political factions.

Often, the refugees come into conflict with their host government over their opposition to the home government and their desire to maintain rebel networks and militant activities across borders. As

highlighted by Salehyan and Gleditsch (2006:338-341), cross-border fightings between "refugee warrior" groups and neighboring governments threaten the sovereignty of the host country, and bilateral relations between neighbors. Therefore, host countries sometimes work to cut off transnational networks by preventing the participation of refugees in homeland conflicts, which in turn can lead to fighting between refugees and their hosts. This is illustrated, by the case of the Tamil refugees who were involved in the assassination of India's Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi over his accommodation of the Sri Lankan government, and Rwandan Tutsi refugees in Uganda who assisted in the removal of the Obote government. In addition, the influx of refugees from neighboring countries where fighting is already underway can provide the impetus and equipment for groups to begin an armed challenge, especially if refugees share many of the same goals as domestic oppositions. This is illustrated by the example of the Somali refugees who have often worked closely with ethnic Somali separatists in the Ogaden region of Ethiopia, supporting them in their political efforts (Salehyan and Gleditsch 2006).

In conclusion, the theoretical framework presented in this section provides a sound basis for understanding the complex interplay of factors that contribute to the transnational nature of intrastate/ethnic conflicts and the strategic alliances that shape them. This will help to explain the dynamics of the conflict in the Congo as it involves neighboring states and cross-border ethnic groups. While these theories provide a valuable framework for understanding transnational alliances in certain contexts, it is important to note that their applicability may be limited to some regions; for instance, Henning's strategic theory does not apply to democracies because it is based on the specific challenges and motivations of authoritarian rulers who must navigate the threat of coups and rebellion to stay in power, a context that is different from the political dynamics of the democratic system.

Chapter 3: Neither Congolese nor Rwandan: Historical background.

Today, it is generally accepted that ethnic conflict is born, develops, and eventually metamorphoses or 'dies'. Whether or not they become transnational depends on certain historical and immediate circumstances. In the context of conflicts framed as ethnic in Africa, historical factors can be largely traced to the invention of tribes/ethnic groups, most specifically in the colonial era, a period in which the stage was set for the unleashing of ethnic conflicts in the post-independence period (Keller 2002:5). The immediate causes of ethnic conflict, either precipitant or facilitating factors might include mainly

political crisis with ethnic undertones, inflammatory rhetoric on the part of ethnic entrepreneurs, or real or imagined fears of an ethnic group that incumbent elites are either unwilling or unable to make credible commitments to protect them against ethnic hostilities (Keller 2002:5). As Francois Dosse argued, facts make sense when they are historicized and contextualized (Dosse 2013) ; this chapter addresses the historical circumstances that led to the formation of the Congolese rebel military group, the M23 (Mouvement du 23 Mars), primarily consisting of ethnic Tutsi.

Instead of understanding this conflict and the ethnic violence that results from it as greed-motivated, as rational choice theorists usually view conflicts (Collier and Hoeffer 2004), or as the result of ancestral hatred, as the advocates of the primordial approach claim, I consider ethnic conflict in Congo to be not inherently local phenomena. Rather as interconnected to global and structural histories of violent consequences of global capitalism and colonialism because capitalism was the fundamental driving force behind the colonial project in Africa (Mamdani 2012, Rodney 1972). The chapter is divided into three sections: the impact of colonialism in the Democratic Republic of Congo; the ideological factor such as the Hamitic ideology coined by the colonial powers as part of the divide-and-rule strategy consisting of the classification of the population in the Great Lakes Region into two broad ethnic categories, labeling certain groups as "Indigenous" and others as outsiders or less Indigenous (Mamdani 2012:46-47). The last section examines how population movements such as refugee flows are an influential mechanism by which conflicts spread across regions. I underline how the division of Rwandan into Hutu and Tutsi antagonistic identities became a vehicle of political conflicts in the region and, in the long run, paved the way for the emergence of the M23. I argue along the same line as Jean Pierre Chretien (2013) and Mahmoud Mamdani (2021), that the Hamitic ideology that labeled the Tutsi as foreigners and invaders is at the roots of the genocide ideology and protracted conflicts in the Great Lakes region and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

1. Colonial legacy as political opportunity structures

The colonial era in Africa represents a pivotal period in the continent's history, which has left a profound imprint on contemporary African politics, social, and economic landscape. A key aspect of the colonial legacy is the social construction of antagonistic ethnic and racial identities, coupled with the establishment of institutional structures that continue to reproduce ethnic divisions (Mamdani, 1996). The construction of both identities and the institutions that legally reinforced them was the result of the colonial system of indirect rule.

Indirect rule and the construction of antagonistic identities

According to Mahmoud Mamdani (2012), Indirect rule is a modern form of rule in colonial settings that differed from modes of rule in previous Western empires in two important ways: first, previous empires focused on conquered elites rather than the mass of the colonized. Second, they aimed to eradicate difference through a policy of cultural and sometimes political assimilation of colonized elites, whereas indirect rule claimed not just to acknowledge difference but also to shape it. The indirect rule needs to be understood as a form of what Michel Foucault called "governmentality", which refers to" combined strategies of organizational governance in a broad sense, as well as self-governance [through mentalities] by those made subjects of organizational governance" (Clegg 2019). This is exemplified by the colonial administration's use of decentralized, subtle control mechanisms over the colonized such as the de governance through existing local leaders and institutions rather than direct administration.

The Belgians introduced indirect rule institutions in the Congo in the 1920s. As shown by Mamdani (1996), the reorganization of the administration in 1918 was followed by the creation of a special legal category called native, subject to customary law and to whom the code Napoleon did not apply. From 1921 on, all Africans were required to return to the rural areas from which they were deemed to have come in the first place. The native must belong to his tribe: the notion of the native as permanently a peasant and only temporarily a worker was given legal reality through a series of decrees between 1931 and 1933.

In the 1930s, Belgian authorities embarked on a vast resettlement scheme designed to encourage the influx of Banyarwanda, essentially Hutu from Rwanda to North Kivu, the aim being to provide Belgian planters with a cheap labor force and create an outlet for the growing population pressure in Rwanda (R. Lemarchand 2009). They created the Mission for the Immigration of the Banyarwanda (Mission d' Immigration des Banyarwanda), a structure that would transfer tens of thousands of people from Rwanda to the Congo to provide workers for the plantations of the Kivus and the mines of Katanga (Severine 2010). The status of this immigrant group in the Congo quickly became ambiguous. On the one hand, the colonizers denied most Kinyarwanda-speaking people an "indigenous" status and thus a "Native" Authority with its customary land. On the other hand, Belgian officials appointed more people with Rwandan ancestry to the local administration, providing the whole group with better access to political and economic power than the "indigenous" Congolese received. Tensions therefore developed between "indigenous" and Kinyarwanda-speaking. The latter claimed that they were entitled to land and traditional representation, while the former complained that people of Rwandan descent enjoyed too much power in administrative and business circles (Severine 2010). This legal distinction and classification of Rwandophone Congolese as non-natives exacerbated divisions and fuelled ethnic

violence in the 1990s and early 2000s since they shaped political opportunities or conditions that facilitated mobilization for violent collective actions.

Ethnic strangers

It is important to underline how the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885, which divided Africa among European colonial powers, had significant and lasting impacts on the Congolese population. The partition with little regard for existing social and ethnic boundaries is another important factor that set the stage for the conflict between the M23 and the government (Prunier, 2009). According to Mamdani (2012), unlike in Rwanda and Burundi where the majority defined as "indigenous" was pressed into a racialized identity called Bantu, single and homogenized, this majority in Congo was further divided into multiple ethnicities, each with its own "customary" law, and a "customary" authority to enforce it; The Banyarwanda of Congo— these Rwandese who found themselves in Congo— were set apart ethnically as being nonindigenous to Congo. This historical circumstance left them without a claim to Native authority in Congo. Without an ethnic patch of their own on Congolese soil, they were treated as ethnic strangers in every Native Authority. The immediate practical consequence of being defined as a citizen nonindigenous origin was that nonindigenous citizens were denied "customary" access to land since they did not have their own native authority. As independence approached, the nationality status of the Kinyarwanda-speaking minority became so problematic that even the Roundtable Independence Conference in Brussels was unable to establish the judicial status of this minority. The fundamental law left the citizenship status of the minority unsolved, stating that the Congolese people would themselves decide this issue (Mamdani, 2012. This dilemma became even more acute after independence.

Though historically distinct and occurring in the Rwandan context the Hutu revolution and the massacres of Tutsi (1959-62) in Rwanda have set off violent chain reactions in neighboring states, specifically in Burundi and in Congo. As René Lemarchand (2009) shows, in late 1960s following the massacres, the influx of Tutsi Rwandan refugees in Congo significantly affected the Congolese demography and politics: The increasing number of Kinyarwanda-speaking intensified land disputes and ethnic tensions, particularly in the north Kivu, provoked growing fears of non-Rwandophones Congolese that the Banyarwanda were about to tighten their grip on provincial institutions and then threaten their autonomy. This set the stage for anti-Rwandophones mobilizations, revolts, and the first public display of anti-Tutsi sentiment in post-independence Congo. This mixture gave birth to the so-called "Kanyarwanda war" when the Banyarwanda faced the threat of expulsion from the North Kivu

region (Reyntjes 2009). It lasted from 1963 to 1966 and resulted in large-scale massacres of Hutu and Tutsi Kinyarwanda-speaking (Lemarchand 2009).

Post-independence citizen crisis

In the three decades that stretched from the end of the "Kanyarwanda war" to the Rwandan Genocide against the Tutsi in 1994 a complex process that incubated the M23 conflict unfolded in Kivu. Unable to access land as did the indigenous Congolese, as a customary right during the 1960s, 70s, and '80s, Kinyarwanda-speaking Congolese with financial resources devoted them to purchasing as much land as possible through the market (Mamdani, 2020). The more they felt blocked at the local level, the more the Kinyarwanda-speaking minority looked to the civic sphere for alternate economic and political strategies. They made every effort to access positions at higher provincial and national levels through elections or networks. This, in turn, provoked a response from among the indigenous majority, afraid that the Kinyarwanda-speaking Congolese would use national representation to acquire power locally, indigenous Congolese came to oppose citizenship rights for them. When their citizenship was questioned and their rights to run for office denied, the Kinyarwanda-speaking minority—particularly the Tutsi, a minority within the minority, without a "home" anywhere in the region, one they could count on as a fallback in times of crisis—developed a strategy of entry into organs of the state, particularly the security apparatus (Mamdani 2021).

