

# Recent History

## ZOË MARRIAGE

### INTRODUCTION

Since the conference of Berlin in 1884, when the boundaries of African countries were formalized by the European colonizers, the politics of powerful nations have heavily influenced events in the territory that is now the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Most recently, towards the end of the 20th century and into the 21st century, the People's Republic of China has played an increasingly significant role on the African continent in general, and in the DRC in particular.

The persistent interventions of great powers in the DRC have shaped the institutions of domestic politics through the incentives and constraints imposed on the leadership. Meanwhile, the population of the DRC has been engulfed in waves of violence of various intensities, but has found ways of surviving and has developed a particular sociopolitical, economic and cultural base that channels continuity and identity.

The DRC's history shares many elements with other countries on the African continent. The sequence of exploitation through slavery, colonialism, neocolonial rule, war and unequal integration into the global commodities market is not peculiar to the DRC, but the impacts thereof are accentuated on account of the vastness of the DRC's territory and mineral wealth, and the extraordinary violence that has been applied. The similarities with other countries' experiences are significant, though, as they draw attention to patterns rather than attaching sole importance to the predilections of individuals: the question is not so much why President Mobutu Sese Seko (formerly Joseph-Désiré Mobutu) or the invading forces of Rwanda and Uganda carried out their actions, but how such agents gained power, given the nature of their programme and the divergence of their interests from those of the population of the DRC.

This essay is divided into three substantive sections which take different perspectives on the history of the DRC. The first section traces the influence of great power politics—initially the Europeans, then the USA and latterly China—on Congolese territory. The second section analyses the political development within the DRC in conjunction with the interests of the great powers. The third examines some forms of response, including resistance, that have been made by Congolese people to the violence that they face from great powers and from their political and military elite.

The DRC is a country of 2.34m. sq km bordering nine others in the central African region, and has an estimated population of 89.5m. The 15th century Kingdom of Kongo was claimed by the Portuguese in 1482; they did not develop the region, but used it for slaving. The country was named Congo Free State between 1885 and 1908, when it was the property of the Belgian King, Léopold II, and the Belgian Congo when it passed to the administration of the Belgian Government in 1908. It was named the Republic of the Congo at independence, and the DRC five years later, when Mobutu took power in a coup. Mobutu changed its name to the Republic of Zaire in 1971, judging this to be a more authentically African name. In 1997, when Mobutu was ousted, it reverted to the DRC at the behest of the incoming President, Laurent-Désiré Kabila.

### GREAT POWER POLITICS

Vastly rich in land, and both natural and mineral resources, the DRC's history for the past 400 years has been overwhelmingly influenced by foreign powers that have exploited its population, natural assets and strategic location. Congo's population was decimated by the slave trade, which took millions of people to the Americas for labour. With the end of the slave trade, colonialism started in 1879 and led to the establishment of the Association Internationale du Congo, nominally a philanthropic venture. Under the auspices of the Association, several million more people were killed, mutilated and displaced over the next 30 years as international demand for rubber in the early 20th century led to increasingly harsh labour conditions for its extraction. The 'Force Publique',

the army operating in Congo from 1886 until independence, comprising African soldiers under the command of European officers, imposed violent penalties on workers to terrorize them into fulfilling rubber quotas. Léopold II claimed to be advancing a humanitarian agenda, but stewardship passed to the Belgian Government in 1908, after the brutality of his reign had been exposed.

### Extraction

One of Léopold II's first projects was the construction of a railway line from the coast to Kinshasa, and thereafter the spatial development of the country by Belgian colonizers prioritized building infrastructure that allowed for the country to be managed as a commercial enterprise. The territory was covered with dense forest, and most major towns were built at mining installations, or at the geographical periphery, to facilitate the export of natural resources. The River Congo allowed for transport from the east of the country, and the sea port on the 37-km stretch of coast onto the Atlantic at Matadi provided a crucial exit point for resources to be taken to Europe.

The extractive industries have changed over time in response to international demand, from trade in human beings for slavery from the 17th century, then rubber and ivory in the 19th and 20th centuries. The copper mining giant, the Union Minière du Haut Katanga, established by the Belgian colonizers and later known as Gécamines, serviced international demand for copper through the colonial and independence eras. In practical terms it reproduced state functions, and the company extended its reach across the mineral-rich province of Katanga, providing physical and social infrastructure to service its workforce, and transporting ore to the international market through Zambia. The uranium mine in Shinkolobwe, also in Katanga, provided the raw material for the USA's atomic bombs during the Second World War. Elsewhere in the east of the country, reserves of tin, tungsten, gold and diamonds have also attracted foreign enterprise. Since the spike in world prices of columbite-tantalite (coltan) in 2000, this resource has been exported for use as a component for tantalum capacitors in electronic devices, including mobile telephones and computers.

The continuous extraction by foreign powers has been managed not only through economic channels, but also through a steer on the governance of the DRC. The country passed from being the personal property of Léopold II to being a colony of the Belgian state. The colonial era gave way to neocolonial rule by President Mobutu, who was favoured by the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to serve the interests of the USA during the Cold War. In 1997 Mobutu was removed from power in the First Congo War (1996–97) by a coalition of regional forces backed by the USA. The political process that has followed Mobutu's demise has been funded and guided by donors in the global North, largely through aid money, which has centred around promoting development through institution building and democratization.

The primary actors intervening in the DRC have consistently been the world's most aggressive military powers: during the late 19th century and the colonial era intervention was led by the Europeans, then as power shifted to the USA in the first half of the 20th century it was that country that dominated. During the Cold War, Zaire's chief purpose in terms of international relations was to fulfil the strategic demands of the USA, which needed allies on the continent to counter the influence of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). At this time Zaire was used not only for extractive purposes: the vastness of its territory provided a key geographical buffer against the perceived threat of communism in Africa, and especially in Angola. The maintenance of privileged access to resources through and after the Cold War kept Zaire available for business, with profits accruing to businesses that could bear the risk, even when the political structures in the country were lacklustre.

