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Disclaimer:

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Abstract

CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND THE ROLE OF LOCAL RELIGIOUS LEADERS IN THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

Mathias Humenberger

Conflict in the CAR has been ongoing for years, despite the constant engagement of the international community and various concluded peace agreements. The recent crisis started as a political conflict with General Michel Djotodia taking over power in 2013 and turned into an ethnic and religious conflict between the mainly Muslim Séléka rebel groups and the predominantly Christian anti-balaka militias. However, religion, as often misunderstood, was not the original source of the CAR conflict but became one of several main drivers during the 2013-2015 crisis. This and other misunderstandings of the situation have been reflected in the failure of numerous international peacebuilding efforts. Not less than twelve peace agreements have been signed between conflicting parties in the last ten years, but most of them were only partially implemented, which has made national reconciliation impossible. New waves of sectarian violence erupted in 2016, 2017, and 2018, and community conflicts in the CAR are still ongoing. Past peacebuilding efforts failed due to a lack of commitment by and confidence in the CAR government as well as the deficient inclusivity of armed group members which would be necessary to stop the cycle of violence. Hence, peacebuilding efforts should focus more on including middle-range and grassroots leaders to promote peace and create social cohesion at the community level. A case study, analysing the effects of local religious community leaders in making peace and ensuring reconciliation supplies useful policy recommendations on how to diversify and improve future peacebuilding initiatives.

Key words: conflict resolution, peacebuilding, Central African Republic, CAR, religious leaders.

Main Findings:

This thesis came to the result that the reasons for the current CAR conflict lie in a combination of national and international factors. As such, constant political instability, group polarizations of ethnic and religious identity groups in combination with the low level of education, poverty, and the resource curse which allowed the funding of rebel groups, constitute the historical roots and current drivers of conflict in the CAR. In addition, the constant international interference and regional instability caused by the CAR's neighbouring provinces hindered successful conflict resolution in the past.

Furthermore, the analysis of past peacebuilding efforts revealed several weaknesses that should be prevented in the future. Security capacity in form of the Central African Armed Forces must be strengthened, international mediation efforts need to be better coordinated, and, most importantly, future peace initiatives need to involve more actors than the CAR government and the main rebel groups in order to diversify the peacebuilding process.

Due to their large influence and trust of the population, religious leaders have a large potential in peacebuilding and can thus contribute to a diversification of the peacebuilding process. First, they can help to increase the population's sensitization on intercommunal coexistence and to create ownership to strengthen the bottom-up peace process. Secondly, religious leaders can participate and promote top-down peacebuilding initiatives which involve the national government. Thirdly, religious leaders can take advantage of their better access to armed groups to plead for ceasefires and surrender of weapons. Fourthly, religious leaders can constitute an unbiased, reliable source of information for the national government, international actors, and local media.

KONFLIKTLÖSUNG UND DIE ROLLE LOKALER RELIGIÖSER FÜHRER IN DER ZENTRALAFRIKANISCHEN REPUBLIK

Mathias Humenberger

Trotz jahrelangem Engagement der internationalen Gemeinschaft und mehrerer Friedensabkommen beherrschen Konflikte die Zentralafrikanische Republik. Die jüngste Krise begann mit der Machtübernahme von General Michel Djotodia im Jahr 2013. Der Übergangsregierung nach dessen Machtenthebung 2014 gelang es seither nicht, ein Ende der Kämpfe zwischen den einzelnen Konfliktparteien und Rebellengruppen herbeizuführen. Obwohl ursprünglich nicht religiös motiviert, wurde der politische Machtkampf in der Krise zwischen 2013 und 2015 zu einem ethnisch religiösen Konflikt zwischen überwiegend muslimischen Séléka-Rebellengruppen und mehrheitlich christlichen Milizen, den Anti-Balaka. Nicht weniger als zwölf Friedensabkommen wurden in den letzten zehn Jahren von den Konfliktparteien unterzeichnet. Diese wurden von der Regierung und den Rebellengruppen jedoch nur teilweise eingehalten, wodurch eine nationale Wiederversöhnung unmöglich gemacht wurde. In den Jahren 2016, 2017 und 2018 kam es zu neuen Wellen konfessioneller Gewalt und die Konflikte dauern weiter an. Internationale Friedensbemühungen scheiterten bisher am mangelnden Vertrauen, politischem Kalkül, fehlender Inklusivität und zu wenig Engagement seitens der zentralafrikanischen Regierung. Zukünftige Friedenskonsolidierungsmaßnahmen müssten sich stärker auf die Einbindung lokaler, nichtstaatlicher Akteure konzentrieren, auf diese Weise sozialen Zusammenhalt stärken um weitere Friedensbemühungen zum Erfolg zu führen. Eine Fallstudie, die die Auswirkungen der Einflussnahme lokaler religiöser Führer auf Frieden und Wiederversöhnung analysiert, liefert Empfehlungen zur Vervielfältigung und Verbesserung zukünftiger Friedensbildungsinitiativen.

Schlagwörter: Konfliktlösung, Friedensförderung, Zentralafrikanische Republik, ZAR, Religiöse Führer.

Pledge of Honesty

On my honour as a student of the Diplomatic Academy of Vienna, I submit this work in good faith and pledge that I have neither given nor received unauthorized assistance on it.

Vienna, 17 September 2018



Table of contents

Acknowledgments	ii
Abstract	iii
List of Illustrations	vii
List of Abbreviations.....	viii
Map of the Central African Republic	x
Introduction.....	1
Methodology	3
1. History of the CAR from Independence to Recent Conflicts.....	4
1.1. Military Coups and Political Power Struggles in the Post-Colonial CAR.....	4
1.2. Intensifying Ethnic Cleavages under the Regimes of Kolingba and Patassé	8
1.3. First International Peacekeeping Missions and Regional Interference.....	11
1.4. The 2013-2015 Crisis: The Incitement of Religious-Based Violence	14
1.5. Post-Crisis but not Post-Conflict Situation	17
2. Roots and Drivers of Current Conflicts.....	22
2.1. National Factors: Political Instability and the Lack of Rule of Law	22
2.2. Ethnic Diversity, Educational Gaps, and Group Polarizations	23
2.3. The Instrumentalization and Amalgamation of Religion.....	28
2.4. Natural Resources, Economic Underdevelopment, and the Militia Problem	31
2.5. International Factors: Geopolitical Interests and Regional Dynamics	35
3. The Weaknesses of Past Peacebuilding Efforts.....	39
3.1. The Short-Lived Impact of Foreign Peacekeeping Missions.....	39
3.2. Mistakes in Mediation Between the Government and Armed Groups	42
3.3. Gaps in the Implementation of Peace Agreements	47
3.4. Lack of Financial Resources, Confidence in, and Commitment by the Government	49

4. The Impact of Local Religious Leaders in Peacebuilding.....	53
4.1. The Role of Local Religious Leaders during the Crisis	53
4.2. Trust, Proximity, and Influence: The Large Potential of Religious Leaders	55
4.3. The Impact of Intercommunity and Interreligious Dialogue Initiatives	58
4.4. Possibilities to Further Involve Religious Leaders in the Peacebuilding Process	59
Conclusion	63
Appendices	65
A. Bibliography.....	65
<i>Academic Sources.....</i>	65
<i>Newspaper Articles and Online Sources</i>	67
<i>Primary Sources: Peace Agreements, Action Plans, and UN Security Council Resolutions</i>	69
<i>List of Conducted Interviews</i>	70
B. Interview Questionnaire.....	71

List of Illustrations

Tables

Table 1	List of Coup d'États in the CAR, 1959-2013	5
Table 2	Central African Republic Heads of State, 1960-2018	7
Table 3	Main Actors in the 2013-2015 Crisis	16
Table 4	List of Ethnic Groups in the CAR	24
Table 5	French Participation in Military Operations in the CAR, 1979-2018	36
Table 6	List of Peace Agreements Signed in the CAR between 2007 and 2017	44

Figures

Figure 1	Geo-ethnic Map of the Central African Republic, 2012	9
Figure 2	Religious Regional Diversity in 2012 and Estimated Current Composition	29
Figure 3	Map of Armed Groups' Zones of Influence in 2015	34
Figure 4	The Weaknesses of Past Peacebuilding Efforts	52
Figure 5	Involving Local Religious Leaders in the Peacebuilding Process	62

List of Abbreviations

AFP	Agence France-Presse (French Press Agency)
APRD	L'Armée populaire pour la Restauration de la Démocratie (Army for the Restoration of the Republic and Democracy)
AU	African Union
BONUCA	Bureau des Nations Unies pour la Consolidation de la Paix en République Centrafricaine (United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office in the Central African Republic)
CAR	Central African Republic
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration
DDRR	Disarmament, Demobilisation, Reinsertion, and Repatriation
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
ECCAS	Economic Community of Central African States
EU	European Union
EUFOR	European Union Force
EUTM-RCA	European Union Training Mission in the Central African Republic
EWS	Early Warning System
ICC	International Criminal Court
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
FACA	Forces armées centrafricaines (Central African Armed Forces)
FDPC	Front Démocratique du Peuple Centrafricain (Democratic Front for the Central African People)
FOMUC	Force Multinationale en Centrafrique (Multinational Forces in CAR)
FPRC	Front populaire pour la renaissance de la Centrafrique (The Popular Front for the Rebirth of the Central African Republic)
KAICIID	King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (also 'KAICIID Dialogue Center')
LPC	Local Peace Committee
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
MICOPAX	Mission de consolidation de la paix en Centrafrique (Mission for the Consolidation of Peace in the Central African Republic)