Three key decisions marked the course of the spiraling crisis of citizenship that fed the insecurity of the Kinyarwanda -speaking minority. The first was Mobutu's 1972 Citizen Decree which extended Congolese citizenship to those who had come as refugees from Rwanda between 1959 and 1963. Its effect was to alarm the local majority who saw the decree as a direct outcome of growing Tutsi influence within the state apparatus. The following year, 1973, the Mobutu government passed the General Property Law, a measure that nationalized all land, including both the land under the control of traditional authorities in the rural areas and land controlled by white settlers. While the state was unable to implement the provision with regard to rural land under customary control, it was able to transfer settler-controlled land to Zairean citizens. This is the context in which the more prosperous among the Kinyarwanda-speaking population cashed in on their newly acquired civic citizenship to gain property rights. To many in Kivu Province, it was not acceptable to put into practice such a so undiscriminating citizenship policy.

The second key decision was the 1981 Citizenship Law passed by an elected Parliament. It was not until the legislation of 1977 that the "Indigenous" majority developed a strategy to counter the minority strategy of penetrating the security and party apparatus of the Mobutu party-state. The prospective of elections brought home the realization that sheer numbers could be translated into political power so that the majority could get access to power even if it was shut out of appointments in the state party, the Movement Populaire Revolutionaire (MPR). They mobilized by following a single guideline: better not elect another Tutsi if you want to balance out against them (Mamdani,2021). Not surprisingly, the parliament that came out of the 1977 elections passed a new citizenship Law hostile to the Kinyarwanda-speaking minority. The 1981 law was passed under strong pressure and stipulated that only those persons who could demonstrate an ancestral connection to the population residing in 1885 in the territory then demarcated as Congo would qualify to be citizen of Congo (Mamdani, 2021). By the time of the 1985 provincial assembly elections, the question of citizenship was still unsettled, though the 1981 law remained in the book. In this context, the "Indigenous "majority improvised a solution: the Kinyarwanda-speaking population may vote in the elections, but none of its members may run for office (Mamdani,2021). The solution aggravated the situation because all Kinyarwanda speakers minority were lumped together into a single group regardless of how long different sections had been on the Congolese soil. Candidates suspected of "foreign" origin were systematically prevented from running during the 1982 and 1987 elections on grounds of "dubious nationality (Lemarchand 2009).

The third was a resolution by the 1991 Sovereign National Conference CNS a significant political event upholding the provision of 1981. The CNS took place at a time when the Kinyarwanda-speaking minority was once again gripped by anxiety about their citizenship status (Mamdani, 2021). Despite great hopes among the Banyarwanda that the CNS would resolve the citizenship issue to their satisfaction, this was not the case. The party delegation representing their interests was refused admission to the conference (Lemarchand 2009). Instead, the CNS impacted the provinces in different ways: on the one hand, it accelerated the tendency to differentiate Tutsi from Hutu and to lump together all Tutsi, regardless of the depth of their presence on Congolese soil, into a single group due to the influence of ethnic conflict between Hutu and Tutsi in Rwanda following the Rwanda Patriotic Front attack in 1990. They used the " Banyamulenge" as a generic term for all Congolese Tutsi (Mamdani, 2021). Within the Kinyarwanda-speaking minority, the Hutu began to differentiate themselves as "Indigenous" from Tutsi as "nonindigenous".

The land problem and the nationality problem were like two sides of the same coin. Access to land assumes access to citizenship; deprivation of citizenship rights meant the end of their security in land rights and for many, the end of their physical security as residents of Eastern Congo. In March 1993, massacres of Kinyarwanda speaking broke out in North Kivu (Chretien et Kambanda 2013). As this

occurred in the context of the Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPF) attack on Rwanda in October 1990**,** it increased the flow of Tutsi youth to cross the border from Congo into Uganda to join the Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPF). Thousands of these young men who fought in the 1990-94 Rwanda civil war were an important part of the movement that toppled President Mobutu of Zaire in 1997; they were also at the forefront of the successive rebellions against his successor Laurent Kabila (such as the National Congress for the Defense of the People), and are today the driving force behind the M23 rebellion (Stearns 2023).

2. From the "Hamitic hypothesis" to the "Tutsi/Hima Empire conspiracy" theory.

This section addresses the construction of an ideological discourse that distinguished the "real Africans" or the Bantu, from the "false Negroes", those designated as "Hamites" since the 1860s in the specialized literature of the time. I examine its significant impact on triggering protracted armed conflict in the Great Lakes Region of Africa, particularly in the DRC. It is what is called the 'Hamitic hypothesis" ideology and its extension, the "Hima-Tutsi empire "conspiracy —theory developed in the post-independence period. They are intertwined ideological discourses widespread in the Great Lakes Region rooted in colonial-pseudo-scientific theories of racial/ethnic hierarchies. These two ideologies are the core of the protracted armed conflicts that have occurred in the Great Lakes Region such as the civil war in Burundi, the genocide against Tutsi in Rwanda as well as the ongoing armed conflict between the M23 and the Congolese state.

The Hamitic hypothesis

The Hamitic hypothesis posited that various groups in Africa, particularly those associated with advanced civilizations or states, were of non-African, specifically Hamitic, origin. Rival colonialists including Belgians, Germans, English, and others, all held the same conviction that if there was evidence of organized state life in Africa, the ruling groups must have come from elsewhere. It is from this world's perception that, in the Great Lakes Region of Africa, the Tutsi were portrayed as a distinct and superior nonindigenous invading race that had subjugated the racially inferior Hutu and other non-Tutsi tribes identified as Bantu (Verweijen 2015).

The hypothesis was rooted in a complex interplay of biblical interpretation, colonial ideology, and scientific racism. The raw material from which the Hamitic hypothesis was manufactured can be dated back to the Judaic myth of biblical and medieval vintage. The term "Hamitic" refers to the descendants of Ham, one of the sons of Noah in the biblical narrative, who has been cursed because he did not look away from his father's nakedness. While Genesis says nothing about the descendants of Ham being black, the claim that they were cursed by being black first appeared in the oral tradition of the Jews when these were recorded in the sixth-century Babylonian Talmud (Gossett 1997). This notion persisted in the Middle Ages, it was in this vein that Leo Africanus, the Great North Africa traveler and one-time protégé of Pope Leo X, identified Black Africans as having descended from Ham. According to Mamdani (Mamdani,2020), Scholars of Hebrew myths note that these oral traditions "grew out of a need of the Israelites to rationalize their subjugation of Canaan." However, in a different age, that of the sixteenth-century Atlantic slave trade, it was turned into raw material and used differently. The biblical curse was taken to mean that the black was preordained for slavery. So, the Negro could be degraded while remaining a part of humanity—without disturbing Christian sensibilities formally.

By the end of the eighteenth century, the myth that the Negro was the accursed descendant of Ham had been turned upside down, the catalyst behind the second incarnation of the Hamitic hypothesis was Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798. He invited archaeologists and other scientists to join the expedition, and the immediate impact of the discoveries they made was to disturb Europe's view of Africans profoundly. How could the producers of a civilization that nurtured Greece and Rome be the black? The answer to this paradox was to turn the curse of Noah upside down and to claim that Hamites —including the Egyptians—were Caucasians under black skin. Hamites were seen as other than Negroes, those who civilized the Negroes and were in turn corrupted by Negroes (Mamdani, 2021). In this scheme of things, the ancient Egyptians were considered Hamitic, not Negroid, as were the Nubians and the Ethiopians as explained by Comte de Gobineau considered as the father of European racism.

The colonial official whose writings were central to the second incarnation of the Hamitic hypothesis was John Hanning Speke. When he "discovered" the kingdom of Buganda, in the 1860s, with its complex political organization, he attributed this "barbaric civilization" to the Hamitic Galla from Ethiopia, considered as Caucasians (Chretien et Kambanda 2013). The Hamites were soon ascribed physical, language, and a wider cultural identity. They were also said to share a single culture, a way of life: unlike the Negroes who were said to be agriculturalists, the Hamites were said to be pastoralists, and confirmed as the great civilizers of Africa. With every move, these pastoralists were said to have brought a wider range of innovations to local agriculturalists.

In the Great Lakes Region of Africa, in Rwanda, Burundi, and Eastern Congo, as many Tutsi were pastoralists they were considered one of many Hamitic groups. Through the indirect rule colonial

system, Belgians institutionalized the Hamitic hypothesis by socially constructing the Tutsi as nonindigenous aliens, a race apart from the majority including the Hutu, labeled as Bantu, indigenous. Key institutions, such as schools, and churches, taught that the first peoples in Central Africa were the Pygmies or Twa, that later Bantu -speakers came from the north-west, and still later, 'Hamitic or Nilotic' pastoralists came to the Great Lakes Region, and established kingdoms where they ruled over the Bantu majority (Turner 2007).

More dangerously, in the 1960s, at the beginning of the post-independence period, the Hamitic ideology was perpetuated by post-independence leaders, and within years it metamorphosed into the "Tutsi/Hima empire conspiracy" theory, giving a new meaning and scope to the Hamitic ideology. Through, framing strategies of ethnopolitical mobilization the Hamitic ideology started to be used for spreading anti-Tutsi sentiment; highlighting a supposed plan for the establishment of a "Tutsi/Hima empire" in the Great Lakes Region (Turner 2007). This is known as the "Tutsi/Hima conspiracy" theory.