### Donor Exit

The end of the Cold War reordered security priorities for the USA as the East–West rivalry ended; the divide between North and South became more salient as neoliberalism distinguished between the successes and failures of development. This had immediate ramifications for Zaire as it was a country that epitomized the unruliness and poverty that was threatening to the neoliberal ideology. Mobutu had minimally fulfilled his strategic function during the Cold War, but he had become an embarrassment to his Western patrons: capitalism had not taken root in Zaire, and Mobutu's style of predatory dictatorship did not present a model of domestic governance that his patrons had reason to invest in once his strategic significance had fallen. Donors withdrew aid funding in the early 1990s and the World Bank declared Zaire bankrupt in 1994. What little great power presence was left in Zaire was exerted through the few extractive companies that could ride the disruption of Mobutu's rule, and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which worked largely with their own budget or project funding.

The end of the 1990s was an episode of territorial violation and unparalleled violence, as the invading forces of Rwanda and Uganda spearheaded the First Congo War to overturn Mobutu and, in the Second Congo War in 1998, established military and administrative control over the east and north of the country. The USA provided direct support to the first of these operations. During the Second Congo War, international outrage at the breach of sovereignty by Rwanda and Uganda was conspicuous in its absence, indicating acceptance, if not support, from Northern governments and international organizations. With bilateral assistance to the DRC suspended, aid budgets for, and trading relations with, Rwanda and Uganda demonstrated where Northern alliances in the region lay.

In 2001 the first Report of the Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth of the DRC was published, engaging with the emerging academic and policy debates on the economic functions of violence and the mechanisms of war economies. The report recorded widespread looting by the armies of Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi (and their allied militias) in the occupied areas in eastern DRC. The United Nations (UN) panel linked the extraction of resources to the extreme forms of violence, but censure for the aggressive behaviour was muted by the more vociferous admiration expressed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for the extraordinary post-conflict recovery and economic growth in Rwanda and Uganda.

### Re-engagement

A dramatic donor re-engagement with the DRC in the early 21st century signalled a shift in Northern perceptions of their priorities, including their security interests and their perceived risks in Africa. In the wake of the September 2001 attacks on New York and Washington, DC, USA, Northern-sponsored peace agreements were signed across the continent, bringing significant change to conflicts in Sierra Leone, Liberia, Angola, Sudan and the DRC. The donor push towards negotiated peace agreements indicated a preoccupation with the dangers of underdevelopment, including concerns about instability, illegal migration and trade. The DRC's crucial location in the centre of Africa meant that war there threatened not only to increase the perceived dangers to the North posed by poverty in the country, but to spark further violence in the region, endangering the forms of development that had taken place in Rwanda, Uganda and elsewhere.

The second aspect to the timing of the re-engagement of donors in the DRC was the challenge posed by heavy investment by Chinese companies, which increased through the first decade of the 21st century. This presence threatened the privileged access that the North had enjoyed to the territory's natural resources for the previous 400 years and presented the Congolese leadership with an alternative paradigm of development to the Northern-dominated version of neoliberalism that had been globally hegemonic since the end of the Cold War. The Northern re-engagement at the turn of the 21st century took the form of a development package that envisaged an economic, political and military transition from the fragmented war situation to a liberal democratic peace. Intense

donor pressure moved the belligerents from across the warring parties to sign the Global and All-Inclusive Agreement on the Transition of the Democratic Republic of Congo, finalized in April 2003.

Economic reforms were introduced in May 2001 before the end of the Second Congo War in 2003. They were introduced through Northern aid policy and were operationalized so rapidly that they were not accompanied by any political consultation in the DRC. Presented in policy as a push to drive development and security through the sale of mineral resources, the rapid liberalization of the mining sector instead became a fire sale that stripped the country of its assets. Following the signing of the peace agreement, the DRC entered a four-year phase of transition, guided by the International Committee to Accompany the Transition (CIAT), which acted as an international guarantor of the agreement and placed a steer on the Government, maintaining political momentum towards presidential elections. CIAT was a piece of political experimentation and was made up of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, the European Union (EU), the African Union (AU) and regional powers.

While Northern donors were preoccupied with building political institutions to support the liberalization, Chinese investment in the DRC increased, culminating in the US \$9,250m. 'Sicomines deal' in April 2008 for concessions in Katanga. This was an agreement between the DRC Government and a group of Chinese companies, and it included the stipulation that the companies would provide infrastructure financed by the mining sector, including roads, hospitals and universities. After European- and US-directed conditionality and imperceptible returns on half a century of development programming, Chinese companies brought to the DRC a pragmatic approach to negotiations and construction. The IMF raised concerns that the concessions sold in the Sicomines deal were so undervalued as to threaten the DRC's ability to service its debt.

A related dimension of the international involvement in the DRC is given by the size and nature of the UN Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC). It has been present in the country since July 1999, and from a small base, its mandate and budget has steadily increased. Doubling in size in the years after the peace was signed, MONUC's numbers rose to nearly 20,000 troops, the mandate was repeatedly extended and the force operated with the largest budget of any single-country operation. In July 2010 the force was rebranded as the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO); MONUSCO had a maximum authorized strength of 18,316 uniformed personnel in June 2020. Two major lines of criticism have been levelled against the UN force. The first is that its personnel have profited from mineral trading and have sexually abused women and girls in the areas in which its troops have been deployed. The second criticism is that it has failed to protect civilians in the eastern part of the country. Its dysfunction was dramatically displayed in November 2012 when MONUSCO troops failed to intervene while the insurgent March 23 (M23—a militia aligned with Rwandan interests in Nord- and Sud-Kivu provinces) group took the provincial town of Goma in Nord-Kivu.

### By Means Other Than War

The great powers have never had a formalized war with or in Congo. Slave trading and colonialism were framed in terms of the development of the country and stewardship of its population despite the catastrophic loss of life that they inflicted. When anti-colonial violence erupted in Kinshasa in January 1959, the Belgians moved to abandon Congo and withdrew within the year. Independence was achieved on 30 June 1960, but the Congo Crisis, which started with an army mutiny within days of independence, wracked the country for the next five years.