MISCA	Mission internationale de soutien à la Centrafrique sous conduite africaine (African-led International Support Mission to the Central African Republic)
MINURCA	Mission des Nations Unies en République Centrafricaine (United Nations Mission for the Central African Republic)
MINUSCA	Mission multidimensionnelle intégrée des Nations unies pour la stabilisation en Centrafrique (United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic)
MISAB	Mission Interafricaine de Surveillance des Accords de Bangui (Inter-African Mission to Monitor the Bangui Accords)
MLC	Mouvement de Libération du Congo (Movement for the Liberation of the Congo)
MLPC	Mouvement pour la Libération du Peuple Centrafricain (Movement for the Liberation of the Central African People)
MPC	Mouvement patriotique pour la Centrafrique (Central African Patriotic movement)
NGO	Non-governmental organization
PCRC	Plateforme des Confessions Religieuses de Centrafrique (Platform of Religious Confessions of the Central African Republic)
SC	UN Security Council
SCC	Special Criminal Court
TNC	Transitional National Council
UFDR	Union des Forces Démocratiques pour le Rassemblement (Union of Democratic Forces for Unity)
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UPC	Union pour la paix en Centrafrique (Union for Peace in the Central African Republic)
WFP	World Food Programme

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

CHAD

SUDAN

SOUTH SUDAN

CAMEROON

CONGO

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

Central African Republic

Scale: 0 50 100 150 200 250 km / 0 50 100 150 mi

Legend:

- National capital
- Province capital
- Town, village
- Major airport
- International boundary
- Undetermined boundary
- Prefecture boundary
- Main road
- Secondary road
- Railroad

Map No. 4048 Rev. 4 UNITED NATIONS

November 2011

Department of Field Support

Cartographic Section

The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

Introduction

Since the outbreak of the Civil War in December 2012, the Central African Republic (CAR) has undergone continuous fighting between various religious and ethnic groups. At the climax of the Central African Civil War in 2013 and 2014, fighting between Séléka and anti-balaka factions had caused more than 2,000 casualties, and today there are more than 1.1 million refugees and internally displaced persons according to UNHCR.¹ In the existing literature and public discourse, the CAR conflict was ‘often portrayed as a religious confrontation’² due to the religious key distinction of the main initial fighting groups: the Séléka alliance almost entirely consisting of Muslim rebel groups and the anti-balaka militia primarily consisting of Christian and animist fighters. However, when taking a closer look at the CAR’s history, one can understand that religious and ethnic cleavages are only one of the numerous factors in the ongoing conflict in the CAR, whose roots lie deeper in the evolution of the state.

With growing tensions in the CAR since the 1990s, the regional and international community intervened with peacekeeping missions and mediation efforts in order to protect civilians. Beginning with the deployment of an inter-African monitoring mission (MISAB) in 1997, the CAR became a ‘laboratory for peace interventions’ and hosted several peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts in the last 20 years.³ Moreover, not less than 12 mediated peace agreements have been signed between conflicting parties. Despite this endeavour, peace interventions have failed to restore sustainable peace, and most of the peace agreements were only partially implemented, which has made national reconciliation impossible. ‘It is argued that peace operations in CAR have lacked a clear political strategy and a clear understanding of the situation, as well as the necessary sustained engagement from both regional and international actors.’⁴ As a consequence, new waves of sectarian violence started during 2016, 2017, and 2018, and conflicts in the CAR are still ongoing.

Past peacebuilding efforts seem to have failed, which leads to the conclusion that new approaches to peacebuilding could bring better solutions. Religious leaders, for example, have played an important role in the CAR throughout the conflict. Since 2012, religious leaders have

¹ UNHCR, “Unprecedented numbers flee as CAR violence surges,” January 23, 2017, <http://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2018/1/5a673ece4/unprecedented-numbers-flee-car-violence-surges.html>.

² Wendy Isaacs-Martin, “Political and Ethnic Identity in Violent Conflict: The Case of Central African Republic,” *International Journal of Conflict and Violence*, v. 10, no. 1 (2016), 35.

³ Tatiana Carayannis, and Mignon Fowles, “Lessons from African Union–United Nations cooperation in peace operations in the Central African Republic,” *African Security Review*, v. 26 (2017): 220-236, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10246029.2017.1302707>, Abstract, 220.

⁴ Ibid.

mediated between communities and armed groups and provided refuge for people seeking shelter.⁵ ‘At the provincial and local levels, they have also directly mediated conflicts [...], and have played a major lobbying role in the CAR and abroad to put reconciliation high on the agenda of the transitional government and international actors (EU, UN, France, USA).’⁶ Various non-governmental and international organizations specifically address religious leaders to contribute to peace and reconciliation at a grassroots level. In a country where religious and ethnic identities are stronger than its national identity, with an ongoing conflict with strong religious underpinnings, religious leaders have a high potential for promoting peace. They have better access to the people than transitional government authorities and can confront violence based on religious identity through timely interreligious dialogue initiatives.

The aim of this master’s thesis is to identify both the origins and drivers of conflict in the CAR as well as to analyse the failure of international peacebuilding efforts. Special attention will be drawn to the question why past peacebuilding efforts have failed to fully address the main conflict drivers and to restore sustainable peace in the CAR. Furthermore, a case study analyses the effects of local religious leaders in peacebuilding and helps to answer the question to which extent local religious leaders should be involved in future peacebuilding initiatives.

The structure of the thesis is designed to answer the before-mentioned research questions in the consecutive order. First, a separate chapter on the methodological approach explains how data was collected and which sources were used for this thesis. *Chapter 1* gives a brief look back on the CAR’s development since independence and thus provides information on historic roots and current conflict dynamics in the CAR. *Chapter 2* helps to identify the main conflict drivers by looking at the ethnic and religious cleavages, as well as the economic, political, and geopolitical variables. *Chapter 3* on past peacebuilding efforts analyses the reasons behind the failure of various actors to establish a sustainable peace and points out the necessities of future peacebuilding efforts. *Chapter 4* includes the case study on the role of religious leaders in the CAR’s conflicts in the past as well as their potential for promoting peace agreements and creating reconciliation through dialogue and mediation efforts at a community level. Moreover, the thesis discusses lessons learned from past peacebuilding efforts and, in the final *subchapter 4.4*, supplies recommendations on how to further include religious leaders in international peacebuilding strategies and government policies in both the CAR and other conflict areas.

⁵ Véronique Barbelet, “Central African Republic: addressing the protection crisis,” *Humanitarian Policy Group*, 2015, <https://www.odi.org/publications/10103-central-african-republic-addressing-protection-crisis>.

⁶ Conciliation Resources, “Analysis of conflict and peacebuilding in the Central African Republic,” November 2015, <http://www.c-r.org/resources/analysis-conflict-and-peacebuilding-central-african-republic>, 21.

Methodology

In order to answer the before-mentioned research questions, the following three main types of sources were used:

Academic literature, including numerous books, studies, reports and scholarly articles, which have attempted to explain conflict and peacebuilding in the CAR, were critically analysed in this study. In addition, generally accepted conflict resolution theories, such as the Symbolic Politics Theory, were taken to provide further explanations of the CAR conflict. Newspaper articles and other online sources were used for statistics and factual information about specific events.

Primary sources were interpreted and taken to provide information on past peacebuilding efforts in the CAR. These sources comprised 5 relevant UN Security Council Resolutions, 7 concluded Peace Agreements, and 1 Action Plan, adopted and signed by religious community leaders during a KAICIID organized Round Table held in Dakar, Senegal, on 8-11 December 2017.

Qualitative Interviews conducted with local scholars as well as peacebuilding and government actors constitute further primary sources which were aimed to fill the gaps that were not covered by the existing literature. A qualitative interview questionnaire was developed,⁷ targeting interviewees for their first-hand knowledge of the topic. In total, 8 interviews were conducted in Vienna, via Skype, or, most of them, during a field trip to Bangui between April 30 and May 5, 2018. The interview partners comprised 2 religious leaders (of which 1 priest and 1 imam) and founding members of the Platform of Religious Confessions of the Central African Republic (PCRC), 1 staff member of the PCRC, 1 professor of the University of Bangui, 1 member of a Local Peace Committee (LPC), 1 high-level member of the CAR government, 1 MINUSCA field officer, and 1 UNDP programme manager.⁸ The interviewees were asked a selection of questions covering topics including origins and drivers of conflicts in the CAR, international and governmental peacebuilding efforts, and the impact of religious leaders on peace and reconciliation.

⁷ See Appendix B: Interview Questionnaire.

⁸ See Appendix A: List of Conducted Interviews.

1. History of the CAR from Independence to Recent Conflicts

The aim of this chapter is to analyse the historical roots and causes which led to the still ongoing conflict in CAR. Starting with independence from France in 1960 until the evolution of recent conflicts, a brief historical review provides information on how the political interests of and power struggles among the elites have influenced or shaped ethnic and religious cleavages. These power struggles and cleavages are assumed to be root causes that generated conflicts in the CAR until today. Moreover, first international peacekeeping attempts, mediation efforts, and the interference of regional neighbours in the CAR's domestic politics should be analysed to determine lessons learned from previous failures. Finally, the problems and dynamics of current conflicts are discussed to provide a base for the identification of main conflict drivers.