The "Tutsi/Hima Empire conspiracy" theory

The "Tutsi-Hima empire conspiracy" theory is an ideological discourse widespread in the Great Lakes Region of Africa that posits the existence of a long-standing plan by the Tutsi and the Hima[2] ethnic groups to dominate the Great Lakes Region of Africa (Bagilishya 2003, Chretien 1998, Chretien et Kambanda 2013). Its advocates describe the complex conflicts that have occurred in the region since the 1960s in a simplistic explanation stating that everything would be due to a plan for domination of Central Africa by the Tutsi/Hima ethnic groups; that "everything could be explained by the ambition and malignity of this evil people"[3]. This ideology discourse is presented as a conspiracy and has been used by non-Tutsi political entrepreneurs as a framing strategy to mobilize and justify violence and discrimination against the Kinyarwanda-speakers Tutsi in Congo in the 1990s as well as during the 1994 genocide against Tutsi in Rwanda (Also used by Hutu in Burundi). It is the extension of the Hamitic racial ideology that constructed the Tutsi as non-indigenous aliens who came to rule over the Bantu majority.

According to Jean Pierre Chretien, (Chretien 1998) the origin of the "Tutsi-Hima empire conspiracy" theory can be traced back to the early 1960s in the Kivu North region of the Congo; It emerged in the context of ethnic mobilization due to local political cleavage between on the one hand non-Tutsi population who considered themselves as Indigenous and the Kinyarwanda -speaker minority as a

[2] The term Hima designates a category of the population in Uganda and Tanzania considered as Tutsi.

[3] Example drawn from an interview of Justin Bitakwira, a Congolese politician and a member of the National Assembly with Bisolo Politik TV, on July 7, 2023, reflecting a narrative used frequently in political or media circles close to the Congolese government.

whole. It initially manifested as rumors and tracts denouncing a supposed plan for Tutsi coalition domination. Between 1962 and 1965, while the administrative organization of Kivu was being discussed, the first tracts circulated denouncing Kinyarwanda- speakers plan. This happened again in the late 70s and early 80s. Each time these rumors coincided with debates on the definition of nationality regarding the Kinywarwanda-speaker minorities[4] and were fueled by propaganda from the Hutu regime in Rwanda and on the other hand, by Burundian Hutu refugees present in Congo, preparing to overthrow the Burundian Tutsi regime (first flow 1972, the second since 1993).

The Tutsi/Hima conspiracy theory gained traction in the 1990s, particularly during the Rwandan civil war when extremist media and political leaders used it to justify the extermination of Tutsi (framing). Established in May 1990 in Rwanda, Kangura newspaper became famous for its publication of what was commonly referred to as the 'Ten Commandments' of the Bahutu (Thompson 2007). Through these commandments, the paper strongly exhorted the Bahutu to understand that the Tutsi were first and foremost an enemy and that they should break all ties with them, whether those links derived from marriage, business, or professional relations (Kambanda 2007).

Since November 1990, Kangura began discussing the alleged Tutsi plan to colonize Central Africa. A text reportedly discovered in August 1962 in North Kivu has surfaced. From 1990 to 1994 the newspaper contained several articles that repeatedly attributed to the RPF the desire "to establish in the Bantu zone of the Great Lakes region (Rwanda, Burundi, Zaire, Tanzania, Uganda) a vast Hima-Tutsi kingdom". The evolution of the situation in Congo between October 1996 and May 1997 gave body to this conspiracy theory. As the Tutsi Congolese from Kivu were persecuted increasingly since 1994 (Masisi massacres of spring 1996), have revolted (took weapons), with the support of the new Rwanda, determined to break up the armed refugee camps where revenge was openly being prepared to complete the genocide, this situation has become like new proof of the regional conspiracy of Tutsi. After the genocide in Rwanda the Association of Rwandan Journalists, based in Goma, Congo, composed of leading figures from Kangura and RTLM,[5] supported by the Rwandan Armed Forces (FAR) General Staff in exile —the perpetrator of the genocide against Tutsi in Rwanda —continued to spread these theories of a Tutsi conspiracy to condition their own opinion on the justification of the extermination of the Tutsi. By extending it, this conspiracy theory became stronger and even spread throughout the whole of Congo as local actors became increasingly trapped by this racial logic. Congolese media have also played an instrumental role in deploying and spreading the myth for the purposes of mobilization purposes. In Kivu, the hatred of Tutsis or those resembling them is passionately and virulently exemplified below by

[4] See the citizenship debates in the DRC discussed in section 1.

[5] RTLM refers to Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines, a Rwandan radio station which broadcast from July 8, 1993, to July 31, 1994, and played a significant role in inciting the Rwandan genocide that took place from April to July 1994.

the written notice at a border post which was noted by researcher and scholar, Jackson (Jackson 2007): "Attention Zairians and Bantu people! The Tutsi assassins are out to exterminate us. For centuries, the ungrateful and unmerciful Tutsi have used their powers, daughters, and corruption to subject the Bantu. But we know the Tutsi, that race of vipers, drinkers of untrue blood. We will never allow them to fulfill their dreams in Kivuland."

The Hima Empire is a historical myth, but it is an ideologically situated and politically active representation. Despite its lack of historical validity, it remains a powerful ideological and political tool frequently used by ethno-political entrepreneurs as a framing strategy for mobilization. Concretely it is a narrative used to justify the killing of Tutsi minorities and to create a sense of victimhood and fear among the Hutu population**.** By consistently framing Tutsis as a problem, the groundwork was laid for a cycle of conflict and resistance which paved the way for the emergence of the M23 rebel movement as Tutsi communities organized to defend themselves against systemic discrimination and violence, ultimately leading to the protracted conflict in the region.

3. Refugee flows and the spread of conflict in the Great Lakes region

This section examines how population movements such as refugee flows are an influential mechanism by which conflicts have spread from neighboring countries such as Rwanda, into Congo. Refugee flows are not only the consequence of political turmoil, but their presence can increase the risk of subsequent conflict in host countries since they may imply the direct importation of ideologies, combatants, and arms from neighboring states, which facilitates the spread of conflicts (Salehyan and Gleditsch 2006). In the case of the Great Lakes Region of Africa, although historically distinct and occurring in a specific national context, the Hutu revolution (1959-62) in Rwanda and the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi have set off violent chain reactions in neighboring states such as Burundi and Congo because of the presence of refugee flows and the existence of transborder ethnic groups in these countries (Lemarchand 2009).

In the case of Congo, the arrival in the Kivu Province of up to 60,000 Tutsi refugees fleeing the massacres occasioned by the Hutu revolution (1959-62) in Rwanda impacted profoundly the state's stability (Severine 2010). Their presence— added to those Banyarwanda who had been on Congolese territory before the 1884–1885 Berlin Conference and those brought from Rwanda in the 1930s, as discussed above —significantly affected the Congolese demography and politics: the increasing Kinyarwanda speakers population intensified land disputes and ethnic tensions, particularly in north Kivu, and provoked growing fears among other Congolese tribes that the Rwandophones were about to tighten their grip on provincial institutions; this set the stage to the first public display of anti-Tutsi sentiment

in post-independence Congo (Lemarchand 2009). As a consequence, Kinyarwanda speakers were threatened with expulsion from north Kivu, and started losing land, houses, shops, cattle, and plantations (Turner 2007); they mobilized to reclaim their rights, the resulting "Kanyarwanda War", which lasted for two years, was the first sign of a spiral of unending violence and protracted conflict in eastern Congo (Turner 2007).

It is important to mention the impact of the 1994 genocide against Tutsi in Rwanda as well as the civil war in Burundi on the Kinyarwanda-speaking people in DRC as an important factor that paved the way to organized and sustained violent collective actions in DRC. The first set of refugees, roughly 50,000 (mainly Hutu fleeing the terror of the army after the assassination of Burundi President Melchior Ndadaye in October 1993) came from Burundi into South Kivu in late 1993 and early 1994 before the Rwandan genocide (Mamdani,2021). In mid1994, over a million Hutu refugees crossed the Congo-Rwanda border —accompanied by fleeing remnants of the FAR and Interahamwe[6] militias— spilled over into North and South Kivu, a region that hosted most of the Kinyarwanda speaker population in Congo (Mamdani,2021). As they crossed, they brought the genocide ideology and arms into Congo. The impact was volcanic and its effects have yet to ebb as their presence triggered a drastic reordering of ethnic loyalties and overnight the Congolese Kinyarwanda-speaking community split into warring factions, pitting Hutu against Tutsi (Lemarchand 2001). It reinforced the Tutsis' fear of being targeted in the Congo as their ethnic kin had been in Rwanda, led "Indigenous" Congolese to increasingly radicalize against all "Rwandans (Severine 2010) and on the other hand, fed "Indigenous Congolese tendency "to refuse to distinguish between Kinyarwanda-speaking Congolese and the mix of refugees and exiles from Rwanda

The escalating crisis in Rwanda introduced a double tension in Congo, both external and internal, both a tension between Kivu and the new power in Rwanda (Mamdani, 2021). As the million Hutu lived in armed camps, controlled by the perpetrators of the genocide against Tutsi, they continued to be supplied militarily by the French and trained refugees (Mamdani, 2021). According to Gerard Prunier (Prunier, 2009), these camps held no fewer than 850,000 people, including the 30,000 to 40,000 men of the ex-FAR, the army of the genocide, complete with its heavy and light weapons, its officer corps, and its transport echelon. The people of Kivu began to experience the violence of Hutu/Tutsi antagonism directly. For instance, until November 1995 large-scale violence started in North Kivu, massacres by Hutu militias against Congolese Tutsi progressively created ethnically homogenous spaces (Reyntjes

[6] The Interahamwe is a Hutu paramilitary organization active in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, formed around 1990 as the youth wing of the then-ruling party of Rwanda, and enjoyed the backing of the then Hutu Power government. The Interahamwe were the main perpetrators of the Rwandan genocide against Tutsi.

2009).In January-February 1996, thousands of Tutsi were massacred in Masisi (North Kivu) by groups of Congolese from the region and Hutu militants from the refugee camps (Chretien et Kambanda 2013). During the same year, two Goma-based radio stations contaminated by the genocide ideology fuelled anti-Tutsi feelings, and megaphones were used to call on residents to chase the Tutsi out of town; Tutsi businessmen were arrested by local authorities without specific charges (Reyntjes 2009). According to Prunier (Prunier 1997), by late 1995 and early 1996, the violence had left about 30,000 people dead, with over 12,000 Congolese Tutsi refugees fleeing into Rwanda.