The Crisis was largely directed by Belgian elites and the CIA, which were seeking control of the mineral-rich province of Katanga in the south-east of the country. The conclusion to the Crisis—the installation of their ally Mobutu as President—was also orchestrated by the West. Mobutu established stability and subjected the population of the DRC/Zaire to 32 years

of violently oppressive rule. Mobutu was in turn violently ousted in the First Congo War (of 1996–97), which was supported by the USA. Laurent-Désiré Kabila assumed the presidency and ruled through the Second Congo War from 1998 until his violent death in 2001, when he was succeeded by his son Joseph, who oversaw peace agreements but imposed increasingly violent rule.

Despite the absence of declared warfare, the evident conflict of interests between the great powers and the DRC has been, and continues to be, mediated violently. The installation of four Vice-Presidents alongside President Joseph Kabila during the transition period after the Second Congo War maintained the priority on the use of force by rewarding elite belligerents for their violence. The transitional arrangement enabled these belligerents to pursue their economic and political ambitions through the legitimized channels of donor-funded institutions. The establishment of CIAT ensured the bureaucratic trajectory towards presidential elections, but was implicated in the use of force, as it was functionally dependent on overlooking both the violence that continued in the east of the country throughout the transition and the way in which it interacted with the political processes in the capital. The success of military politicians in Kinshasa can be attributed at least in part to the ongoing insecurity on the border with Rwanda, and in part to the shows of violence between the candidates, which demonstrated that politics was the preserve of those who used violence.

The suasion applied by donors through the transition did not establish political institutions that were commensurate with the tenets of neoliberalism. Instead, it constituted an interference with governance, and, as a result of the hurried and irregular sale of national assets, ownership of the DRC's resources was placed outside the country, compromising the Congolese state and rendering the population increasingly powerless. The continuous reiteration of a stewardship role reinforces the unequal power relations between the Congolese and the country's funders. As great powers confront each other for control of political and economic resources, the DRC remains in a subordinate position in the global hierarchy.

### POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

On account of the weight of foreign involvement in the DRC, the development of domestic politics has depended heavily on the interventions made by the great powers. From independence, jockeying between the USA and the USSR placed parameters on how politics would be conducted in Zaire. The involvement of the USA and Belgium in the political and military affairs of the DRC in the early years of independence placed the strategic interests of the West at the centre of the country's political configuration.

#### Centralization of Power

The political arrangement at independence led to Patrice Lumumba, leader of the Mouvement National Congolais, as Prime Minister and Joseph Kasavubu, of the Alliance des Bakongo, being elected by the Parliament as President. During the Congo Crisis Moïse Tshombe, backed by Belgian interests in Congo's wealth, headed a movement for the secession of Katanga, and the province of Kivu also threatened to secede. Mobutu, army Chief of Staff under Lumumba, attempted to quell the secessionists and a UN mission was launched. Frustrated by the weakness of this mission, Lumumba turned to the USSR for military assistance, thereby alarming the USA. In September 1960 President Kasavubu dismissed Lumumba, while Lumumba proposed the dismissal of Kasavubu and they both ordered Mobutu to arrest the other.

Mobutu dismissed the Soviet advisers and placed Lumumba under house arrest. (Lumumba was assassinated in Katanga in 1961 by a collaboration of Congolese, Belgian and US conspirators.) Tshombe was elected Prime Minister, but differences between him and Kasavubu led to political stalemate and Mobutu seized power again in November 1965, marking the start of the 'Second Republic'. He declared a state of emergency and centralized political power. Mobutu's ruling party, the Mouvement Populaire de la Révolution (MPR), was formed in 1966 and absorbed all political, legislative and judiciary institutions.

Mobutu was re-elected President in uncontested elections every seven years during the Cold War, and was backed by millions of dollars of aid from his Western patrons. Although Zaire experienced reasonable internal stability from 1965 onwards, there was no political or logistical expertise equal to governing a country of such magnitude and wealth. Mobutu's career was built on an increasingly flamboyant personality cult, which was the ultimate expression of patrimonial politics, the defining logic of his rule. He would address the nation as his children and appear on the television floating on clouds. His image was ubiquitous, including on clothing, and his name was venerated daily in songs sung in schools across the country.

A programme of 'Zairianization' was introduced in the early 1970s, involving a profound redistribution of industries and services, inspired largely by the African nationalism of the time. It was accompanied by the rhetoric of 'authenticity' that led to the renaming of many cities—and the renaming of the country as 'Zaire'—and the adoption of purportedly indigenous cultures. Zairianization aimed to bring foreign-owned companies under Zairian control and was conducted according to patrimonial politics. In a contorted way, the process was consonant with the ideology of the West at the time in that it promoted the state as the driver of development. Zairianization was, however, in economic and political terms a disaster for most of the population: there were gains for the President granted through cronyism, but the allocation of assets to unqualified managers contributed to Zaire's precipitous economic trajectory.

Two episodes of territorial violation from Angola, known as Shaba I and Shaba II, tested Mobutu's mettle as a political and military leader. Angolan guerrilla factions had formed along Congo's southern border, and in 1976 Mobutu moved to repatriate them in exchange for a group of Zairian exiles who had supported Tshombe and his bid for the secession of Katanga at independence. Mistrusting the deal, the Zairian exiles invaded Katanga (named Shaba at the time) in 1977. France airlifted in 1,500 Moroccan troops to assist Mobutu. Mobutu quashed the insurgency, but in punishing the collaborators in Katanga he sparked another. The following year, thousands of Katangans exiled in Angola crossed into Zaire and occupied the mining town of Kolwezi, resulting in further military operations and assistance from France, Belgium and the USA, as well as from China.

Throughout the Cold War the priority of the USA's interests played out through the extroverted lines of political and military accountability to Western patrons in return for aid. The significance of Mobutu's Cold War role is demonstrated by the extraordinary tolerance shown by the USA to his deviation from economic policy. This tolerance heaped costs on the Zairian population as the iterative rescheduling of debt contributed to the inflation that led to the devaluation of the currency. In their continued support of Mobutu, the Western patrons overlooked not only large-scale financial embezzlement, which persisted through the Structural Adjustment Programmes of the 1980s, but also the widespread use of violence against the population by the regime and its agents.