1.1. Military Coups and Political Power Struggles in the Post-Colonial CAR⁹

The Central African Republic emerged as an independent state in 1960 from the former French colony Oubangi-Chari. Since then, the CAR's postcolonial history was characterised by several military coups, elitist power struggles, and the emergence of ethnoreligious cleavages, which have made it difficult for state-building and the creation of a national identity to progress. Moreover, external actors such as France, neighbouring states, and the international community have continuously interfered since independence. Not less than ten military or political coups were attempted in the short post-colonial history of the CAR until the outbreak of the Central African Civil War with the Séléka's takeover in 2012. Some of these coups d'états were successful, others failed, but all of them had severe consequences on the political landscape and the development of the CAR as a state.

State-building in the CAR has been a difficult proposition from the dawn of its history and is since then facing slow progress due to its changing elites. During the colonial period with the arrival of the French in the late 19th century, the Oubangi-Chari colony was a territory inhabited by different tribes who did not have much in common. Establishing functional state structures in the landlocked country in the heart of Africa presented a great challenge to the colonial power. Therefore, the French gave contracts to private companies who were put in charge of exploiting the CAR's natural resources. Public administration then barely existed and only around the Ubangi River near today's capital Bangui. When gaining independence from France

⁹ Much information on the history in this chapter is drawn from Stephen W. Smith, "CAR's history: The Past of a Tense Present," in *Making Sense of the Central African Republic*, ed. Tatiana Carayannis, and Louisa Lombard (Zed Books Ltd, 2015), 17-52; Carayannis/Fowlis, 221-223; and Richard Bradshaw, and Juan Fandos-Rius, *Historical dictionary of the CAR* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016).

on 13 August 1960, the CAR's population still faced a vast power vacuum at the political level. Despite the fact that 6,000 French nationals stayed in Bangui and still controlled large parts of the administration, political elites emerged and struggled for power and political interests over the next decades.

Table 1: List of Coup d'États in the CAR, 1959-2013

Year	Event
1959	Accession of David Dacko to power (allegedly through an 'electoral putsch')
1965/66	Military putsch by Jean-Bedel Bokassa ('New Year's Eve putsch')
1969	Failed coup by Alexandre Banza
1976	Failed coup by Fidèle Obrou and Martin Meya
1979	Putsch by David Dacko
1981	Political coup d'état by General André Kolingba
1982	Failed coup by Ange-Félix Patassé, Alphonse Mbaïkoua, and François Bozizé
2001	Failed coup by François Bozizé
2003	Putsch by François Bozizé
2013	Putsch by Michel Djotodia Amnondroko (with the support of the Séléka rebellion)

Sources: Boris Yakoubou, "Interfaith dialogue landscape and needs assessment," *KAICIID internal report*; Bradshaw/Fandos-Rius, *Historical dictionary of the CAR* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016).

For various reasons, several coup d'états followed the declaration of independence. The first of these coups is known as the 'electoral putsch' carried out by David Dacko in 1959. Dacko, a former Catholic from the Ngbaka people, wanted to follow the rule of Oubangi-Chari's Catholic priest, Barthélemy Boganda, the first Prime Minister of the Central African Republic autonomous territory. After the latter's death, Dacko 'surrounded parliament with a group of pygmies armed with poisonous arrows',¹⁰ guaranteed the deputies advantages such as an extension to their terms of office and was elected the first president of the CAR by the national assembly. Initially supported by the French government, Dacko lost popularity both abroad and at home for several reasons. His affiliation for the People's Republic of China was not really well received by the French, and the establishment of universal suffrage for the presidential elections in 1964 - with himself being the only candidate – further raised concerns among the CAR national assembly. Moreover, his rule was perceived as corrupt and authoritarian by the local grassroots population. Hence, when Dacko saw his political decline, he tried to hand over power to his close companion, Colonel Jean Izamo, who, however, never came to power due to a familiar process: a military putsch.

¹⁰ Smith, 24.

Colonel Jean-Bédél Bokassa, like Dacko and Boganda a Catholic and Ngbaka, served under Dacko as the national army's chief of staff. He took power in the New Year's Eve putsch on 31 December 1965. During this bloody coup, he killed his rival Izamo and his followers murdered most of the former political elite. With Bokassa as the new president, the CAR experienced its first steps in creating infrastructures and the first signs of modern economic development. Bokassa's initial popularity was retained until he declared himself president for life in 1972, and emperor in a costly ceremony in 1976. His rule was strongly authoritarian, and he kept power by incarcerating or murdering his political opponents, such as his former coup combatant Captain Alexandre Banza and his son-in-law Fidèle Obrou, who attempted coups against Bokassa in 1969 and 1976. He converted to Islam in order to get financial support from Colonel Gadhafi after a visit to Libya in 1976, and thus became the CAR's first Muslim leader since independence.¹¹

Bokassa's empire lasted three years before resistance began against him in the form of social uprisings and the establishment of a first real opposition party, the *Movement for the Liberation of the Central African People* (MLPC), led by the former Prime Minister Ange-Félix Patassé. Bokassa's reaction was to imprison around 250 of the young demonstrators and put them to death in the prison of Ngaragba. This triggered French military intervention and led to his overthrow in 1979. This military intervention, known as the 'Operation Barracuda'¹², led to the return of French control over the CAR with the restoration of the former president, David Dacko. Dacko's rule, however, only lasted for two years. He sought democratic legitimacy from the CAR population and campaigned for re-election, which he slightly won against the MLPC's leader Patassé – with a difference of only 90,000 votes. Despite this success, he decided to hand over power to his army's chief of staff, General André Kolingba, who ruled the country for the following 12 years.

Looking at its early post-colonial history, one can conclude that the CAR's first steps as an independent state were determined by power struggles and kleptocratic elites who came to power mainly through military coups. By repressing their political opponents, Dacko, Bokassa, and later Kolingba, managed to stay in power for several years. At least in Bokassa's 'Central African Empire', first state structures were established, and the CAR faced its climax in terms of state-building. Except for the French-led 'Operation Barracuda', all early civil conflicts stayed relatively isolated in the CAR and no external actor had directly intervened in the CAR's

¹¹ Smith.

¹² Ibid, 28.

elitist power struggles. Nevertheless, France had always maintained its influence in Bangui due to the important strategic position of the CAR's capital, and several sources claim that the French assisted in the successful military coups in 1965, 1979, and 1981.¹³ Due to the repressive and authoritarian rule of law, all the early leaders had to face resistance both by the French and among the CAR's grassroots population, until they became themselves victims of another coup.

Table 2: Central African Republic Heads of State, 1960-2018

President	Tenure	Ethnic group	Hometown (prefecture)	Position prior to assuming office	Reason for leaving office (date)
David Dacko	1960-65	Ngbaka	Bouchia (Lobaye)	Minister of the Interior, Economy and Trade	Coup d'état (31 December 1965)
Jean-Bédel Bokassa	1966-79	Ngbaka	Bouchia (Lobaye)	Chief of staff of the armed forces	Ousted by French troops (20-21 September 1979)
David Dacko	1979-81	Ngbaka	Bouchia (Lobaye)	Bokassa's personal adviser	Coup d'état (1 September 1981)
André Kolingba	1981-93	Yakoma	Kembé (Basse-Kotto)	Chief of staff of the armed forces	Election defeat (19 September 1993)
Ange-Félix Patassé	1993-2003	Sara	Paoua (Ouham-Pendé)	Former prime minister	Coup d'état (15 March 2003)
François Bozizé	2003-13	Gbaya	Bossangoa (Ouham)	Former chief of staff of the armed forces	Forced to exile by the Séléka (24 March 2013)
Michel Djotodia	2013-14	Gula	Gordil (Vakaga)	Civil servant in the Ministry of Planning under Patassé	resigned after pressure by ECCAS (10 January 2014)
Alexandre-Ferdinand Nguendet	2014 (Acting President for 13 days)	Gbaya	Bossangoa (Ouham)	Chairman of the Transitional National Council (TNC)	Elections by the TNC (23 January 2014)
Catherine Samba-Panza	2014-16	Gbanziri	N'Djamena (Chad)	Mayor of Bangui	end of interim president tenure (30 March 2016)
Faustin Archange Touadéra	2016-	Gbaya	Bangui	Former prime minister under Bozizé	-

Sources: Eric G. Berman, and Louisa Lombard, "The Central African Republic and Small Arms," *Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies*, December 2008, 2; and Bradshaw/Fandos-Rius.

¹³ Keith Somerville, "The Central African Republic: An Artificial State," *E-International Relations*, February 25, 2014, accessed April 8, 2018. <http://www.e-ir.info/2014/02/25/the-central-african-republic-an-artificial-state/>.

1.2. Intensifying Ethnic Cleavages under the Regimes of Kolingba and Patassé¹⁴

Regarding the ethnic and religious aspect, it must be mentioned that, until Kolingba's rule in 1981, all early rulers, including presidents Barthélemy Boganda, David Dacko, and Jean-Bédél Bokassa, came from the forest-fringe Ngbaka,¹⁵ an ethnic minority living along the Ubangi River close to the capital Bangui. The Ngbaka had consolidated their grip on power during the colonial period as they were among the first in the former Ubangi-Chari colony to encounter the French. 'Many were educated by French Christian missionaries, worked for the French as clerks, or joined the French army.'¹⁶ Despite the fact that ethnic fault lines had existed in the CAR ever since, and even before its independence, the one-sided ethnic representation on CAR's political level had only played a minor role until the end of Dacko's second rule in 1981. All major political parties generally had avoided being associated with any ethnic group, a fact that changed with General André Kolingba gaining power.