As shown by Mamdani, armed refugee camps led to the acceleration of the militarization of communities in the Kivu: Subjected to a regime of terror by armed Interahamwe based in refugee camps, more and more Congolese Tutsi crossed the border into Rwanda; In response, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF)trained and armed them (Mamdani, 2021). Similarly, more native authorities created their own militias, as the Interahamwe were collaborating with the Congolese army (Mamdani,2021). Faced with an "Indigenous" militia the Hutu Congolese developed too their own counter-militia called Les Combattants, formed alliances, and collaborated freely with the Rwandan Hutu Interahamwe operating from Congo. In a parallel movement, the Tutsi concentrated in South Kivu, created in November 1996 the ADP, an organization of Congolese Tutsi (Mamdani, 2021), the ancestor of the M23 as it is composed of former ADP. As the ex-FAR and the Interahamwe were intent on returning to power in Rwanda, they intensified launching attacks against the new regime in Rwanda, which represented a serious security threat to Rwanda. As the threat grew, Rwanda decided to neutralize the danger with the support of the Congolese Tutsi military organization the Alliance Democratique des Peuples (ADP) (Reyntjes 2009). The Rwandan state's collaboration with Congolese Tutsi military organizations persists even in the ongoing conflict between the Congolese government and the M23, as stated in numerous UN reports.

To sum up, the historical environment of the formation of the Congolese military organization M23 revolves around a central pattern in which political structures promoting division pave the way to political exclusion, exclusion leading to an environment in which conditions for mobilizing insurgent collective action becomes possible, insurrection eventually leading to massive flows of refugees which in turn become the vector of further instability. The Colonial administration's indirect rule socially constructed antagonistic ethnic identities, coupled with the establishment of institutional structures that continue to reproduce ethnic divisions. In addition, the structural exclusion against the Rwandophone Congolese can be interpreted as the political opportunity structures that triggered thousands of young Tutsi Rwandophones to flee, while in refugee camps —which I consider as an important pre-existing institution and mobilizing structure that facilitates bloc recruitment —they were mobilized to join the Rwanda Patriotic Front and to become a decade after the driving force behind the M23 rebellion.

It is important to underline the crucial role played by the use, through framing strategies, of the "Hamitic ideological discourse and its extension, the Tutsi/Hima conspiracy theory", without which the interactions between the communities in the Congo would have been different, possibly even peaceful. If it had been the ideological discourse of peace, which rejects exclusionary us-versus-them dichotomies in favor of tolerance of diversity, that had been institutionalized and disseminated, hundreds of thousands of lives would have been saved.

Chapter 4: M23 in context: Formation, discourse, and Mobilization.

The March 23 Movement, commonly known as M23, is a prominent military group operating in the eastern Provinces of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), primarily consisting of Congolese Tutsi Rwandophones. Formed in April 2012 by former National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP) armed group members, M23 quickly gained notoriety for its rapid military advances and control over key territories (Stearns 2012). The group's name is derived from the March 23, 2009 peace agreement between the DRC government and the CNDP, which M23 claims was never fully implemented, thus justifying their rebellion.

Understanding the reasons for the emergence of the M23 and its discourse is crucial to grasping the complexities of the ongoing conflicts in Congo, as its activities have significantly influenced the countries' security landscape, contributing to the involvement of both local and regional actors. This chapter delves into the formation, ideology, and power dynamics of M23, providing an analysis of the socio-political order in the territories under its control. The first section addresses the formation of the M23 highlighting the immediate causes that led to its creation. The second section explores the ideological foundations of the M23 and its political, social, and economic motivations. In section three I discuss the framing strategies and mobilizing structures used by the rebel group for prosecuting the war.

Since the emergence of the M23, much of the literature has focused either on economic factors such as the exploitation of natural resources, and economic motivations of the actors involved or on the role of

external actors, particularly portraying the M23 as a proxy for Rwanda's regional interests. In contrast, my argument focuses on ideology and discursive practices. I argue that the spread of anti-Tutsi hate speech in the Congo further facilitates M23's mobilization efforts, since such rhetoric reinforces the perception of existential threat among Congolese Tutsi, making M23's calls for protection and solidarity even more compelling.

1. Formation of the M23

The immediate origin of the M23 movement can be traced back to a complex history of conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo, marked by the two Congo Wars (the First War from 1996-1997 and the Second War from 1998-2000) and a decade of ethnic tensions that followed. Understanding this context is crucial to comprehending the formation and motivations of the M23. In this section, I argue that three factors paved the way to the emergence of the M23. Notably,(1)the threat provoked by the presence of the Hutu extremists who organized the 1994 genocide in Rwanda—later called the FDLR that continued their project of eliminating the Tutsis from their refuge across the border in the DRC; (2) the increasing use of the Hamitic ideological discourse as a framing strategy to spreading anti-Tutsi sentiments in the region ;(3) combined with the continued marginalization and the lack of will on the side of the government to implement different peace agreements and a real unification of the country, which increased the belief within Congolese Tutsi that their interests could be defended only through armed rebellion.

The two Congo wars.

The First Congo War, also known as Africa's First World War (Prunier 2009:72), was a civil war and a transnational military conflict that occurred in Congo from October 1996 to May 1997. This conflict set the stage for the emergence of numerous armed groups, including the precursors to M23. This war began with the invasion of Zaire (now the DRC) by a coalition of forces from Rwanda, Uganda, and various Congolese rebel groups mostly Rwandophones Congolese coalesced into the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo (ADFL) (Prunier 2009:113). The primary aim was to overthrow the long-standing dictator Mobutu Sese Seko and was motivated by the presence and the continued operations from Congo territory of the former Rwandan army ex-FAR and Interahamwe Hutu militia, held responsible for the 1994 genocide against Tutsi (Young 2002). The war culminated in the ousting of Mobutu and the installation of Laurent- Désiré Kabila as the new president of the DRC in

1997. This conflict set the stage for the subsequent rise of armed groups, including those that would later form the CNDP and the M23.

The Second Congo War began in August 1998, more than one year after the First Congo War. It started when Laurent Désiré Kabila turned against his former allies, which led Rwanda, together with Uganda to shift their backing to groups opposed to Kabila's rule because they were convinced that Kabila had neither the means nor the will to meet their security concerns (Reyntjes 2009:146). The tensions escalated when Kabila started to provide the ex-FAR/Interahamwe with supplies, and logistical support and launched a large-scale insurgency in Rwanda's north-western prefectures (Tamm 2016:173). A new rebel compilation, the Rassemblement Congolais pour la Democractie (RCD) was created, its sole aim was to overthrow Kabila. The core of the RCD was composed of former ADFL members, including many Congolese Tutsi who already tended to ally themselves with Rwanda against anti-Tutsi forces present in the Region (Stearns, 2012) notably the Rwando-Burundian Hutu alliance in which ex-FAR/Interahamwe and the CNDD-FDD Burundian Hutu rebel group operated in mixed units ((Reyntjes 2009:203-204; Rafti 2006:68).

It is important to underline the amplification of the use of the Hamitic ideology and its extension "the Tutsi/Hima conspiracy" theory as a framing strategy to mobilize anti-Tutsi fighters. Reyntjes (2009:148-149) shows that the practices of the Tutsi military from the ADFL had spoiled the relations between Tutsi and other groups "to the point that in certain places in Kivu province, the presence of a Tutsi is not tolerated any longer" (La Libre Belgique,1997). Non-Tutsi Congolese movements that came into being explicitly stated as their goal, the fight against 'Tutsi hegemony', an objective couched in increasingly violent terms: 'the killers-invaders are known, they are the Tutsi Banyarwanda refugees who massacre the Bantu"; A sort of 'Bantu front' was established, contacts between movements for the liberation of the Bantu people, such as [the Burundian rebel movements] Palipehutu and Frolina led to the signing on 08 January 1997 of a protocol of co-operation agreement "(Reyntjes 2009:149).

The emergence of this movement, in turn, led others of the Congo's neighbors such as Angola, and Zimbabwe to intervene on the side of Kabila, at least six armies were involved (Soderlund, Briggs, Najem, and Roberts 2012:14). The RCD rebellion officially ended in 2003, when a peace agreement the Pretoria Accord signed in 2002, brought about a transitional government, uniting the country and integrating all belligerents into one army (Stearns, 2012:16)

A failed transition: continuation of violence in the eastern Congo

The 2002 peace agreement brought relative calm in Kinshasa and other parts of the Congo but in the eastern provinces violence has continued without interruption because of the failure of the peace process. Some of the signatories to the peace agreement, which committed all belligerents to joining the transitional government and merging their militia forces into the national army, had been adopting a cautious approach. For instance, early in the transition, there were already signs that Kabila, whom the peace deal confirmed in the presidency, was trying to outmaneuver the other parties to the agreement: according to the peace deal his party was supposed to hold one of four vice-presidential posts—but by co-opting the representative of the opposition, he was able to tilt the balance of power in his favor (Stearns, 2012:16). The RCD which controlled much of the eastern Congo, saw three inherent threats: the first was that the RCD was afraid that it would be an unequal partner in the power-sharing transitional government; the second threat was more fundamental to its continued existence: The culmination of the transition period was to be the national elections. However, the RCD was still framed and viewed by many outside the Banyarwanda community as aliens, which placed the RCD party at risk of significant electoral defeat. Immense tension arose due to the fact that the RCD, once the strongest military force in the country, had the least to gain from the political transition (Stearns,2012:18).

The third threat was related to the physical safety of the Congolese Tutsi. It is important not to underestimate how deeply Congolese Tutsi feared persecution. As shown by Stearns (2012), almost all Tutsi in North Kivu fled the countryside in 1994, gathering in city centers or moving to Rwanda. Thousands were killed. When the RCD rebellion was launched in 1998, hundreds of Tutsi, including many soldiers, were rounded up in army camps and towns around the country and massacred. The RCD military group guaranteed their safety. The transition threatened not only their power base but, for many, their very survival since it never directly addressed these fears nor the hatred among other communities due to the presence of anti-Tutsi forces and ideology in the region. This situation led to the split of the RCD and the emergence of the Congres National pour la Paix et la Concorde (CNDP) as discussed in the following section.

The emergence of the CNDP and its transformation into the M23.