Mobutu announced the formation of the 'Third Republic' in April 1990, and announced his resignation as Chairman of the MPR. The end of the Cold War had brought new pressures on the President from his Western patrons to facilitate democratization. He opened a Sovereign National Conference with a view to initiating negotiations, but his refusal to step down prompted a boycott of the Conference by the coalition of the three main opposition parties, known as the Union Sacrée de l'Opposition Radicale and headed by Etienne Tshisekedi Wa Mulumba. Mobutu's political future relied on removing contenders to power and intimidating those who might hope to challenge him. In this way he held off the risk of losing power to a democratic process.

The political altercation between Mobutu and Tshisekedi in Kinshasa prompted major episodes of violence in Katanga in the early 1990s. Kasai was Tshisekedi's home province and Mobutu attacked him by exposing his political constituency to violence. An exclusive political discourse of 'Katanga for the Katangans' sanctioned violence against people deemed to have originated from Kasai (although many of the victims' families had lived for generations in Katanga). Some 10,000 people

were killed and three times as many died from hunger or exposure as they were forcefully displaced from mining towns in Katanga. This provincial-level conflict benefited Mobutu as it impoverished a previously powerful group and distracted attention from his abusive role in the process. It also set the precedent for large-scale unregulated violence against parts of the population deemed unworthy of protection by the state.

Increased Northern pressure brought the Conference back into play in 1992, and Mobutu appeared to cede to its decisions. The Conference elected Tshisekedi as Prime Minister in August, and he formed a Government comprising many high-profile opponents to Mobutu. In 1993 Tshisekedi and Laurent Monsengwo Pasinya, Archbishop of Kisangani, formed a rival government. This later became the Haut Conseil de la République—Parlement de Transition (HCR—PT, High Council of the Republic—Transitional Parliament), which succeeded the Sovereign National Conference, and threatened to impeach Mobutu. The HCR—PT assumed some of the presidential roles, including control over the central bank and security forces and nomination of senior civil servants, and it elected Léon Kengo Wa Dondo as Prime Minister. The transitional Government extended its tenure, amid increasingly violent protest in Kinshasa. Further trappings of transition followed, including the establishment of the Commission Electorale Indépendante and the adoption of a new Constitution in 1996.

### Militarization

The acrimony of the situation was intensified by the mounting insecurity in the east of the country. Following the genocide in Rwanda in 1994, the defeated Rwandan army and militia forces migrated to camps in eastern Zaire and prepared for an assault on Rwanda. The incoming Rwandan army mounted offensives on the camps, disbanding them and driving the residents back to Rwanda or further into the Zairian forest. As a result of these events, the ethnic politics central to the Rwandan genocide were transferred to Zaire and the exiled Hutu militias (known as Interahamwe) led campaigns against Zairian Tutsis, particularly the Sud-Kivu group of Banyamulenge. In late 1996 Mobutu revoked the citizenship of the Banyamulenge and ordered them to leave Zaire within a week; this demand was withdrawn, but the antagonism had been deepened. The Banyamulenge opened hostilities against the combined forces of the Zairian army, the former members of the Rwandan army and the Interahamwe militias.

Despite widespread discontent with the violence of dictatorship from the 1970s onwards, opposition to Mobutu failed to gain traction until a coalition of regional allies from Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi precipitated the First Congo War, tapping into the dynamics of the violence already under way between the Banyamulenge and the Rwandan exiles in Sud and Nord-Kivu. A coalition of loosely organized groups forged the Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Congo-Zaire (AFDL), under the leadership of Laurent-Désiré Kabila, who had been a ministerial aide to Patrice Lumumba and had been living for years in Tanzania. As the group gained ground in the east, it was backed by the armies of Rwanda and Uganda. Mobutu's health was failing and he had spent four months in Switzerland in 1996 receiving treatment for advanced prostate cancer. He returned in December 1996 to form a crisis Government, retaining Kengo Wa Dondo as Prime Minister. Tshisekedi's party, the Union pour la Démocratie et le Progrès Social (UDPS), was excluded and consequently forged a tactical alliance with the AFDL.

The AFDL subsequently took the key mining towns of Kisangani, Mbuji-Mayi and Lubumbashi. Kengo Wa Dondo was dismissed by the HCR—PT in March 1997, and Tshisekedi became Prime Minister, only to be dismissed himself when he dissolved the HCR—PT. Mobutu declared a state of emergency in April and deployed troops in Kinshasa amid failing peace talks with Kabila mediated by Nelson Mandela, then President of South Africa. The AFDL continued its march across the country; Mobutu left Zaire on 16 May and the AFDL troops took Kinshasa on the following day. Kabila, still in Lubumbashi, claimed the presidency and renamed the country the DRC. He did not, however, hold elections, and he banned political

parties and public demonstrations. Kabila took control of legislative and executive power, the army and the treasury.

The greatest political challenge for Kabila was his relationship with Rwanda, the country that had backed his ascent to power. One year after coming to office, and under pressure from the population, he expelled all Rwandans from senior Congolese military positions. It was a move that ruptured the coalition that had made up the AFDL and it prompted the Second Congo War, which was launched in August 1998. In an attempt to take the capital, Rwanda flew troops to Matadi on the Atlantic coast and cut the power supply from the hydroelectric dam at Inga. This plunged Kinshasa into disarray and the Rwandan army mounted a ground attack. Kabila was saved by the military intervention of Zimbabwe and Namibia, and later Angola. Beaten back, Rwanda revised its ambitions and concentrated its military efforts on the east, extending as far as Kisangani, where it clashed with the Ugandan army in 2000 and 2002, inflicting heavy casualties on the civilian population and destroying the physical infrastructure of the town.

The occupation of one-half of the DRC by Uganda and Rwanda and the involvement of nearly all neighbouring countries in the fighting established the Second Congo War's reputation as Africa's First World War. The population suffered attacks from military and militia forces, total disruption of already severely depleted public services and trade, and long-term destitution as the invading armies pillaged the resources in the areas under occupation. Violence, exposure and lack of access to health facilities and markets led to extremely high mortality rates, particularly in the east of the country, with an estimated 1m. deaths occurring each year as a result of the war.