General André Kolingba was a Yakoma, an ethnic minority (by then constituting less than 5% of the CAR's population) from the Ngbandi on the riverside of the Ubangi on the CAR's southern border to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). This fact is crucial considering that by the end of Kolingba's reign in 1993, all possible major political positions, as well as 70% of the national military staff, were represented by the Yakoma minority.¹⁷ Kolingba only played a limited role in policy-making because most of the political decisions were made by prime minister Colonel Jean-Claude Manton, a French officer who had been appointed Prime Minister in the CAR by the French. However, Kolingba's tactic of giving all major positions to his tribe fuelled ethnic tensions among the CAR population.

A clear north-south cleavage had emerged already in the previous decade, but it had intensified during Kolingba's reign in the 1980s. The CAR's society was divided into *savaniers* (inhabitants from the savannah) in the north and *riverains* (living around the Ubangi river) in the south. The north western part of the country, which was densely populated by the biggest group, the Gbaya, as well as the ethnic minorities Sara and Mbum, felt discriminated by the politically dominant south-central elites.¹⁸ This divide was perfectly shown when Ange-Félix

¹⁴ Much information on the history in this chapter is drawn from Smith; Bradshaw/Fandos-Rius; and Boris Yakoubou, "Interfaith dialogue landscape and needs assessment," *KAICIID internal report*.

¹⁵ See Table 2 (p. 7).

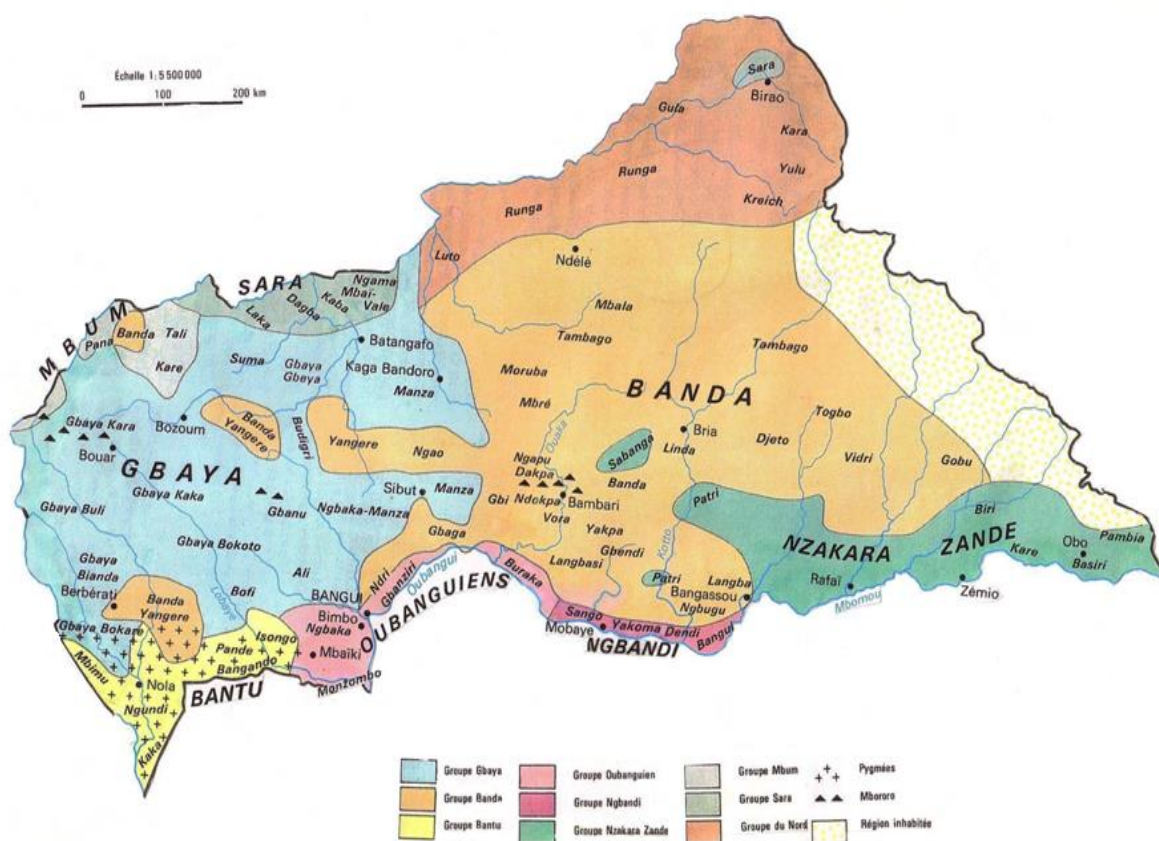
¹⁶ Bradshaw/Fandos-Rius.

¹⁷ International Crisis Group, 2007, in Carayannis/Lombard, 30.

¹⁸ Andreas Mehler, "Rebels and parties: The impact of armed insurgency on representation in the Central African Republic," *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, v. 49 (2011): 115-139, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X10000674.2011>, 119.

Patassé, together with two generals who also originated from the north west, François Bozizé and Alphonse Mbaïkoua, attempted a military coup against Kolingba in 1982. Patassé had built on the north-south division and demanded a change in the elites, giving the northern *savaniers* adequate representation.

Figure 1: Geo-ethnic Map of the Central African Republic, 2012



Source: Atlas of geography of the Central African Republic, 2012, in Yakoubou.¹⁹

Although the coup failed, the attempt can be called a small success for Patassé as it created stronger cohesion among the ethnic groups in the north-western part of the CAR, which became his support base. In the following years Patassé's party, the MLPC, progressively gained votes and became the most popular party by the end of the 1980s. When the pressure from France for democratization and the establishment of a multiparty system got too high, Kolingba could not do other than to agree to French monitored elections in 1993. As expected, Kolingba did not play any role in these elections but Patassé won slightly over his biggest opponent, Abel Goumba, another elitist figure from the southern Gbanziri group. Patassé, from the Suma

¹⁹ The configuration of ethnic group representation has significantly changed during the 2013-2015 crisis. This map shows the regional distribution of ethnic groups in 2012, which differs from the contemporary situation.

minority but usually identified with Sara, hence became the first president representing the *savaniers*.

Like Kolingba, Patassé established his presidential guard mostly comprised of his own tribal group, the Sara-Kaba. He could not trust most of Kolingba's Yakoma fighters in the military and handed them over to the National Armed Forces (FACA). This move was not well received by those concerned who had enjoyed preferential treatment under Kolingba. With widespread discontent in the army, the situation was clearly out of the hands of Patassé's government, which gradually lost effective control over much of the national territory. Three army mutinies and decreasing support by the CAR population were the consequences. As Wendy Isaacs-Martin, an expert on identity construction, nation-building, and violence from the University of South Africa, explains:

Conflicts begin when there are perceptions of exclusion, marginalisation, and preferential treatment of certain individuals and groups. Civilians receive information from government sources or militias that certain groups are being favoured or targeted. As identities are embedded in ethnicity, religion, or tribal allegiances people are easily convinced that their group is being exploited, excluded, targeted, or condemned. These sentiments have political and social consequences that in their extreme form can result in ethnic cleansing and expulsion [...].²⁰

What happened in 1996 was a clear revisionist act by the FACA which was predominantly represented by the Yakoma and wanted a return to the status that they had under Kolingba. However, Patassé supporters from the north wanted to prevent the Southerners to take over power again. The ethnic politics of Kolingba and Patassé, in which certain groups were favoured and others discriminated, had intensified existing ethnic cleavages to such an extent that ethnic-based violence broke out within the military and threatened to spread among the whole population. The 'three army mutinies in quick succession - on 18 April, 18 May, and 15 November 1996 – inaugurated a repetitive, escalatory pattern of national self-destruction.' With '43 dead and 238 wounded',²¹ the last mutiny was even bloodier than the ones before and resulted in a French military intervention to protect civilians from ethnic-based violence.²²

²⁰ Isaacs-Martin, "Political and Ethnic Identity," 28-29.

²¹ Smith, 32.

²² See Table 5 (p. 36): Operation Almandin I/II.

1.3. First International Peacekeeping Missions and Regional Interference²³

In 1996 and early 1997, the French military presence was back in the CAR in form of what in UN-terms would be called a classic 1990s second-generation peacekeeping mission, namely to monitor ceasefire agreements between the government and rebel groups.²⁴ As a result of the intervention, the Bangui Accords could be negotiated through mediation by other African states. In this peace agreement, both the Patassé government and rebel groups declared they would ‘employ dialogue and concerted efforts as a means to avert any return to armed confrontation.’²⁵ Soon, the French military presence was increased to 2,300 soldiers, and a regional peacekeeping force was initiated with Burkina-Faso, Gabon, Mali, Senegal, Chad, and Togo forming the *Inter-African Mission to Monitor the Bangui Accords* (MISAB).²⁶

What followed, however, was a phenomenon that would reoccur in many following peacekeeping interventions in the CAR: Both the negotiated peace agreements and the stabilization forces failed to achieve a sustainable peace, and new clashes emerged in Bangui that produced numerous victims and internally displaced persons. Consequently, the UN Security Council authorized the deployment of UN troops and established the 1,350 strong *UN Mission for the Central African Republic* (MINURCA) as a replacement for MISAB in 1998.²⁷ In the following two years, MINURCA allowed the end of French military presence in the CAR and managed to superficially stabilize the country until its withdrawal on 1 April 2000. In these years between 1997 and 2000, the Patassé government had become increasingly dependent on the international military presence. But due to the quick withdrawal of MINURCA, which only left behind the administrative Peacebuilding Support Office BONUCA without any military presence, stability in the CAR was short lived and once again confrontations arose in Bangui. Backed by general discontent among the CAR population due to a deteriorating social situation, opposition forces demanded the resignation of Patassé.