The three-year transition process provoked deep division within the RCD as its leaders disagreed over whether to continue to participate given the apparent bad faith of Kabila's government. Former RCD members resisted an integration that they felt would erode their political and economic power, while members of the Rwandophone community also were anxious about discrimination and persecution. In this climate those who were to instigate the CNDP rebellion such as General Laurent Nkunda and two

fellow officers refused to join the newly integrated national army in September 2003, citing both personal and community-wide security concerns and a general mistrust of Kinshasa. By early 2004, tensions within the transitional government had come to a head, army integration was stagnating, the RCD felt Kabila was monopolizing power and little progress was being made toward elections or a real unification of the country[7]

The crisis in the Kivu escalated with General Nkunda at its center. Following friction between RCD officers and government loyalists in Bukavu in early 2004, Nkunda launched an assault on the capital of South Kivu in May 2004 (Amnesty,2004). According to him, he did so to defend the town's Tutsi population from genocide. In his first official appearance for over a year in September 2005 Nkunda issued a statement that launched a new rebellion: he said that "the Kabila clan" was responsible for sowing ethnic division in the Kivus and muzzling the political opposition, and bore responsibility for multiple human rights cases of abuse; accused Kinshasa of organizing a 'plan for ethnic cleansing in North Kivu under the cover of military integration' and pressed for the use of 'all necessary means to force this government to step down'" (Amnesty International 2005:11).

After orchestrating several brigades' defection from the national army, primarily consisting of Congolese Tutsi, Nkunda officially launched his new CNDP rebellion in 2006. He drew largely on mid-ranking Tutsi officers who had previously been in the RCD. The clear stress was on the demands and insecurities of the Tutsi community. A fundamental concern underpinning the CNDP's existence was the eradication of the FDLR Rwandan Hutu rebels, ideally to be coupled with the return of the 55,000 Congolese Tutsi still living in refugee camps in Rwanda (Stearns, 2012:26). It is important to note that the CNDP was significantly influenced by the Rwandan regime, which supported the group in terms of weapons and recruitment, as part of its broader strategy to counter the threat posed by Hutu militias such as the FDLR operating in eastern Congo.

After four years of military offensives and unsuccessfully attempting to defeat the CNDP militarily, Congolese president Kabila made a deal with President Kagame of Rwanda to allow Rwandan soldiers into the DRC to uproot FDLR militants in exchange for Rwanda neutralizing Nkunda. CNDP senior officers were promised by the Congolese government key positions within the Congolese army and were given guarantees that they would not be transferred out of the Kivus[8]. The agreement was formalized on 23 March 2009 with the formal signatures by the Kinshasa government and the CNDP.

[7] Interview with Sentore, a former member of RCD Goma, 13 May 2024
[8] Interview with Sentore, a former member of RCD Goma, 13 May 2024

However, this integration was hampered by numerous challenges, including deep-seated mistrust, insufficient integration efforts, and continued factionalism within the army. Starting in September 2010, the Congolese government tried several times to deploy ex-CNDP commanders outside of the Kivus, but the CNDP always refused, citing security risks, anti-Tutsi discrimination, and the continuing existence of the FDLR (Stearns 2023:152). Many CNDP fighters felt marginalized and disillusioned with the Congolese government's failure to fully implement the peace agreement, leading to tensions and dissatisfaction. This dissatisfaction laid the groundwork for the emergence of a new rebel group. In April 2012, former CNDP members, led by Bosco Ntaganda and Sultani Makenga, defected from the Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo (FARDC) and formed the M23 movement, named after the March 23, 2009, peace agreement they claimed was not honored by the DRC government (Stearns 2023:154).

To sum up, three factors linked to the socio-political environment and conditions shaped the possibility and political opportunities of the emergence of the M23. Notably,(1)the threat provoked by the presence of the Hutu extremists who organized the 1994 genocide in Rwanda—later called the FDLR that continued their project of eliminating the Tutsis from their refuge across the border in the DRC; (2) the increasing use of the Hamitic ideological discourse as a framing strategy to spreading anti-Tutsi sentiments in the region ;(3) combined with the continued marginalization and the lack of will on the side of the government to implement different peace agreements and a real unification of the country increased the belief within Congolese Tutsi that their interests could be defended only through armed rebellion.

2. M23's ideology

The ideological discourse of the M23 rebel movement is deeply rooted in ethnic protectionism, political marginalization, and economic opportunism. It is a complex and multifaceted ideology, reflecting a mix of political, ethnic, and economic grievances. Referring to the name M23, the initial claims of the rebel group concern the implementation of the March peace agreement signed between the CNDP and the Congolese government in 2009.

Official political discourse

The M23 initially presents itself as a group fighting to promote and protect Congolese Rwandophones' interests and security, and its discourse is articulated in terms of a right to citizenship, land rights, and political participation. Among the provisions of the 2009 agreement, two major issues are of importance for the M23: Political discrimination, insecurity of Congolese Rwandophones, and the return of internally displaced persons, and thousands of hundreds of Congolese refugees living in refugee camps settled in neighboring countries.

Regarding political discrimination and insecurity, the M23 claims that Rwandophones civilians and soldiers are subject to injustice. In all their speeches and communications, they argue that they are discriminated against in terms of employment opportunities and that they cannot expect justice from Congolese authorities (UrwagasaboTV,2024). The issue of discrimination and insecurity in their discourse focuses on the experience of ex-CNDP fighters who were integrated into the FARDC after the peace accord. They did not receive their salary like their other counterparts. As it is put in a statement by M23's coordinator, "Former CNDP soldiers were victims of discriminatory treatment and were targets of their FARDC's colleagues; When other FARDC received their wages, the ex CNDP soldiers were getting only a lump sum" (Umutoni 2014)

The second point, the return of the refugees is at the center of M23 political discourse. In most of their official declarations, they often express their concern about the increasing number of Congolese refugees in neighboring countries, particularly Rwandophone Congolese, and the lack of will of the Congolese government to bring them home. An example, in January 2013, Jean Marie Runiga (the former coordinator of M23), when addressing a press conference said "Rwanda alone has 56,000 refugees from the DRC. Nobody cares about the plight of these stateless people. The Congolese Government does not regard them as Congolese citizens." (Umutoni 2014).

However, with time, the M23 list of demands was extended beyond the content of the 2009 peace agreement. Thus, in addition to the March peace agreement, the M23 claims to fight for good governance and a legitimate government in the DRC. In multiple interviews with M23 political leader Bertrand Bisimwa, he emphasizes that the formation of the M23 was intended to enforce the implementation of the peace agreement, with good governance as the central pillar. He claims that " there is no road there is no hospital, there is no school and there is insecurity in our area, which is caused by bad governance, that is why we are fighting to change these things"[9].

[9] Interview of Bertrand Bisimwa M23 chairman, posted on Jun 11, 2021, on YouTube channel UGANDA The Economy, The History, Magic & Mystery available on YouTube, available on https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9OP5wTktmrE&t=162s

Economic Interests

Economic motives play a significant role in shaping M23's ideology and actions. The eastern DRC is rich in mineral resources, including tin, tantalum, tungsten, and gold. Control over these resources provides both financial support for the group's operations and personal enrichment for its leaders and members.

M23 has strategically targeted areas with valuable mineral deposits, establishing control over mines and trade routes. According to UN reports (UN 2022), until mid-October 2022, M23 controlled a territory some three times as large as the territory it had controlled in March 2022. On 20 October, after relative calm since mid-June, it launched a new offensive against FARDC, pushing north, north-west, west, and south-west. By 1 November, the amount of territory that it controlled had again doubled and included strategic locations such as Rutshuru and Kiwanja towns, the Rumangabo military camp, the Matebe power plant, and the Kitagoma and Bunagana border posts, and the M23 began imposing taxes, including at the Bunagana and Kitagoma border crossings and in the territories that it occupied. Generated income contributed to funding M23 military operations (UN S/2022/967). A recent example is the capture of the mining town of Rubaya in May 2024 a town that was previously under the control of a pro-government militia group known as the Wazalendo. (The East African 2024).

The revenues generated from these resources are critical for sustaining the group's military activities and administrative functions in the territories they control. This economic dimension of M23's discourse reflects a pragmatic approach to funding their political and military objectives. The exploitation of mineral resources also ties into M23's broader ideological narrative. The group argues that the wealth generated from the DRC's natural resources should benefit local communities rather than being siphoned off by corrupt national elites or foreign corporations. This stance is part of their wider call for better governance and equitable resource distribution.

However, the economic interests of M23 have also led to significant human rights abuses. UN reports (UN, S/2023/431) have documented that M23 combatants systematically used civilians to carry out forced labor, notably to transport ammunition or mandatory community service, those who refused faced punishment. These actions undermine their ideological claims of protecting and benefiting local populations and highlight the often contradictory nature of their economic motivations and political rhetoric.

M23's Framing Strategies and Mobilization

As discussed above in the theoretical framework chapter, armed conflicts do not break out simply because conditions happen to be right, but because they are organized (Richards 2005), by leaders who draw people into action by successfully mobilizing participants at opportune political moments through framing strategies. Since its formation, leaders of the M23 movement have strategically employed various framing strategies to mobilize and legitimize its actions in the Democratic Republic of Congo. These multifaceted strategies, targeting both local and international audiences, reflect the Great Lakes Region's socio-political and ethnic dynamics. This section analyzes the official discourse of the M23 and discusses the framing strategies and mobilizing structures used for prosecuting the war.

Framing strategies

My analysis of the official discourse of the M23 reveals that one of the most potent framing strategies they use is the portrayal of Congolese Tutsi as victims of systemic discrimination on the part of the Congolese state which treats them as aliens, on the one hand**,** and as the victims of violence primarily due to the presence of Rwandan genocidaires in the Democratic Republic of Congo on the other hand. This narrative is deep-rooted in the historical political and social context of the exclusion and then resistance of Congolese Rwandophones since the "Kanyarwanda war" in the 1960s, and most importantly in the context of the aftermath of the 1994 Rwandan genocide that led to the exportation of anti-Tutsi ideology and violence from Rwanda into Congo. This can be observed in the content of websites established by M23 members such as www. congodrcnews.com or www. soleildugraben.com, or Facebook fan pages as well as Twitter accounts run by M23 leaders, members, or people close to them. This victimization narrative is very efficient since it taps into the collective memory and the ongoing fears of the Tutsi population, emphasizing the need for a strong, organized defense against recurring threats. " They are fighting for us[...] they are the only ones we have" stated one of my interviewees[10].