Some four years after becoming President, on 16 January 2001 Laurent Kabila was shot dead by one of his bodyguards in his office. The assassin was killed at the scene and the inquiry into Kabila's death was long and politically inflected. In a handover that was swift and guarded, the presidency passed to his son, Joseph Kabila, who was politically unknown and militarily untested.

Joseph Kabila inherited a war that was waged predominantly through a network of militia forces, reflecting the highly informalized economic and political structures in the DRC. Rwanda backed the Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie (RCD), which was based in the Kivus, in the towns of Goma (principally), and Bukavu and Uvira. Uganda operated through the Mouvement de Libération du Congo (MLC), which occupied much of the north of the country. The former Rwandan regime and Interahamwe militias regrouped under various titles through the war, settling on the Forces Démocratiques de Libération du Rwanda (FDLR) in 2000. The Congolese state, unable to extend military operations to the border, abandoned the areas under foreign control and sporadically provisioned militias, known as Mai-Mai, to mount defences at the village level.

### Transition and Elections

The Lusaka Accords (aimed at bringing an end to the Second Congo War) that were signed in July–August 1999 by the regional parties to the conflict, but not by the militia groups, were not implemented. On assuming power in 2001 Joseph Kabila reinstituted negotiations, and the inter-Congolese national dialogue, which had stalled under his father, was reopened in South Africa's Sun City in early 2002. A bilateral agreement between Kabila and the Rwandan President, Paul Kagame, in July led to the formal withdrawal of Rwandan troops, although the process was incomplete and Rwanda continued to operate through the RCD.

The agreement that brought a formal end of the Second Congo War framed the violence largely as a civil war, which involved accepting the legitimacy of all parties as pretenders to Congolese power. This position was institutionalized in the formation of the transitional Government, a coalition comprising a President and four Vice-Presidents. Kabila remained in the former post and was joined by Vice-Presidents drawn from belligerents in the war and opposition groups: Azarias Ruberwa (of the RCD), Jean-Pierre Bemba (MLC), Abdoulaye Yerodia Ndombasi (Parti du Peuple pour la Reconstruction et

la Démocratie—PPRD, the President's party) and Arthur Z'ahidi Ngoma (previously of the RCD).

The members of the transitional Government were confronted with perverse incentives: with a small chance of any of the Vice-Presidents winning a presidential election, they were faced with a limited time in office and practically unlimited access to revenue. Some US \$10,000m. of donor funding was poured into the DRC as donors rushed through the transition with little oversight of spending. The resulting looting of aid money by the members of the transitional Government allowed each member to answer his economic concerns, and the accompanying liberalization process resulted in the opportunity for elite politicians to sign off on concessions deals that granted them lucrative illicit rewards.

The transition period that followed the signing of the peace agreement witnessed increased violence in some areas, particularly in the east. The province of Ituri, created in 1999 by James Kazini, the Ugandan commander in the DRC, had been the site of massacres since its inception. The violence was arrayed predominantly around the dynamic of the conflict between the Ugandan army and the RCD-Kisangani, a faction led by Ernest Wamba dia Wamba. The province witnessed escalating fighting when the Ugandan troops withdrew, opening space for violent contestation between militias. Opposing militia groups crystallized the ethnic differences between Lendu and Hema, aggravated by unequal land rights and the heightened militarization across the east of the country. In June 2003 a French-led intervention, Operation Artemis, stabilized the provincial town of Bunia, but fighting continued in the surrounding areas. By 2005 violence in Ituri had led to around 60,000 casualties, and some 500,000 people had been displaced.

The country's first democratic presidential and legislative elections in over 40 years took place on 30 July 2006, supported by donor aid of at least US \$540m. The two leading candidates for office, Kabila and Bemba, dominated the campaign politically and militarily. The first round of the presidential elections were inconclusive, with Kabila gaining 44.8% of the vote against Bemba's 20.0% but failing to gain the requisite 50%. A run-off was held on 29 October, and Kabila's victory (with 58.1% of the votes cast) was confirmed on 15 November 2006; he was sworn in the following month.

The continuing violence in the east of the country contrasted with the apparent political transition in the capital, but clashes between the forces of Kabila and Bemba in Kinshasa in August 2006, when the results of the first round of the presidential election were announced, indicated the primacy of violence as a political tool across the country. Kabila and Bemba's forces clashed again in March 2007, when Bemba's forces missed the deadline for integration into the Congolese army. Accused of high treason, and in danger of being stripped of his senatorial immunity, Bemba travelled to Portugal for medical treatment. He was arrested in May 2008 following the issuing of a warrant by the International Criminal Court (ICC), in The Hague, Netherlands. Rather than being prosecuted for violence committed in the DRC, which would have drawn attention to other high-ranking politicians in the country, Bemba was accused of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in the Central African Republic (CAR) in 2002 and 2003, when he was involved in operations to suppress a coup attempt against then President Ange-Félix Patassé. The ICC sentenced Bemba to 18 years in prison in 2016, for commanding troops who had committed crimes including murder, rape and pillaging.

Kabila's first term as elected President was shaped by a variable relationship with Rwanda. Laurent Nkunda, who fought in the RCD during the Second Congo War and had been integrated through demobilization into the Congolese army, broke ranks and opened insurgent hostilities in the Kivus in 2007. He claimed that his group, the Congrès National pour la Défense du Peuple (CNDP), was defending Tutsi groups in the Kivus against the FDLR, the force regrouped from the Rwandan militia exiles who had migrated to the DRC in 1994. Intense fighting took place in Nord-Kivu in 2008, with high civilian casualties. In January 2009 Nkunda was placed under house arrest in the Rwandan town of Gisenyi, and a degree of rapprochement between the Rwandan and DRC Governments was achieved two months later, although

elements of the CNDP re-formed as the Mouvement du 23 Mars (M23) at around the same time.