In 2001, Patassé’s decreasing popularity within both the population and the military induced the return of violence to Bangui and a failed coup against him. General André Kolingba, the former Yakoma president, ‘rather confusedly claimed responsibility for the coup’,²⁸ which led to the killing of hundreds of Yakoma people and forced thousands of residents to flee their homes in Bangui. Once again ethnic cleavages, which had been created

²³ Much information on the history in this chapter is drawn from Smith; and Yakoubou.

²⁴ See Table 5 (p. 36): Operation Bubale and Almandin III.

²⁵ UN Peacemaker, “Bangui Accords,” accessed May 30, 2018, <https://peacemaker.un.org/carbanguiaccords97>.

²⁶ United Nations, Security Council resolution 1125, S/RES/1125 (6 August 1997).

²⁷ United Nations, Security Council resolution 1159, S/RES/1159 (27 March 1998).

²⁸ Smith, 35.

and intensified during Kolingba's preferential politics in the 1980s, came back to the surface and triggered an ethnic and political conflict between Gbaya northerners and riverine southerners, mostly Yakoma. Thereupon, Patassé initiated a repressive campaign against all political opponents involved in the coup. This included the army chief of staff, General François Bozizé, himself a descendent from the Gbaya group (33% of the population and the largest ethnic group in the CAR),²⁹ who was dismissed and had to flee to Chad. From Chad he went into exile in France and started organizing his own guerrilla troops with some former FACA supporters and Chadian mercenaries.

In 2002, Bozizé's supporters and loyalists, together with Chadian mercenaries staged a raid on Bangui which was only partially successful as Patassé's troops were supported by some Libyan soldiers and several hundred rebel fighters of the *Movement for the Liberation of the Congo* (MLC). Patassé's reaction to the failed coup, however, changed the mind of his regional supporters. As Patassé blamed the Chadian President, Idriss Déby Itno, for having supported the coup for material interests (extending Chad's oil fields near Doba in the South of Chad, on the border to the CAR),³⁰ he arranged for the massacre of hundreds of Chadians resident in the north of Bangui. As a consequence, France convinced Gadhafi to withdraw the Libyan soldiers from Bangui, and, together with financial and political support from France, Chad, and both Congo-Brazzaville and Congo-Kinshasa, Bozizé seized power in Bangui on 15 March 2003.

The Bozizé regime lasted for the next ten years despite several insurrections in the Northern provinces of the CAR. Bozizé, who had promised financial and political benefits to his supporters, could not meet their expectations. Most of his supporters were excluded in the formation of Bozizé's government and consequently fled to the CAR's northern provinces where they organized their own rebel movements. Like his predecessors, Bozizé failed to end the era of political mismanagement, corruption, and nepotism, and thus, the vicious circle of violence continued. As a result, several rebel groups were formed in the CAR's northern provinces such as the *Democratic Front for the Central African People* (FDPC) and the *Army for the Restoration of the Republic and Democracy* (APRD), which was remote-controlled by former President Patassé from his Togolese exile. In the north eastern provinces, the *Union of Democratic Forces for Unity* (UFDR) was formed as a coalition of three armed groups with Michel Djotodia as one of their spokespersons.

²⁹ Global Security, "Central African Republic: People," accessed May 30, 2018, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/africa/car-people.htm>.

³⁰ Smith, 36.

The APRD, the FDPC, and the UFSR, as well as other smaller rebel groups, were held responsible for several attacks on FACA troops and the occupation of various towns in the north east of the CAR such as Birao. This once again triggered French military intervention in support of the FACA,³¹ which led to a stalemate between the regime troops and the rebel groups. Consequently, three ceasefire and peace agreements were signed, after mediation by the Libyan leader Muammar Gadhafi³² and later by Gabonese President Omar Bongo.³³ In parallel, the regional peace operation *Force Multinationale en Centrafrique* (FOMUC), which had been established in 2002, was replaced by the *Mission for the Consolidation of Peace in the Central African Republic* (MICOPAX). The latter was led by the Peace and Security architecture of the regional *Economic Community of Central African States* (ECCAS) and therefore received a stronger mandate.³⁴ Nevertheless, most points of the mediated peace accords were only partially fulfilled. Hence, incomplete disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programmes, and large amnesty for rebel combatants allowed rebel groups to sustain their status quo, and new tensions with the government would revive with accusations of fraud during the presidential elections of 2011.

Reviewing developments in the CAR from the mid-1990s and during the Bozizé regime provides insight on first international peacekeeping missions, mediation attempts, and the interference of regional neighbour states in the CAR's domestic politics. As in earlier years, both the former colonial power France and regional neighbours played a decisive role in the Bozizé's seizure of power in 2003. Consequently, his government was very dependent on international and regional support - a circumstance which had already existed with all other rulers of the CAR before him - which was not very beneficial for stable development in the CAR. First peacebuilding failures occurred during this period. Both the international peacekeeping and monitoring missions MISAB and MINURCA and the regional peace operations FOMUC and MICOPAX, as well as the three mediated peace agreements of 2007 and 2008, could not establish a sustainable peace, as the roots of conflict, were never fully addressed. Therefore, a combination of ethnic cleavages, political mismanagement, and a worsening social situation, led to the continuation of violence.

³¹ See Table 5 (p. 36): Operation Boali.

³² See Table 6 (p. 44-45): Sirte and Birao, 2007.

³³ See Table 6 (p. 44-45): Libreville, 2008.

³⁴ Angela Meyer, "Regional Conflict Management in Central Africa: From FOMUC to MICOPAX," *African Security*, v. 2, no. 2-3 (2009), 158-74.

1.4. The 2013-2015 Crisis: The Incitement of Religious-Based Violence³⁵

Under Bozizé, after signing the 2008 Libreville Peace Agreement, which foresaw an immediate ceasefire in exchange for general amnesty, DDR, and political participation of the three main rebel groups APRD, FDPC, and UFDR,³⁶ the political management of the state had deteriorated. Bozizé was accused of giving major positions to his nomenklatura, and there was an increased ethnic polarization of public life, which increased even more after the elections of January 2011. Meanwhile in the predominantly Muslim north-eastern Vakaga province, one of the CAR's most economically deprived provinces, those rebel fighters who had not been successfully disarmed, demobilized, and reintegrated into the FACA reorganized themselves and sought new alliances.

In 2012, numerous alliance agreements among rebel groups in the north resulted in the creation of a large coalition of rebel groups named the 'Séléka'. By the end of the year, the Séléka coalition launched wide-ranging attacks and within only two weeks controlled more than half of the CAR territory. According to the Chadian president Idriss Déby Itno, who is considered to have supported the Séléka, 'the armed rebellion swept up the general discontent on its way to Bangui',³⁷ the rebel movement was united primarily by two common motivations: Taking down the unpopular Bozizé and gaining control over the CAR territory. Despite the presence of more than 2,300 MICOPAX soldiers the Séléka succeeded to make their way to Bangui, and Bozizé had no choice other than accepting Djotodia, one of the rebel coalition's leaders, as the new number two of the government, in charge of defence. The latter was conceded in the 2013 Libreville agreement.³⁸

As is almost customary in the CAR, neither side adhered to the 2013 Libreville Peace Accord. The Séléka took over power and Michel Djotodia declared himself president on 22 March 2013. It was the first time that the small Muslim minority from the north east of the CAR managed the country and gained control over the economy and the country's natural resources. Although political and not religious interests were the initial reason for the rise of the Séléka movement, 'their group identity came to be defined in religious terms'³⁹ and it was the first time in the CAR's independent history that the whole population was divided on the lines of their religious denominations. In the following six months, more than 100,000 Christians and

³⁵ Much information on the history in this chapter is drawn from Smith; Carayannis/Fowles, 223-228; and Yakoubou.

³⁶ See Table 6 (p. 44-45): Libreville, 2008.

³⁷ Smith, 42.

³⁸ See Table 6 (p. 44-45): Libreville, 2013.

³⁹ Smith, 43.

other non-Muslims were displaced from their homes in Bangui, and several civilians were killed by Séléka fighters. Some Muslims who were living in Bangui before were accused of having joined the Séléka in their struggle for power and wealth while expelling Christians and animists from their homes. After enormous pressure of the other members of the ECCAS, Djotodia had to disband the Séléka alliance in September 2013, which was a condition of the 2013 Libreville Agreement and the ‘Declaration of N’Djamena’.⁴⁰ However, in the six months between his seizure of power and the dissolution of the Séléka, the CAR faced a period of emerging such extreme hatred between Muslims and Christians as it has never experienced before.

Such a treatment could only result in an act of revenge from the other side. What followed was the reaction among mainly Christians and animists from the north western part of the CAR. They formed self-defence militias against the Séléka rebels, calling themselves the ‘anti-balaka’. The situation became even more problematic when François Bozizé, who sought revenge for his ousting, interfered and called upon his supporters to organize themselves into anti-balaka militias. The reaction by the united anti-balaka militias was at least as bloody as the acts committed by Séléka fighters, and the remaining soldiers of the ECCAS-led peacekeeping operation MICOPAX could not prevent another escalation of violence. Being in the majority in Bangui, the anti-balaka have since largely cleansed the capital of Muslims. ‘For fear of being massacred, about 130,000 Muslims have fled’ to Chad or are hiding in the CAR’s northern regions.⁴¹ A UN inquiry published in December 2014 estimates that more than 6,000 people were killed by anti-balaka militias and affirms that it might have been many more. Despite some experts arguing to call it genocide, the UN did not dare. The established commission of inquiry came to the result of ethnic cleansing, and condemned war crimes such as ‘murder, rape, and the recruiting of child soldiers’ by both the Séléka and the anti-balaka.⁴²

The French were the first to react to the chain of events and prepared a military intervention which was launched in November 2013 under the name ‘Operation Sangaris’. Shortly afterwards, the UN Security Council authorized the *African-led International Support Mission to the Central African Republic* (MISCA),⁴³ which folded MICOPAX under AU-leadership and increased its capacity. When the humanitarian situation turned out to be worse than expected, the wake-up call also reached the European Union, which reacted in April 2014 with the

⁴⁰ See Table 6 (p. 44-45).