It is important to underline how the spread of anti-Tutsi hate speech in the Congo either by officials members of the ruling party, or non-Tutsi militias operating in Congo among others, further facilitates M23's mobilization efforts. According to the 2022 UN's Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo report, there is a

[10] Interview with Ngabire sister of an M23 fighter, May, 31, Groningen

> " worrying proliferation of xenophobia and hate speech inciting discrimination, hostility, and violence against Rwandophone populations perceived as supporting M23/ARC, in particular the Banyamulenge and Tutsi communities, leading at times to acts of violence, including killings [...]This rhetoric has spread nationwide, either in the context of demonstrations or in public speeches by defence, security or political figures, civil society actors and members of the Congolese diaspora, via conventional and social media. The North Kivu deputy police commissioner, Aba Van Ang, incited civilians to take machetes 'against the enemy', and Justin Bitakwira, a former minister and former member of the Parliament, called for every Congolese to identify 'infiltrators'. This rhetoric was also propagated by persons selectively targeting members of Rwandophone communities and those perceived as Rwandophone".

Such rhetoric reinforces the perception of existential threat among Congolese Tutsi, making M23's calls for protection and solidarity even more compelling.

The effectiveness of using instances of anti-Tutsi violence and hate speech to rally support lies in the dissemination on social media of videos of violent acts on Tutsi individuals or inflammatory anti-Tutsi speeches made by those who are supposed to protect them. In this way, the M23 creates a sense of urgency and immediacy. This approach not only galvanizes local Congolese Tutsi support but also seeks to attract international sympathy and support by framing the issue within the global discourse on Human rights and protection against genocide. In many refugee camps such as in Rwanda, Uganda or Burundi this framing strategy is particularly influential since refugees, already living in precarious conditions, are highly susceptible to messages of impending danger and the need for defense. M23 exploits these vulnerabilities, presenting itself as the only viable option for safety and empowerment. This strategy has proven effective in recruiting fighters and garnering logistical support from refugee populations, who see alignment with M23 as a pathway to security and potential resettlement in their homeland. Such videos are available on Twitter accounts analyzed such as Vive M23 with 23.600 followers, Kivu News 24 with 25.200 followers, Les Miserables with 21.300 followers, among many others.

It is important to highlight the M23 tendency to justify the use of violence as a coping strategy within the political emergency that has engulfed the Kivu region since the arrival of the Rwandan genocide perpetrators in Congo. As one can interpret through their discourse they claim that the use of violence by the M23 is a rational response to the dysfunctional state structures that cannot support or protect the citizens. The M23 views force as a necessary means to gain leverage and access to resources that have been denied to them, particularly in a context where their voices and demands are not heard. Additionally, they argue that the national army's collaboration with the Rwandan genocidaires leads citizens to distrust state-sponsored forces for protection. Consequently, the M23 employs violence as a

form of "currency" in a context where other means of survival are inaccessible. " We do not like war, it is the Congolese government who is pushing us into it, because they opted for war, any one who speaks Kinyarwanda is branded Rwandese, if they have chosen to attack us, what shall we do? shall we stand and watch? They may finish us but other people will be born they will still talk about the same problems

3. M23's Mobilizing structures

The rapidity of M23 's mobilization support is heavily reliant on its use of mobilizing structures including former military networks, pre-existing social networks such as ethnic networks, and local governance systems established in the territory under their control.

Regarding former military networks, it is important to remember that most M23 military leaders have a military trajectory that can be traced back to the 1990s when thousands of Congolese Tutsi joined the Rwandan Patriotic Army because their citizenship was denied and for security reasons[11]. After the civil war in Rwanda, the majority of them joined the ADFL during the first Congo War, then the RCD during the Second War, and finally the CNDP which transformed into the M23. This can be illustrated by the profile of General Sultan Makenga the military commander of the M23, who summarises his life in these terms: "In Brief, My Life Is War"[12]. The legacy of military networks more specifically CNDP networks from which M23 emerged provides a pre-existing military and organizational framework bringing with them military experience, discipline, and a hierarchical structure that can be quickly mobilized. This continuity ensures that the M23 can maintain operational efficiency and coherence, crucial for sustaining a long-term insurgency.

Although wartime situations like civil war are most of the time presented as chaotic and anarchical, non-state socio-political institutions and orders frequently emerge to play a crucial role in shaping how individuals and groups behave (Arjona 2014). The M23, as a non-state political organization established parallel governance structures in areas under its control by appointing new chef de groupements, chefs de villages, Nyumbakumi (chiefs responsible for about 10 houses), and dignitaries (UN,S/2022/967 2022). These structures are not only about administrative control but also about embedding their

[11] This was discussed in chapter 2, Histotical background of the M23.
[12] [12] General Sultan Makenga interviewed by New African Magazine, February 15, 2013, https://newafricanmagazine.com/3565/

ideological narratives within local governance through public meetings By providing security and services in conquered territories, the M23 attempts to legitimize its authority and gain the loyalty of populations, on the one hand, and to use these governance structures as a platform for further mass mobilization for recruitment through direct interaction with pre-existing institutions and structures under their control such as village associations, religious groups, schools, etc.

To sum up, M23's ability to mobilize and legitimize its actions is based on its strategic use of framing strategies portraying long-standing systemic discrimination and violence against Congolese Tutsi on the one hand, and by robust organizational frameworks, including former military networks, parallel governance established in areas under its control facilitating ideological inculcation and recruitment.

Chapter 5: Transnational alliances, threats, and ethnic solidarities

Since the beginning of the fighting between the M23 and the Congolese state in 2012, significant involvement of neighboring countries notably Rwanda, Burundi, and Uganda has been reported. According to UN experts, the Rwandan and Ugandan states have supported the M23 movement in terms of transfers of arms and ammunition, facilitating recruitment, and intelligent services even in direct combat, in the case of Rwanda (UN 2024). After the failure of the Eastern Community Force's attempt to bring peace in 2022, more than 1,000 Burundian soldiers were covertly deployed in eastern Congo to fight the M23 alongside the Congolese army with the Wazalendo coalition of local armed groups, the sanctioned Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR) (UN, 2024:12-15, UN, 2023:12). This chapter discusses the involvement of Burundi and Rwanda In the Congolese conflict and examines why Burundi supports the Congolese state while Rwanda is backing the M23. It explores whether the alliances formed by Burundi with the Congolese state on the one hand, and Rwanda with the M23 on the other are driven either by perceptions of threats, opportunities for resource exploitation, or connections through cross-border ethnic or ideological ties.

The first section discusses Burundi's alliance with the Congolese state, locating their relationship back to the 1990s during the two Congo Wars period. In the second section, I discuss the Rwandan support for the M23 and I argue that Rwandan support for the M23 is attributable to the transnational threat the regime faced from FDLR rebels the perpetrators of the genocide against the Tutsi operating from Congo. In the last section, I discuss the challenges related to reaching a peace deal due to the involvement of neighboring states in the conflict between the Congolese state and the M23. I argue

that the divergence in the analysis and interpretation of this conflict generates parallel and contradictory approaches that negatively impact its resolution.

1. Burundi's motivation in intervening to fight the M23

Since the war that toppled President Mobutu Sese Seko in 1996, Congo has experienced a protracted conflict involving numerous transnational alliances between regional states and armed groups. Successive Burundian regimes and armed groups such as the former CNDD- FDD rebel group today's ruling party played a significant role. Understanding the involvement of the current Burundian regime in the Congo War necessitates a brief review of historical alliances formed on the one hand by Burundi with various Congolese rebels between 1996 and 2001, and on the other hand the alliance history between the current Burundian ruling party CNDD-FDD and the Congolese state and its allied. I argue that the involvement of the current Burundian regime in the Congo War is motivated by a combination on the one hand of a continuation of historical ethnic and ideological ties with the leaders of the Congolese army based on the establishment of a common front against a " Tutsi/empire conspiracy " and on the other hand, the presence of Burundian rebels groups based on the Congolese territory that threaten the Burundian regime.

Burundi's involvement during the two Congo Wars

The Burundian civil war triggered by the assassination of its first Hutu President Melchior Ndadaye by extremist Tutsi army officers in 1993 provoked a large influx of refugees to neighboring countries and, a great number went into Congo. Many of these refugees were "warrior-refugees" who were involved in cross-border movements and transnational ethnic-based alliances, a situation that transformed internal armed conflicts into two regional wars, the two Congo Wars discussed above. Backed by President Mobutu Sese Seko, Burundian Hutu rebels such as the CNDD-FDD, the FNL, and the FROLINA formed alliances with the Rwandan Ex-FAR/Interahamwe and used the Congolese territory as a rear base to launch attacks on Burundi. The link between the rebellion and the perpetrators of the Rwandan genocide frightens Burundi's Tutsi minority. Faced with the security threat posed by this coalition, the Burundian regime allied with the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo (ADFL) the coalition supported by Rwanda and Uganda that aimed to overthrow President Mobutu. Its target was mostly Burundian rebel camps and fiefs in Congo. After the AFDL war, few Burundian troops remained in the Congo to protect the country's commercial interests (ICG, 2000:19). It is important to remember

that Burundi at that time was under a regional trade embargo imposed in the aftermath of the July 1996 coup d' Etat that brought President Pierre Buyoya to power. Thus, Burundi's trade with the outside world passed through the Congo because its government never observed the regionally imposed sanctions. According to the 2000 International Crisis Group report (2000:20), this commerce was important during the civil war in the country because the government faced a raging rebellion, it depended upon this route to import weapons, munitions, and gasoline.