The rapprochement, such as it was, was demonstrated in a joint operation in January 2009 between the DRC and Rwandan armies and the UN forces to counter the FDLR. The FDLR was the largest militia force still in the Kivu area and the operation was dubbed 'Umoja Wetu' or 'Our Unity' in recognition of the collaboration between the DRC and Rwanda. It was followed by a second attempt, named 'Kimia II', meaning 'peace', an operation that was led by the DRC army with MONUC backing. The offensives made marginal impact on the force and led to heavy civilian casualties as the FDLR mounted reprisal attacks. The moves to demobilize the FDLR did not address the incompatibility between the Rwandan and Congolese interests in eastern DRC, with the outcome that the FDLR continued to recruit among discontents and prey on civilian populations who were not protected by the state.

The presidential election of 28–29 November 2011 pitted Kabila against Etienne Tshisekedi, who had led the opposition to Mobutu since the early 1980s. Kabila's campaign benefited from the resources available to the President's office, and Tshisekedi's was further weakened by the fact that he was out of the country and receiving medical treatment until two weeks before polling day. On his return, his rallies were shut down and his supporters were intimidated. Provisional presidential results released by the Commission Electorale Nationale Indépendante (CENI, which had replaced the Commission Electorale Indépendante in 2010) gave Kabila a clear victory, with 49.0% of the votes cast, but Tshisekedi, who secured 32.3% of the ballot, rejected the outcome of the election and proclaimed himself the winner. The polls were criticized by an EU observer mission and by many NGOs for a range of malpractices and the EU mission published its report in March 2012, contending that the results of the elections were 'not credible' due to the high level of 'irregularities and fraud'.

A Peace, Security and Co-operation Framework was signed by 11 countries in the region in early 2013, including all nine of the DRC's neighbours. Later in that year the Force Intervention Brigade (FIB), a regional effort led by South Africa, defeated the M23 militia. This ameliorated the security situation in the region more generally, as the decisive action indicated that the political tide had turned against Rwanda. A government of national unity was named by Kabila in December 2014, with Augustin Matata Ponyo (appointed in 2012) remaining as Prime Minister. Street protests began in early 2015 in response to the National Assembly's rapid adoption of electoral legislation requiring that a national census be conducted prior to the next elections (thereby providing for a lengthy delay in the organization of the polls and enabling Kabila to extend his mandate). With elections slated for November 2016, Moïse Katumbi, a credible opposition candidate, was charged in May 2016 with hiring foreign mercenaries and left the country on medical grounds. The election date was subject to 'slippage' as a National Dialogue, established to break the political stalemate, faltered.

The political machinery of the DRC pitted the interests of the leadership against those of the population. The antagonism of this relationship was multiplied by the fact that the elite cadres were not required to create or shape political space or attend to the needs of the population, and instead took advantage of the profits available for self-aggrandisement. The release of the Panama Papers in April 2016 implicated members of the elite in concessions sales that stripped the DRC of control over its mineral assets and provided individual politicians with lucrative returns on the deals made. In the light of these publications, and concerns about the nature of Kabila's presidential power, international pressure, including the imposition of targeted sanctions by the EU in May 2017 and by the USA in June, was brought to bear on Kabila and other senior officials to host elections.

Questions concerning the logistics and desirability of organizing polls dominated Congolese domestic politics and international relations, as reports of more than 1,000 extrajudicial killings signalled widespread oppression in 2017. The announcement by the President of the CENI in July of that year that it would not be possible to hold elections before the end of the year, owing to the continuing violence in Kasai,

prompted the UDPS to call for a campaign of civil disobedience. In November the CENI finally announced that presidential and legislative elections would take place on 23 December 2018, although they were ultimately pushed back to 30 December. In the month following the announcement of the polling date, 14 Tanzanian UN peacekeepers were killed in an attack on a military base in Nord-Kivu, and 44 others were injured. Extreme and routine violence hampered electoral preparations and contributed to an atmosphere in which it was unclear whether Kabila would stand for re-election as President, or indeed whether the elections would take place at all. An outbreak of Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) in the western province of Equateur in April 2018 compounded the sense of insecurity and unease among the population.

The possibility of change in the political landscape increased in June 2018 when the Appeals Chamber of the ICC overturned the 2016 conviction of Bemba for committing war crimes in the CAR, ruling that he could not be held responsible for the actions of his soldiers. In July 2018 the MLC nominated Bemba as the party's candidate in the upcoming presidential election. Bemba enjoyed considerable popularity as a long-term challenger to Kabila, but his candidacy was blocked by the CENI, and he gave his political support to Martin Fayulu Madidi. Fayulu, a newcomer to high-profile national politics, was a businessman favoured by a group known as Lamuka—an alliance of seven opposition parties that forged a strategic agreement in Geneva, Switzerland, in November under the auspices of the Kofi Annan Foundation.

The presidential elections were held on 30 December 2018 and, on the surface, the first peaceful transfer of power in the history of the DRC took place, from Joseph Kabila to Félix Tshisekedi, the son of former prime minister Etienne Tshisekedi. The provisional results, which were released on 10 January 2019, credited Félix Tshisekedi with 38.5% of the valid votes cast, followed by Fayulu with 34.7% and Emmanuel Ramazani Shadary 23.8%; however, the results were disputed by leaked data from the CENI and the Catholic Church, which suggested that Fayulu had gained some 60% of the vote. Fayulu appealed for a recount of votes, while declaring himself to be the legitimate President and urging nationwide protests. On 20 January the Constitutional Court upheld the result, and Tshisekedi was sworn in on 24 January. The former presidential majority, the Front Commun pour le Congo, led by Kabila, fared well in the parliamentary and provincial assembly elections that accompanied the presidential voting, retaining control of the National Assembly and strategic power over the naming of regional governors.

The threat of widespread violence muted regional and international discontent with the election process and the initial demand of the Southern African Development Community for a recount of the votes was eventually abandoned. Tshisekedi's victory was widely attributed to a deal between him and Kabila to obstruct the political progress of Fayulu; Tshisekedi invested in winning over Kabila's support in elite circles and in February 2021 appointed Jean-Michel Sama Lukonde as Prime Minister, a move that demonstrated considerable political independence from his predecessor.