⁴¹ Smith, 45.

⁴² Michelle Nichols, “Ethnic Cleansing in Central African Republic, No Genocide: UN inquiry,” *Reuters*, January 8, 2015, accessed April 25, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-centralafrica-inquiry/ethnic-cleansing-in-central-african-republic-no-genocide-u-n-inquiry-idUSKBNOKH2BM20150108>.

⁴³ United Nations, Security Council resolution 2127, S/RES/2127 (5 December 2013).

establishment of the *European Union Training Mission in the Central African Republic* (EUTM-RCA) under authorisation of the UN Security Council.⁴⁴ EUTM-RCA constituted another ‘bridging’ mission to stabilize the country until a greater UN mission took over.⁴⁵ Since MISCA suffered capacity and financial issues as well as a lack of a clear command structure, the UN Security Council authorized the transition of MISCA to the *UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic* (MINUSCA), giving the mission a Chapter 7 mandate.⁴⁶ MINUSCA, which started deployment in September 2017, was to engage in ‘peace enforcement’ rather than just ‘peacekeeping’, which includes the use of military force for purposes beyond self-defence.⁴⁷

Table 3: Main Actors in the 2013-2015 Crisis

Seleka or ex-Seleka	A coalition of armed groups from the north-east of CAR formed to oppose the Bozize regime. In rural areas the Seleka were associated with armed Peuls	
Anti-Balaka	Started life as a self-defence militia, but now refers to various groups that either identify themselves as part of the anti-Balaka movement or are or were associated with it by default. Some members of the national army, the FACA, and the national Gendarmerie have allegedly participated	
Lord's Resistance Army	A Ugandan armed group with a long presence in CAR, as well as in the DRC and South Sudan. Operates mainly on the border with DRC and South Sudan	
MICOPAX	Central African regional force deployed in 2010 to consolidate peace after 2011 elections	Ended deployment in December 2014
BINUCA	Civilian (not military) UN political mission deployed to consolidate peace	Ended April 2014
MISCA	African Union peacekeeping force deployed in December 2013	Ended September 2014
Sangaris	A 2,000-strong French force deployed to support MISCA under UN Security Council Resolution 2127 (December 2013)	Started deployment in December 2013
EUFOR	An 800-strong police and army force from the European Union deployed in Bangui in early 2014 to support Sangaris and MISCA	Started deployment in February 2014
MINUSCA	A 12,000-strong UN peacekeeping force mandated by UN Security Council 2149 (April 2014)	Started deployment in September 2014

Source: Véronique Barbelet, “Central African Republic: Addressing the Protection Crisis,” *Humanitarian Policy Group*, November 2015), 5.

⁴⁴ United Nations, Security Council resolution 2134, S/RES/2134 (28 January 2014).

⁴⁵ Thierry Tardy, “EUFOR RCA: Tough start, smooth end,” *European Union Institute for Security Studies*, 2015, accessed April 24, 2018, https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/Alert_17_EUFOR_RCA.pdf.

⁴⁶ United Nations, Security Council resolution 2149, S/RES/2149 (10 April 2014).

⁴⁷ Louisa Lombard, *State of Rebellion: Violence and Intervention in the CAR* (London, UK: Zed Books Ltd, 2016).

Meanwhile, a Transitional National Council (TNC) had been established, first DDR-measures were taken, and Djotodia was forced to resign during an ECCAS-led summit in N'Djamena on 10 January 2014. After 13 days in N'Djamena with the TNC chairman Alexandre-Ferdinand Nguendet acting as interim president of the CAR, the TNC moved back to Bangui and decided to declare Catherine Samba-Panza, the former mayor of Bangui, the next interim head of state, and the first female president of the CAR. Even though Samba-Panza, who was born in Chad and not perceived to adhere to any specific ethnic or religious group, was a good choice, her administration lacked institutional capacity and completely relied on the support of the international community. Hence, it took another year until MINUSCA was established and at least in Bangui succeeded in preventing further escalation of the violence.

The Samba-Panza administration neither controlled nor administered the CAR territory, and organizing elections in 2016 could not establish sustainable peace and national reconciliation in the CAR. Ex-Séléka combatants spread all over the country and formed new rebel groups. Consequently, the country faced a new secessionist threat in the north. Several peace accords were made between the government, ex-Séléka fighters, anti-balaka militias and other politico-military groups, including ceasefire arrangements (signed in Nairobi, 2015), and agreements for the cessation of hostilities (concluded in Brazzaville, 2014; and Bangui, 2015).⁴⁸ However, all the agreements faced huge gaps in their implementation.

The international intervention was only partially successful. The involvement of the UN peacekeeping forces with MINUSCA came too late to prevent the massive escalation of violence and ethnic cleansings by both sides in 2013 and 2014, resulting in the death of more than 2.000 people.⁴⁹ At least further escalation was prevented after the beginning of 2015. However, despite several peace accords between the government and rebel groups, new surges of violence could not be prevented. Hence, past peacebuilding efforts could only terminate the 2013-2015 crisis but not settle the ongoing conflict.

1.5. Post-Crisis but not Post-Conflict Situation

When becoming interim president, Catherine Samba-Panza had three main goals. State institutions should be created, dialogue initiatives with the rebel groups should be launched, and democratic elections should be organized. The first constituted the most difficult as state-

⁴⁸ See Table 6 (p. 44-45)

⁴⁹ UNHCR, 2017.

building has always been an issue for all leaders of the ‘phantom state’⁵⁰ CAR since independence in 1960. The second was equally difficult but at least dialogue with rebel groups was started and the Bangui National Forum (*Forum national de Bangui*) on reconciliation took place from 4 to 11 May 2015. It was the most important dialogue initiative, easing tensions and preparing the road toward a stable situation. In addition to offering armed groups immediate and voluntary disarmament and a reintegration process, the Bangui National Forum led to a relatively democratic transition and prepared the road for elections. These elections finally took place on 14 February 2016 and resulted in the victory of Faustin Archange Touadéra, who gained 62 percent of the votes and thus became the new president of the Central African Republic.⁵¹

The former mathematician Touadéra had already been prime minister under Bozizé, but he had resigned before the raid of the Séléka alliance. When he took office as president in March 2016, a bit of hope waved through the CAR after so many years of conflict, instability, and dependence on international aid. His ambition to create stable institutions and preparing the road for a sustainable peace, however, have since only brought minor results. His own support base within the government is divided between those who want Bozizé back in power and those who do not. This leads to the fact that Touadéra depends on a small majority in the National Assembly, which makes it hard to push for reforms. Moreover, relations between the parliament and the executive branch worsened and the latter turned down initiatives such as the National Assembly’s ‘Initiative for Peace’ in 2017 – the only peace initiative by the government.⁵² Consequently, the security and humanitarian situation deteriorated, and the CAR now risks an ‘institutional deadlock’⁵³ that prevents the government from acting against the armed groups and addressing other problems.

Not being able to improve much of the institutional capacity within the state, Touadéra requested the international community’s help from the first day he took on office. Despite his efforts, the French withdrew their 2.000 soldiers from Operation Sangaris by the end of October 2016 after having completed a three years military mission. Although 350 of the French soldiers

⁵⁰ International Crisis Group, 2007, in Carayannis/Lombard, 17.

⁵¹ Bradshaw/Fandos-Rius.

⁵² Enrica Picco, “The world has put its faith in CAR’s leadership,” *African Arguments*, October 24, 2017, accessed January 23, 2018, <http://africanarguments.org/2017/10/24/the-world-has-put-its-faith-in-central-african-republic-car-leadership-it-should-think-again/>.

⁵³ International Crisis Group, “Avoiding the Worst in Central African Republic,” *Africa Report no. 253*, September 28, 2017, accessed May 28, 2018, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/central-african-republic/253-avoiding-worst-central-african-republic>, 3.

remained in the CAR as a backup, MINUSCA failed to make up for the withdrawal.⁵⁴ Starting in October 2016, new waves of sectarian violence erupted and clashes between various armed groups caused heavy losses and deepened the existing internal tensions between ethnic and religious communities in the country. Moreover, UN-soldiers have become targets of attacks by armed groups. During 2017, the UN reported a total of 14 peacekeeping soldiers killed. Most of them were victims of attacks by armed groups such as the attack on a MINUSCA convoy by anti-balaka militias near Bangassou in July,⁵⁵ others when trying to protect civilians, for example in the attack on a camp for displaced people in Bria in December in which more than 100 civilians and members of rival factions died.⁵⁶ More recently, in April 2018, a Rwandan peacekeeper was killed and several others injured when ‘elements of armed groups’, most probably ex-Séléka fighters, attacked a UN base to take revenge for the failed MINUSCA ‘Operation Sukula’ in which several civilians and members of armed groups were killed when UN troops tried to enter the predominantly Muslim inhabited third district of Bangui (also referred to as the “PK5” or “Kilometre 5”, because it is five kilometres away from the city centre) to disarm and arrest members of armed groups who ‘were posing a threat to the security of civilian populations’.⁵⁷ Yet, the numbers of killed peacekeeping soldiers are extremely small compared to the number of casualties among armed group members and civilians.