When the second war began in 1998, as discussed above, the alliances shifted: former AFDL leader President Laurent Désiré Kabila turned into the ex-FAR/Interahamwe, CNDD-FDD Burundian rebels, and other local militias for support against Congolese Tutsi-led rebellions Rwanda, Uganda, and Burundi. As a reaction, the Burundi government closed its embassy in Kinshasa. It deployed approximately a thousand troops in South Kivu and along the Congo side of Lake Tanganyika to guarantee the safety of its border and to protect the Lake Tanganyika trade against rebel piracy that could threaten Burundi's defence capability (ICG, 2000:20). In addition, the Burundian deployment in the South Kivu helped secure some Congolese Tutsi, the Banyamulenge communities, under threat from the Babembe or Bafulelo Mai Mai armed groups that considered themselves as Bantus.

It is important to remember that due to the spreading and increasing use of the Hamitic ideology and its extension of the Tutsi/Hima empire conspiracy theory as a framing strategy of mobilization by Rwandan and Burundian rebels present in Congo, the perception within these rebel groups was that the conflict was a regional war between the Bantu and the Tutsi/Hamites who control Burundi, Rwanda, and Uganda. In addition, the alliances formed within all the antagonistic groups — either on the side of the Congolese state and its allies or the rebels and states that supported them— were based on Bantu versus Tutsi/Hamites lines. The presence of Burundian troops ended after the signature of the comprehensive Ceasefire Agreement between the government and the CNDD-FDD in 2003.

Current alliances and involvement

The involvement of the current Burundian regime alongside the Congolese army in fighting against the M23 is a continuation of alliances formed by successive Congolese regimes and the leaders of the former Burundian rebel group, the CNDD-FDD since the beginning of the two Congo wars in 1996, as discussed above. They allied with President Mobutu to help his regime fight the AFDL supported by Rwanda, Uganda, and Burundi. The alliance outlived the first Congo War and was reinforced by Laurent Désiré Kabila, who provided them with political, military, and diplomatic support (Buyoya 2011:154),

when he created mixed units of his Congo army that included Burundians CNDD-FDD and Rwandans Ex-FAR/Interahamwe (ICG 2002:13). This type of collaboration cemented ties between former rebel officers from the CNDD-FDD and officers from the Congolese army. When the CNDD-FDD came to power in Burundi in 2005, the wartime ties remained between officers from both states, these relationship still influenced their decisions and actions regarding the management of security issues in the Great Lakes Region.

To find a solution to the conflict between the M23 movement and the Congolese regime, the East African community deployed troops to implement a ceasefire and agreement signed in Luanda in November 2022 (EAC, 2022). The East African Community Regional Force (EACRF) was composed of Burundian, Kenyan, South Sudan, and Ugandan troops. Just a year later the troops started withdrawing amid tensions with the Congolese regime. The point of contention was the scope of the force's mandate of the EAC regional force. According to the mandate, the EAC force was to enforce the ceasefire and oversee the withdrawal of the M23, which had handed over most of the territory under its control to the EAC regional force (EAC,2023). The Congolese government wanted a more assertive posture, but the regional force has refused to engage in offensive operations (The Conversation 2023)." Act on rebels or leave" warned the president of Congo in May that the EAC regional force had to leave the country in June if they are not effective on the ground. (The EastAfrican 2023).

After the failure of the EAC regional force, Burundi deployed a thousand troops to fight the M23 alongside the Congolese army and its allies the sanctioned Rwanda rebels Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR) and the Wazalendo militias, following a secret bilateral defense pact signed in August 2023, by Congolese President Félix Tshisekedi and Burundi's Évariste Ndayishimiye (RFI 2023). "If you do not help your neighbor put out the fire when his house is burning, tomorrow if it is your turn, he will not come to help you," he said. "If Burundi is going to help (Congo), it is defending itself " Burundian President Évariste Ndayishimiye, in a public broadcast on Dec. 29, acknowledged the presence of Burundian troops in eastern Congo.

Arguably, the primary driving motivation for Burundi's intervention is security notably the threat posed by the presence in the eastern Congo of the RED-Tabara. This rebel group has challenged the Burundian regime since the 2015 political crisis. Using Congolese soil as a rear base Red Tabara has renewed attacks since 2023, resulting in the heightening of tensions between Burundi and its neighbor Rwanda. Burundi has continually accused Rwandan authorities of supporting the RED-Tabara rebel group, the attack launched by RED-Tabara near the capital Bujumbura in December 2023 provoked the suspension of diplomatic ties between the two countries and Burundi closed its border with Rwanda. " We noticed that we have a bad neighbor: Paul Kagame president of Rwanda is a bad (…) we have suspended relations with him (…) he is not well intentioned. He is the one who shelters the evildoers who disturb

Burundi, today, we are closing the borders, "announced Kirundi the minister of interior January 11, 2024. (IWACU 2024).

It is important to highlight that many observers view the illegal exploitation of natural resources in the Congo as the most important underlying factor that motivated Congolese neighboring countries such as Rwanda, Uganda, and Burundi to support Congolese rebel groups today and in the past decades. The proponents of such a view argue that these states use the security grievance discourse to cover their economic greediness in the eastern Congo. It can be argued that this perspective underestimates the importance of transnational ethnic ties, ideology, and alliances that motivate states' leaders to intervene in conflicts involving their ethnic kin. In the case of Burundi, the wartime ties and alliances formed during the two Congo wars, as discussed in previous chapters, remained between CNDD-FDD and Congolese leaders. An analysis of the content of Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp group messages circulating in Burundi and spread by individuals close to the ruling party CNDD-FDD, illustrates that the attack from M23 backed by Rwanda and Uganda, on one hand, and the support of the RED-Tabara Burundian rebel group by Rwanda on the other, is being interpreted and framed by members of the ruling party in Burundi, as the continuation of a regional war between Bantu and Tutsi/Hamites, thus as an existential threat for the survival of the Burundian regime Which justifies their intervention.

2. Rwanda's involvement in the conflict between the Congolese government and the M23

To understand Rwanda's involvement in the conflict between the Congolese government and the M23, it is essential to trace the conflictual relationship between the current Rwanda regime and successive Congolese regimes. The antagonism between the two states can be traced back to President Mobutu's involvement in the civil war in Rwanda that brought the current Rwandan regime into power. When the Rwanda Patriotic Front rebel group (RPF)— a rebel group largely composed of Rwandan Tutsi refugees and also of thousands of Rwandophones Congolese Tutsi refugees— invaded Rwanda from Uganda, President Mobutu of Zaire sent elite troops to support the Hutu-dominated regime of his close ally Juvenal Havyarimana (Gachuruzi 1999:58). When the RPF seized the control of Rwanda, the defeated Forces Armees Rwandaises (FAR) and the Interahamwe militias— around tens thousands of combatants— the main perpetrator of the genocide against Tutsi fled to Zaire, with its heavy and light weapons, its officer corps, and its transport echelon (Prunier 2009: 25). They entered through the French-controlled zones and settled in the areas near the border with Rwanda. They quickly established administrative control over a million Hutu installed in five refugee camps, ruled over significant parts of eastern Zaire, and pursued an active insurgency inside Rwanda (Reed 2007: 134). This event is crucial to

Rwanda's later involvement in the Congo. The proximity of the Ex-FAR and Interahamwe militias to the border with Rwanda combined with their continued support from Zaire, France, and other allies allowed them to prepare and launch attacks inside Rwanda, a situation that paved the way for the Rwandan regime to support and join the AFDL coalition armed groups and to invade the country in 1996.

Rwanda's motivations for intervening during the two Congo Wars.

Rwanda's critical role in supporting and joining the AFDL coalition forces in 1996 is directly attributable to the transnational threat the new regime faced from the Rwandan defeated army, the Ex-FAR/ Interahamwe— the main perpetrators of the genocide against Tutsi —who were based across the border in eastern Zaire and received support from France and the host country. Zairean regime protection enabled them not only to rearm and to keep harassing Rwanda militarily from their safe refuges in the camps but also helped them pretend they were still a major actor to be reckoned with. As Prunier shows, the Ex-FAR did regularly murder civilians during their cross-border operations, as a reaction, the RPF army attacked, for instance, Birava and Mugunga camps in April 1995 killing people just to show that cross-border raids could work both sides. (Prunier 2009:29). According to Gribbin (2005:144-145) Rwanda warned the US ambassador that if Zaire continued to support the ex-FAR/Interahamwe against Rwanda, Rwanda could find anti-Mobutu elements to support and that if the international community could not help improve security in the region, the Rwanda Patriotic Army might be compelled to act alone. There were few domestic groups more vigorous in their opposition to the Mobutu government than the Tutsi of eastern Zaire, whose aspirations for full citizenship had been frustrated for decades and who called for ethnic solidarity against the Mobutu-genocidaires bloc (Verhoeven and Roessler 2011:31). The coalition launched the attack in October 1996, also known as the First Congo war. The principal reason was the security threat caused by the transnational alliances and cooperation between non-Rwandophone Congolese and the ex-FAR/Interahamwe. The other reason was to liberate the refugee camps where hundreds of thousands of Rwandan civilians were kept against their will because RPF leaders believed that, as stated by Kagame "One cannot say that the million or so Rwandese outside the country were killers" (Prunier 2009:29).

Within fifteen months after the AFDL and Rwandan forces together seized Kinshasa, the alliance collapsed. As discussed previously, President Laurent Désiré Kabila began to reach out to the génocidaires secretly— the Ex-FAR and the Interahamwe that carried out the Rwandan genocide. Around May 1998, he secretly started to provide them with supplies and logistical support; in the context of a larger-scale insurgency launched by the ex-FAR/Interahamwe in Rwanda's north-western

prefectures, Kabila's support for these génocidaires constituted a serious transnational threat to Rwandan regime (Tamm 2016:173). In July 1998 he expelled the Rwandan forces from DRC. Within days of being expelled, the Rwandan forces —and its allies, the Rassemblement Congolais pour la Democractie (RCD) from eastern Congo— launched a new rebellion, also known as the Second Congo War or the Great War because of the involvement of nine states (Prunier 2009). According to Verhoeven and Roessler (2011:28) if this tragic falling out between Kabila and its allies had been avoided, the deadliest conflict since World War II may have been averted. The second War officially ended with the signing in 2002 of a peace deal between Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo known as the Pretoria Accord in 2002. The talks centered on two issues: the withdrawal of the estimated 20,000 Rwandan soldiers in the Congo and the rounding up of the ex-Rwandan soldiers and the dismantling of the Hutu militias Interahamwe, which took part in Rwanda's 1994 genocide and continued to operate out of eastern Congo (UN 2002).