In Nord-Kivu and Ituri provinces the death toll from a further outbreak of EVD that started in August 2018 passed 1,000 fatalities in May 2019. International technical responses to the disease were hampered by the generalized violence in the provinces and by targeted attacks that destroyed NGO-administered medical facilities. Mistrust between the affected parts of the population and international organizations operating in the area meant that the outbreak ran until June 2020. The elections and the EVD outbreak in eastern DRC were both characterized by politics that reproduced the *status quo ante*, but also showed signs of a rejection of the established order, albeit from a position of relative powerlessness on the part of the electorate. The population's engagement—and subsequent disappointment—with the electoral process has parallels in the underlying lack of confidence in national and international politics that has undermined attempts to control the EVD outbreak. Inequalities in the processes of negotiating representation and systems of protection have resulted in outcomes that impose further burdens on an already beleaguered population.

## RESISTANCE AND RESPONSE

People in the DRC have been victims of extreme violence and manipulative destitution since the start of European control over the country. Through Mobutu's rule, the combination of his charismatic rhetoric of nationalism, alongside a routinization of state violence, disciplined the country to celebrate the nation, despite the fact that the population had practically no experience of what statehood or citizenship involved. Recent history has brought further costs for the Congolese population, who have been re-taught that politics, now in the form of Northern-sponsored democratization, is a violent process of political and economic exclusion.

The means that citizens have to resist abusive power have been constrained by decades of violence and destitution. In the years leading up to independence, there was a semblance of political debate, albeit taking place mostly among the small educated class, but this was halted when Mobutu banned political parties in 1966. During the 1980s some political opposition started to mount in the domain of formal politics. In 1982 the UDPS was formed, led by Etienne Tshisekedi, and the coalition Front Congolais pour le Rétablissement de la Démocratie, with Jean Nguza Karl-I-Bond at its head. However, Mobutu did not tolerate opposition, and throughout that decade the challenge to his rule was muted.

In the early 1990s there was another brief flirtation with the possibility of opposition parties, when Northern pressure pushed Mobutu towards multi-party democracy. This, too, was short-lived, as the strikes and demonstrations of the early 1990s were met with state violence, driving resistance into more meek or disorganized positions. The institutional strength that had provided a stage for organization was broken when the Catholic Church ceased to rally its considerable membership against the Government. In addition, the mass unemployment and normalized non-payment of salaries meant that the workforce had little leverage in industrial disputes. The intensifying crisis that unfolded with extreme economic deprivation compelled people to find ways of responding that minimized contact with the state and were founded on pursuing basic requirements for survival.

### Informalization

Mobutu's ban on political parties placed parameters on resistance in Zaire. With very limited official avenues to challenge Mobutu's rule or hold the leadership to account, and with little national physical or political infrastructure, resistance and response took place in localized ways that deployed a blend of patrimonialism and mutuality. Taking the cue from Mobutu's system of governance, vertical systems of power organized around regional or ethnic lines, and commanded resource distribution through mechanisms of favours and threats. Alongside this patrimonial system, a level of protection was gained by membership of co-operatives that were forged through mechanisms of reciprocity and collectivity.

As Mobutu retreated into his palace at Gbadolité in the north-west of the country in the 1980s, people increasingly relied on the informal economy to avoid the state's aggressive taxation. Abandoned or abused by the state, and with no access to formally legitimate resources or markets, the economy operated largely by smuggling along trade routes that linked agricultural produce and mineral resources into regional and international sales. The economic responses had ramifications for the way that people organized to provide social services and form political constituencies, and the population depleted the state's political power and legitimacy by depriving it of revenue. Mobutu's charismatic power waned as the evasion practised by the population prompted him to operate increasingly through violent force, meted out by the police and army. The lack of social or political contract meant that the population turned away from the state for protection and support. As central service provision failed, hospitals, schools and clinics became informalized and managed through pooled funds and haphazard privatization.

Political voice was largely disorientated by violence, and found disparate and often disastrous channels for expression. A series of pillages, led by the army but involving civilian participation, swept the country in the early 1990s, destroying what remained of the industrial, commercial and agricultural

infrastructure in all major towns except Bukavu. The violence was widely held to have been orchestrated by the President, but also gave vent to a show of popular dissatisfaction with Mobutu. The pillages were counterproductive in leading to the destruction of stock and physical infrastructure, as well as considerable loss of life. Mobutu imposed no sanction on the pillagers and made no reinvestment: the country's economy was left in tatters and the population lived with the consequences of the damage. In addition, pillage entered the canon of political negotiation and became routine as a popular demonstration of dissatisfaction.

### Mobilization

The violence of the pillages of the early 1990s signalled another form of informalization: the decentralized use of violence. A mass exposure of the state's lack of control over the monopoly of violence came in the First Congo War, when thousands of fighters were mobilized spontaneously, many of them teenagers. As Laurent-Désiré Kabila's AFDL marched across the country, the Zairian army was routed, and resentment at the abusive rule of Mobutu facilitated recruitment and support for the movement from the destitute and frustrated population. On reaching Kinshasa, Kabila's rule was not democratic, but it was populist. His legalization of artisanal mining demonstrated the symbiosis between the informalization and his rule, stemming largely from his inability to exert political authority.

The Second Congo War augmented further the population's reliance on informal structures and became more disruptive as people were faced with increased violence and reduced assets and options. Large-scale migration from the countryside, particularly in the east of the DRC where the fighting was most intense, to cities, reformulated the demographic profile. The migration placed further stress on already dilapidated infrastructure in towns and reduced the agricultural activity of rural areas. Kinshasa doubled in size, but there was no increased service provision. Lacking physical or political infrastructure, people lived in an enormously expanded and unplanned city, organizing locally and subdividing what remained of the colonial era electricity and water supply works.

Informal military activity was revitalized by the occupation by Rwanda and Uganda, and armed mobilization became widespread. Throughout eastern DRC, vigilante groups formed to protect civilians from the predations of the invading armies and other militias. The largest set of groups was the Mai-Mai, who fought in a fluid network of allegiances as the fortunes of the war changed, sometimes supported by the Government and other times engaging the army. As the fragmented interest groups in the eastern parts of the country became increasingly militarized, opportunities from the use of violence escalated and the war was conducted through attacks on civilian populations and through multiplying local battles over territory and mining.