The situation in the Central African Republic is now converging towards a probable return to a square one and the risk of a civil war. The International Crisis Group reports that ‘the normalization of the security situation in the CAR is very unlikely in the near future, and a military defeat of armed groups is even less conceivable.’ The ethno-religious tensions that led to the crisis of 2013 still exist. Not only have the elections not solved the problem, the country is currently experiencing a sharp rise in violence between armed groups and also against civilians. Anti-balaka militias launch attacks in the north eastern areas, which are mainly controlled by ex-Séléka armed groups, whereas ex-Séléka factions cause problems in areas controlled by anti-balaka militias or the FACA, as is the case in Bangui with the unsafe predominantly Muslim PK5 neighbourhood. The recent attack on the Catholic Fatima church

⁵⁴ International Crisis Group, “Avoiding the Worst”; See also “France Ends Sangaris Military Operation in CAR,” *BBC News*, October 31, 2016, accessed May 29, 2018, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-37823047>.

⁵⁵ “UN: Moroccan Peacekeeper Killed, Three Wounded in CAR,” *Al Jazeera*, July 24, 2017, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/07/moroccan-peacekeeper-killed-wounded-car-170724012058267.html>.

⁵⁶ “Militants kill U.N. Peacekeeper in Central African Republic,” *Reuters*, December 4, 2017, accessed May 29, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-centralafrica-security/militants-kill-u-n-peacekeeper-in-central-african-republic-idUSKBN1DY28V>.

⁵⁷ United Nations, Department of Public Information, “Security Council Press Statement on Attack against United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Central African Republic,” SC/13291-PKO/724, November 4, 2018, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2018/sc13291.doc.htm>.

near the PK5 on 1 May 2018, in which 26 Christians were killed, more than 170 wounded, and a priest was shot, shows that ethno-religious tensions still exist and can lead to interfaith-based violence. Several sources confirm that the attack was followed by reactions among the Christian population, who formed an angry mob which damaged two mosques in Bangui⁵⁸ and lynched two people who were believed to be Muslim, while they carried nine dead bodies of the attack's victims to the presidential palace in order to show their discontent.⁵⁹

In view of such faith-based violent acts, one major risk is that incidents like the reaction to the Fatima Church attack and the failed Operation Sukula may trigger the reunification of main ex-Séléka groups, which could lead to a revival of the 2013 crisis. In fact, two of the three main ex-Séléka groups, the *Popular Front for the Rebirth of Central African Republic* (FPRC) and the *Central African Patriotic movement* (MPC) met in mid-April 2018, just two weeks after the failed Operation Sukula, and threatened to storm the capital Bangui. Fortunately, the *Union for Peace in the Central African Republic* (UPC), the third of the main ex-Séléka groups, did not participate in the meeting and stayed in their base in Bambari. Nevertheless, another faith-based attack such as the Fatima Church attack or another fiasco like Operation Sukula could lead to a reunification of all major ex-Séléka combatants and a return to the situation of 2013, the storming of Bangui, and armed groups taking control of the entire country. This time, there would probably be no new French Operation Sangaris to secure Bangui and MINUSCA would face an immense military threat.⁶⁰

Before, during, and after the crisis, international peace efforts failed to fully end the conflict in the CAR. MINUSCA alone is unable to restore peace and the national government has no power to support it. Recent externally-driven peace agreements between the government and armed groups once again have failed to establish a sustainable peace or achieve national reconciliation and cannot prevent further escalations of violence.⁶¹ Meanwhile, a sort of donor fatigue has crept into the international community. Much effort has been made and much money spent on the CAR conflict in the last 20 years. There is no more appetite to step in with a greater intervention. Besides, the CAR conflict is hardly ever in the news and barely on the agenda of the UN Security Council. Other crises like the Syrian Civil War have a greater media attention.

⁵⁸ KAICIID, "Every Person Who Dies Is a Central African," July 27, 2018, accessed August 8, 2018, [http://www.kaiciid.org/news-events/news/"every-person-who-dies-central-african"](http://www.kaiciid.org/news-events/news/).

⁵⁹ "UN Calls for Calm after Gunmen Storm Church, Kill Worshipers in CAR," ENCA, May 3, 2018, accessed May 29, 2018, <https://www.enca.com/africa/un-calls-for-calm-after-gunmen-storm-church-kill-worshippers-in-car>.

⁶⁰ Florence Richard, "En Centrafrique, la menace d'une offensive sur Bangui par d'ex-Séléka," *France 24*, April 19, 2018, accessed May 29, 2018, <http://www.france24.com/fr/20180419-centrafrique-ex-seleka-touadera-minusca-operation-pk5-regroupement-kaga-bandoro>.

⁶¹ See Table 6 (p. 44-45): Benguela, 2016; Sant'Egidio, 2017; Libreville, 2017.

What is needed would be an expensive long-term commitment by the UN, AU, or France to finance state-building for at least 5-10 years. However, France is thinking about withdrawing its remaining 350 soldiers not engaging further in a country which it has invested so much already.⁶²

Another issue is the lack of confidence among the people in both the international community and the Central African state. In addition to the discontent with the slow peace process and mistakes such as Operation Sukula, MINUSCA has lost the confidence of the CAR society due to several allegations of rape and sexual abuse by international peacekeepers. ‘Of the 80 cases of abuse allegedly committed by international peacekeepers in CAR between 2014 and 2016, half involve children and nine left girls pregnant with so-called peacekeeper babies’.⁶³ The investigation by the UN and the French has not led to any charges due to “the difficulty of collecting the children’s testimonies”.⁶⁴ The local population does not trust peacekeepers anymore. Similarly, the government was unable to respond to the new series of challenges of the last two years. Touadéra, himself a Christian and former Prime Minister under Bozizé, has not done much to include Muslims in his government. The Muslim population accuses the government and the military of taking the side of anti-balaka militias. More than two years after the election of Touadéra, the country has not made much progress to resolve its conflict.⁶⁵ In a nutshell, much more must be done in terms of reconciliation and trust building. This will be one of the few things that can prevent the CAR from suffering another crisis, like it has experienced numerous times throughout its young history.

⁶² Louisa Lombard, interview by TRT World, April 3, 2018, <https://www.trtworld.com/video/roundtable/roundtable-car-civil-war/5a40bd1d41736a1f528addf5>.

⁶³ Inna Lazareva, “Broken Promises for the Children of Bangui Abused by Peacekeepers,” *The Guardian*, March 28, 2017, accessed August 3, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2017/mar/28/broken-promises-children-bangui-reports-peacekeepers-abuse-central-african-republic>.

⁶⁴ AFP, “Case against French Troops Accused of Child Rape Dismissed,” *The National*, January 16, 2018, accessed May 30, 2018, <https://www.thenational.ae/world/africa/case-against-french-troops-accused-of-child-rape-dismissed-1.695712>.

⁶⁵ Richard.

2. Roots and Drivers of Current Conflicts

Having analysed the historical roots and causes of conflicts in the CAR, this chapter focuses on the identification of current conflict drivers. The first chapter gave an overview of which factors led to past conflicts in the CAR. The information from the historical review is to be taken to assess to what extent the previous roots of conflict are still relevant. Moreover, this and other factors are considered to answer the question of what is currently preventing the constitution of a sustainable peace and reconciliation in the CAR. A close look has to be taken on national factors such as the political instability, ethnic and religious group polarizations, the economic and educational situation in the CAR, the militia problem, as well as international factors with the influence of neighbouring states and regional dynamics. All these factors are considered to be the main drivers of current conflicts which must be addressed in all future peace efforts.

2.1. National Factors: Political Instability and the Lack of Rule of Law

As the historical review showed, the CAR has experienced numerous military coups and political elites since independence. The unstable political situation made sustainable state-building impossible and it was certainly due to political interests among changing elites that the CAR society has remained fragmented until today. Especially in the post-colonial period, the CAR's leaders struggled to successfully govern the large territory in the heart of Africa. Due to the strong interference into domestic affairs by the French, the CAR struggled to build up its new independent state at the beginning. It took until the establishment of Bokassa's declared 'Central African Empire' that first state structures were built and a national identity developed among the population. Since the fall of Bokassa, the state-building process in CAR was, however, on a long-lasting downwards spiral.

The continuing political power struggles among elites, including military coups and rebellions, have led to the fact that the government has lost the monopoly on the legitimate use of force. The CAR, especially the capital Bangui, has been completely dependent on foreign troops for its security in the last 20 years. A 2007 report by the International Crisis Group, argues that the CAR cannot even be called a failed state, but a 'phantom state, lacking any meaningful institutional capacity at least since the fall of Emperor Bokassa in 1979.'⁶⁶ Moreover, administrative control was completely lost in most areas outside of Bangui,

⁶⁶ International Crisis Group, "Central African Republic: Anatomy of a Phantom State," *Africa Report no. 136*, December 13, 2007, accessed June 2, 2018, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/central-african-republic/central-african-republic-anatomy-phantom-state>.

triggering secessionist threats in the north which until today remains an area controlled by various rebel groups. It is in a permanent state of insecurity. Both, the establishment of the Séléka and the anti-balaka can be traced back to the lack of functioning institutions. They took over the role of the non-existent police in deprived areas. The lack of state rule and the security vacuum allowed them to establish their own system and incited other rebel groups from neighbouring countries to flourish in the territory of the CAR, as it is the case with Joseph Kony's famous Ugandan *Lord's Resistance Army* (LRA), which is said to be in the very east of the CAR near the town of Obo.⁶⁷

In the 2018 Fragile States Index, the CAR is classified as the fifth most fragile state after South Sudan, Somalia, Yemen, and Syria.⁶⁸ The crisis of 2013-2015 has depleted the already limited resources of the government, which is not able to provide basic services to its citizens, especially outside of Bangui. As public funds are scarce, the state is often unable to pay its civil servants, who then rely on corruption as their main source of income. Moreover, public funds were used for the purchase of weapons and to buy the loyalty of certain armed groups, constituting another factor of ineffective governance that strengthened the power and influence of armed groups in rural areas. Unequal distribution of funds because of ethnic discrimination and broad impunity for various war criminals round up the socio-political problems in the CAR.⁶⁹ In order to establish sustainable peace in the future, strengthening institutional capacity, good governance, and the rule of law is indispensable.