Rwanda's support to the M23

Since the beginning of the conflict between the Congolese government and the M23 in April 2012, numerous reports from the United Nations and Human Rights organizations have accused Rwanda of providing support to the M23. According to these reports, such as the 2012 Final Report of the Group of Experts on the DRC (UN 2012), the Rwandan government continued to provide direct military support to the M23 rebels, facilitating recruitment, encouraging and facilitating desertions from armed forces of the Democratic Republic of Congo, and providing arms, ammunition, intelligence and political advice. According to successive annual reports, these allegations are further supported by testimonies from defected M23 fighters and material evidence of Rwandan-made arms found in M23 possession (UN, 2022). Rwanda has consistently denied any involvement with the M23, dismissing the accusation as politically motivated.

Rwanda's involvement with the M23 is also evident through its discursive practices that have often justified its actions in the eastern Congo by framing them as necessary for national security and regional stability. In various official speeches or when asked by journalists about Rwanda's support for the M23 rebel movement, instead of confirming or denying the allegations, President Kagame often reminds his audiences of the FDRL, an armed group formed in 2000 by the perpetrators of the genocide and operating in eastern Congo: "Everyone is quick to blame Rwanda and remain silent about other problems that have existed for 25 years", castigating the actions of the FDRL (Interview with France 24 2022). Addressing a group of foreign ambassadors in Kigali in February 2023, the Rwandan president

complained bitterly of being hounded about his country's involvement in the neighboring Democratic Republic of the Congo, according to him, the group still poses an existential threat to Rwanda. "It's about our lives, our existence," he said of the dangers of the FDLR (Rwanda TV 2023).

Many of Rwanda's critics claim that the FDLR is not a threat to Rwanda and therefore when Rwanda evokes FDRL as a threat they claim that it is exaggerating the danger by using FDLR as a threat, and as an excuse for invading Congo to look for minerals and resources. For instance, according to Stearns (2023:90), the FDLR Rwandan rebels had been dramatically weakened when the M23 rebellion broke out in 2012; The last major incursion by the FDLR into Rwanda took place in 2001, although there have been many smaller incursions since then that resulted in civilian fatalities; between 2009 and 2012, over 4,500 FDLR combatants were repatriated to Rwanda by the UN, which may have been over 70 percent of all their troops. By 2012, the FDLR may have had as few as 1,500 troops. In addition to that, he argues that the genocide ideology advocated by the FDLR forms the raison d'être of the RPF, bolstering its legitimacy as the force that ended the genocide; the RPF continues to shield the population from genocide even as it tries to exorcise the ideology behind it from the population; that in some cases, genocide ideology has become a pretext for the RPF to repress dissent; in others, RPF officials are motivated by genuine concern; and that these twin impulses—the desire to preserve the RPF and the drive to extirpate genocide ideology—have become deeply, perhaps inextricably, entangled (Stearns 2023:91). According to Congolese interviewed, such narrative that involved Rwanda in Congo is formed to make it sound like eastern Congo's problem is created by Rwanda, and that it is about turning a perpetrator into a victim.

It is important to note that the collaboration between the members of the M23 with Rwandan leaders during the 1990-1994 Rwandan civil war —when thousands of Congolese Tutsi joined the RPF rebel group— and then during the two Congo wars when they fought together, cemented ties between them. In addition, as many of the M23 leaders and RPF leaders are Tutsi, it is undeniable that ethnic ties and solidarity play an important role in the Rwanda decision to support the M23 because they have a common threat, the FDLR whose activities in Congo have included persecuting and killing members of the Congolese Tutsi community and fanning popular animosity against them. Thus, it can be said that the ethnic ties and the transnational threat constituted by the unsolved presence of the Rwandan FDLR rebels and their alliance with the Congolese government play a significant role in Rwandan involvement in the Congolese conflict.

3. Challenges in reaching a deal

The involvement of neighboring states in the conflict between the Congolese state and the M23 rebel group has significantly impacted the dynamics of the conflict, complicating efforts toward resolution and contributing to its protracted nature. As stated by Demmers (2017:1), behind every analysis of violent conflict is a set of assumptions that explain why and how people resort to violence, these assumptions are usually subjective and form the basis of academic theories of conflict and indirectly influence the way policymakers and politicians interpret a conflict. Their interpretation of a conflict determines to a certain extent what sort of intervention they design. In the case of the conflict between the Congolese government and the M23 divergent interpretations of the M23's origins, motivations and legitimacy led to significant confusion in determining the appropriate resolution. For some, the M23 is an expression of popular frustration, a commitment to fighting for the rights of Rwandophone Congolese who over the past 30 years have suffered not only mistreatment but violence and eviction from their ancestral lands, as well as forced displacement into neighboring countries. This line of analysis proposes to treat the M23 as having legitimate grievances amenable to a negotiated resolution. For others, the M23 represents the latest in a long line of Rwandan-linked rebel movements that have served as proxies for the economic ambitions of the Rwandan state. According to them, the M23 is an illegitimate actor requiring a robust military response. This divergence in conflict analysis generated parallel and contradictory approaches to resolving it (Shepherd 2018:3).

At the beginning of the conflict, the international community aimed to engage with the M23 as a Congolese armed group with valid concerns that could be resolved through negotiation. This approach was reflected in the Kampala discussions, which occurred in December 2012 under the auspices of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) and the facilitation of Uganda. At the same time, the Congolese government, its allies in the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and the UN mobilized security resources to defeat the M23 militarily. The Kampala negotiations broke down in April 2013; M23 representatives walked out following a decision by the UN to deploy an intervention brigade to neutralize it; The force has been given a more forceful mandate than any previous military contingent with a UN peacekeeping mission (ReliefWeb 2013). In late October, the Congolese government backed by the UN Force Intervention Brigade consisting of troops from South Africa, Malawi, and Tanzania launched a renewed offensive against the M23 and defeated it within a week. The robust armed approach proved ineffective because, at the end of 2016, the M23 rapidly reconstituted and set up a military base in North Kivu, recruited new elements, and sprang into action starting in 2022 capturing swathes of territories in North Kivu. As discussed in the previous section, in

2022 another attempt to find a solution was made through the signature of a cease-fire in Luanda but its implementation failed.

To the question of how the M23 rebellion could be ended, the interpretation of data collected through interviews I conducted and my analysis of Twitter accounts show that there is a tendency among non-Rwandophone Congolese individuals even officials who consider the rebel movement as an illegitimate actor requiring a robust military response because it serves as a proxy for the economic ambitions of Rwanda. They disregard the reason for the emergence of this insurgent group, fighting for the rights of Rwandophone Congolese who over the last almost 30 years have suffered mistreatment and violence. The tendency among the Rwandophones interviewed is to ask why the Congolese government does nothing about the FDLR Rwandan rebels because they are one of the major actors in the persecution of Congolese Tutsi. Or "why the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in Congo or MONUSCO, with its greater number of troops and a very generous budget, has never fought again against FDLR to neutralize it, but the same MONUSCO was able to mobilize quickly the UN Force Intervention Brigade to neutralize the M23?

The resolution of the M23 rebellion does not lie in defeating the insurgency militarily, let alone holding neighboring countries responsible for its emergence and sustenance. Instead, there is a need for a multifaced strategy that establishes a regional political process that involves the countries in the Great Lakes Region such as Rwanda, Uganda, and Burundi to foster dialogue, and cooperation and to address issues related to refugee movements because, as discussed in previous chapters the large-scale displacement of people fleeing conflict is one of the major factors that often contribute to regionalization of conflicts.

Conclusion

This thesis is an effort to contribute to the existing academic literature on ethnic conflict in the Congo and the Great Lakes Region, by offering. Throughout this thesis, I explore two main questions: First, why is the armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo protracted? Second, why are neighboring states and cross-border ethnic groups involved in the conflict? I respond to these questions using the collective action analytical framework that helps to understand why people participate in violent collective actions as has been happening in Congo since the 1990s. For the first question, I argue that the protracted nature of the conflict is rooted in the spread of the Hamitic ideology, which labels Tutsi from the Great Lakes Region of Africa in general and Congolese Tutsi as foreigners and invaders. This

ideology, along with the threat posed by Rwandan Hutu extremist armed groups present in Congo since the end of the genocide against Tutsi in Rwanda in 1994, as well as the continued marginalization toward Congolese Tutsi and the lack of implementation of peace agreements by the Congolese government. These factors have created a socio-political environment that increased the belief within Congolese Tutsi that their interests could be defended only through armed rebellion. Regarding the second question, I posit that the transnational dimension of the conflict is the outcome of transnational threats posed by foreign rebel groups and transnational ethnic alliances influenced by the embedded Hamitic ideology in the Great Lakes region of Africa. This has motivated state leaders and armed groups to often intervene in conflicts involving their ethnic kin, leading to a protracted transnational conflict.

The analysis goes beyond economic and proxy explanations, explanations that tend to minimize the impact and the role played by the ideological discourse of divisions in fueling and perpetuating ethnic conflicts in Congo and the region. The thesis draws attention to the growth use, and dissemination of the Hamitic ideology and its extension, the 'Tutsi/Hima empire conspiracy', frequently employed by ethnopolitical entrepreneurs from the Great Lakes region, and in Congo as a framing strategy for mobilization. This phenomenon involves the formation of alliances between cross-border ethnic groups from the region and is often overlooked in academic literature. This has a detrimental effect on how conflicts are managed. Policymakers and politicians are influenced by academics, and the way academics interpret conflict determines to a certain extent what sort of intervention policymakers and politicians design. This is illustrated by how the conflict between the Congolese and M23 was prolonged because policymakers' analyses proposed to treat the rebel group as a proxy for the economic ambitions of the Rwandan state which required a robust military response instead of treating it as having legitimate grievances amenable to a negotiated resolution. The resolution of the M23 rebellion does not lie in defeating the insurgency militarily, let alone holding neighboring countries responsible for its emergence and sustenance. Instead, there is a need for a multifaced strategy that establishes a regional political process that involves countries from the Great Lakes Region and addresses the presence of refugee fighters that motivate neighboring states to be involved.

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