A Global Plan for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration was introduced by the DRC Government in June 2014, but around 70 armed groups remained operational in the east, including the FDLR, which missed its deadline to disarm in January 2015, despite an ICC arrest warrant having been issued for its leader Lt-Gen Sylvestre Mudacumara in July 2012. The Government's Stabilization and Reconstruction Programme for War Affected Areas, worked alongside the FIB and the donor-funded International Security and Stabilization Support Strategy, implemented from 2013 to 2017. Violence increased in central Kasai Central in July 2016 when security forces killed the leader of the militia group Kamwina Nsapu. In this new theatre of fighting several hundred people were killed and around 1m. displaced; 40 mass graves have been identified. Rural and urban violence increased elsewhere in 2017 and 2018, including in the Kivus, in Kinshasa and in Tanganyika province. The FDLR remained active after Mudacumara's death in 2019, killing 12 Virunga Park Rangers in 2020 and the Italian Ambassador to the DRC in February 2021.

### Tactical Choices

Violence places narrow parameters on the options available to the Congolese population in the face of insurmountable power,

but the tactical choices that people take under constrained conditions indicate where priorities lie. The determination to organize locally to generate some form of service provision demonstrates the will to bring order and meaning to violently disordered and discounted lives. The informalized nature of political and social behaviour provides people with the means of survival, but it is a form of development that is at odds with the ideology and implementation of the neoliberal state-building promoted by Northern donors in the DRC. The contradiction has been played out through disease control in recent years. A measles epidemic claimed over 6,000 lives, mainly of young children, at the end of 2019. As the EVD epidemic subsided after two years, being declared over in November 2020, the first cases of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) were detected in the DRC in March 2020, rising to 9,500 cases by mid-August, and causing over 200 deaths. Community responses have been crucial to disease control, as local efforts have been put to identifying and isolating patients. As with other informalized activities, the efforts at community level, though, are stymied by lack of public investment in services as basic as providing water to health facilities, and ultimately undercut by a critical lack of health infrastructure, including sufficient trained personnel and credible public health information. In the context of COVID-19, reluctance to take the vaccination was combined with the logistical challenges of physical access. By August 2021 only 0.1% of the population had been vaccinated and the recorded deaths from the virus stood at just over 1,000.

Contemporary post-conflict development processes reserve strong and specific roles for the state, and institution-building is held by donors to be the fabric of emergent political arrangements. The elite provide a focal point for aid and negotiations, but in the DRC their abusive role, despite changes in personnel, indicates that a tension between the security of an elite group and that of the population remains. The population's responses to violent power demonstrate their distrust of the formal political processes and institutions, and their attempts to create development alternatives. During the latest round of political bargaining, activist groups such as *Lutte pour le Changement* (LUCHA—Struggle for Change) and *Il est temps* (It is time) have been gaining prominence among the youth and operating effectively through social media. Despite facing state repression, their popularity demonstrates the significance to Congolese people of a form of social and political action that is not linked to the formal state and established party politics. Increased pressure from LUCHA and the Catholic Church during the 2018 presidential elections meant that, even if the outcome was not in their political favour, they placed constraints on the political manipulation of the elite.

There are two implications of the divergence of agenda between that promoted by donors and that pursued by the population: the first is that people's life chances in the DRC are not being enhanced by the forms of development that are promoted, as the political institutions systematically exclude the majority of the population. The second implication is that the political institutions are in turn compromised by their failure to include the population. Whatever the apparent successes of the interventions, the everyday reality of informal networks of economic and political survival deny the legitimacy and authority of state power and the sponsorship it receives, just as they did in the time of Mobutu's rule.

### CONCLUSIONS: A PERFECT STORM

The preceding account exposes two threads around which the DRC's contemporary history is twined. One is the continuity of violent power. This continuity over time shapes both the forms of politics that take place and the disorientated responses that are made by the population. The second thread is the extraction of resources for international consumption. The close interaction between these two phenomena is evident in incidents such as the collapse of a gold mine in Kamituga in September 2020, which killed 50 miners. The investigation of whom the violent power and extraction profit and whom they disempower, is central to understanding the political history of the country. The interplay of these two elements has been mediated through the regional political elites who have aligned

their own interests and power to the opportunities available. It also conditions the response of the population, and has frequently led to their involvement in their own destruction through pillage or militarization.

The combination of foreign, regional and domestic interests and power has resulted in a perfect storm that is exceptionally violent. Foreign powers have never compromised their interests in the DRC and have persistently exerted dominance despite changes in the political situation. The slave trade led directly to colonialism, which led directly to the era of clientalist development programming. Although the configurations of extraction have altered, and the end of slavery and colonialism are important moments in human history, the continuities are also significant. Control over the DRC's political and economic systems is of strategic significance internationally: the violence committed in the country is interlinked with great power rivalry and the DRC remains the site for a struggle for economic supremacy and political hegemony.

In assessing the processes of development, it is imperative to note that the current configuration of violence and destitution takes place in a country that is nominally at peace and progressing economically. By accepting the divergence of the perspectives of the powerful and the disenfranchised, the often self-defeating efforts of resistance and response of the Congolese population become comprehensible. The formal layer of politics—the interface between the DRC and the rest of the

world—is not the arena in which development can be promoted according to a standard template. Instead, it is characterized by perverse incentives that nurture opportunism in the decisions taken by elite groups and irresponsibility towards the population. Disorientated by the outcome and the layers of direct and structural violence that it imposes, the population finds itself unable to organize either physically, for lack of resources, or politically, for lack of a united set of needs or agenda, or a steer on how its history or future is described.

Much of the contemporary analysis and policy work on the DRC focuses on a version of events that is both state-centric and static. The DRC's history has demonstrated that the nature and function of the state is determined by a set of relationships between the leadership, population and foreign funders that are partially renegotiated by changes of personnel. The work on resources as the driver of development, similarly, conceptualizes the vastness of the resources as a calculable 'solution' to the poverty. The evidence is that resources are not of inherent significance, but are extracted and traded within shifting power relations that affix value and risk. Given the violence that has characterized the state and the extraction of resources, it is the nature of these two sets of relationships that determines how they are connected and the disorientating effect they have on the long-suffering population of the DRC.