2.2. Ethnic Diversity, Educational Gaps, and Group Polarizations

Ethnic fault lines are considered to play a crucial role in fuelling conflict in the CAR. Almost similarly to the religious division today, the ethnoregional north-south division has long been 'the most relevant cleavage in the CAR'.⁷⁰ With more than 100 ethnic groups,⁷¹ each with its own language, the CAR society has always struggled to develop a nation-wide common identity with all ethnic groups feeling they belong together. Moreover, decades of power struggles among elites using religious and ethnic discrimination as political tools, shaped religious and ethnic identities and created cleavages among the diverse CAR society.

⁶⁷ Ledio Cakaj, "The Unclaimed Land", in Carayannis/Lombard, 267-294.

⁶⁸ The Fund For Peace, "Fragile States Index 2018: Issue of Fragility Touch the World's Richest and Most Developed Countries in 2018," April 19, 2018, accessed June 2, 2018, <http://fundforpeace.org/fsi/2018/04/19/fragile-states-index-2018-issues-of-fragility-touch-the-worlds-richest-and-most-developed-countries-in-2018/>.

⁶⁹ Yakoubou.

⁷⁰ Mehler, 119.

⁷¹ Bradshaw/Fandos-Rius, s.v. "Ethnic groups".

As anthropologists argue, the UN model of the world is based on the Westphalian definition of nation-states, which does not apply to the CAR because basic institutions are not present, and the CAR does not have a long history as a sovereign state. As a result, national identity has yet to be developed.⁷² The majority of the Central African population had to witness power struggles among elites which helped them lose their belief in the state structure and weakened national identity. In most areas in the CAR outside of the capital Bangui, people derive their identity along ethnic or tribal lines and religious faith communities. National identity has not been issued for most of the rural population.

Table 4: List of Ethnic Groups in the CAR

Ethno-cultural groups	Main Subgroups	%	Main locations
Gbaya/Mandjia	Kara, Kaka, Buli, Bianda, Bokare, Gbeya, Bokoto, Dooka, Bofi, Ali, Gbanu, Ngbaka-Manza, Budigri, Suma	33 - 38%	Nana Mambere, Mambere Kadei, Ouham, Ombella Mpoko, Sangha Mbaere, Lobaye
Banda	Mbala, Moruba, Mbre, Tambago, Yangere, Ngao, Dakpa, Gbaga, Gbi, Linda, Vora, Banda, Ndokpa, Yakpa, Gbendi, Djeto, Togbo, Vidri, Gobu, Langbasi, Langba, Ngbugu, Ndri	23 - 27%	Ouaka, Lower Kotto, Upper Kotto, Kemo, Bamingui Bangora
Bantu and Ubangi	Bantu: Mpiemu, Ngundi, Kaka, Pande, Bangando, Isongo (Mbati), Kare, Aka Pygmies. Ubangi: Ngbaka, Monzombo, Gbanziri, Buraka	8%	Lobaye, Sangha Mbaere
Sara & Northerners	Sara: Laka, Kaba, Dagba, Mbai-Vale, Ngama. Northerners: Runga, Luto, Gula, Kara, Yulu, Kresh	8 - 10%	Vakaga, Bamingui Bangoran, Ouham, Upper Kotto
Mboum	Pana, Kare, Tali	6 - 7%	Ouham Pende
Ngbandi	Sango, Yakoma, Dendi, Bangi	5.5%	Mbomou
Nzakara-Zande	Nzakara, Zande, Sabanga, Patri Related subgroups: Biri, Basiri, Pambia	3%	Upper Mbomou, Mbomou
Other groups	Mbororo (Fulani)	1%	-

Sources: Yakoubou; and Bradshaw/Fandos-Rius.

This lack of national identity which goes along with great poverty, lack of education, and political leaders radicalising certain groups constituted the base for all rebellions and military coups in the past. Throughout history, group leaders used parts of the society to gain political power and overtake governing authorities. The fact that the CAR was, until the election of Patassé in 1993, governed only by southern leaders and their ethnic minorities, created a feeling

⁷² Louisa Lombard, interview by Mike Cummings, *Yale News*, March 23, 2017, <https://news.yale.edu/2017/03/23/understanding-conflict-central-african-republic-qa-anthropologist-louisa-lombard>.

of neglect among the rest of the country. This cleavage between northern *savaniers* and southern *riverains* became even more problematic during Kolingba's preferential ethnic politics in the 1980s when the first ethnic-based tensions evolved within the CAR society. It was in this period that 'perceptions of exclusion, marginalisation, and preferential treatment of certain individuals and groups',⁷³ evolved and triggered ethnic fault lines. The following era of the "northerners" Patassé and Bozizé, oversaw a continuation of this north-south cleavage with the evolution of even more fault lines between the over 100 ethnic groups who had lived in peaceful coexistence for centuries before independence.

The Symbolic Politics Theory of ethnic conflict offers a psychological explanation for the emergence of ethnic fault lines. As such, it is the 'nature of human beings to organize into groups based on a constructed perception of their communal identity, which resounds around a common plight and narrative that must be championed against adversaries.'⁷⁴ Narratives and prejudice against other groups always exist and come along with symbolic predispositions for ethnic politics. Often aggressive leaders emerge and use these existing symbolic predispositions and address the large-group identities of certain (ethnic) groups in order to create an 'in-group' and an 'out-group', or in the words of Volkan, an 'us and them polarization'.⁷⁵ As a result, aggressive leaders manage to trigger mobilization of people which allows them to legitimize their seizure of power from the 'out-group'.⁷⁶ In extreme forms, especially when the perception of threat comes into effect, this may be accompanied by the use of violence against other groups, as was the case in almost all of the ten coup d'états in the history of the CAR.⁷⁷

All former presidents of the CAR successfully used this strategy of an 'us and them polarization' to come to power and continued to do so when governing the country. It started under the first prime minister Boganda when the Ngbaka group was given power by the French colonialists. With Kolingba, the Yakoma became the 'in-group', followed by the *savaniers* under Patassé. Similarly, under Bozizé it was still the northwest which was affiliated with him. Never since independence has the CAR managed to fully bring together all its peoples and different identity groups as it should be the case in a functioning republic. Even worse, declassifications of certain (ethnic, later religious) groups became a common practice in the

⁷³ Isaacs-Martin, "Political and Ethnic Identity," 28.

⁷⁴ Katherine Green, "The Symbolic Politics Theory of Ethnic War," *E-International Relations*, March 13, 2012, accessed June 3, 2018, <http://www.e-ir.info/2012/03/13/the-symbolic-politics-theory-of-ethnic-war/>.

⁷⁵ Vamik D. Volkan, "Large-group Identity: 'Us and Them' Polarizations in the International Arena," *Springer*, April 21, 2009, accessed June 03, 2018, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1057/pcs.2008.50>.

⁷⁶ Stuart J. Kaufman, *Nationalist Passions*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015), Chapter 1, "Symbolic Predispositions and Ethnic Politics", 31-65.

⁷⁷ See Table 1 (p. 5).

CAR. Not only in the public service sector, but also at schools, there were good grades for the students in the governing group, and bad grades for students in groups who were not in power. All political leaders have only trusted their group, which for them was the only group with competence and integrity. This public discrimination and exclusion started the vicious circle towards division and violent conflicts in the first place and continues to feed this today.⁷⁸

The outbreak of violence in 2012 can also be seen as a result of group polarizations that have emerged over decades before. Throughout the short history of the CAR, feelings of exclusion, discrimination, and marginalization spilled over from one identity group to another, accelerating the wish for regime change. In 2012, this spillover effect had reached the northeastern provinces, an area populated by various ethnic minority groups, which are commonly referred to as the 'Northern group', with the highest percentage being Muslims. As in other crises before, aggressive leaders, such as Michel Djotodia, addressed the common identity of different groups and triggered political mobilization. This in- and out-group polarization did not happen on the basis of ethnicity nor religion, but the common goal to gain power from the governing elites. Narratives were created (some of them partly true) that the Bozizé regime was only accelerating the wealth and security of its own people by privatizing the state by, for instance, giving oil to China instead of selling it to others.⁷⁹ These narratives became prejudices against the ruling elite and their supporters, which helped facilitate the recruitment and mobilization of militant armed groups who then formed the Séléka alliance. As most of the population was and still is mainly young, poor, and illiterate (the literacy rate was only 37 % in 2010),⁸⁰ they tended to easily believe the narratives of aggressive leaders and thus constituted the perfect material for a rebellion.

Since 2015, the major crisis between ex-Séléka and anti-balaka might have eased, but feelings of marginalization, exclusion, and discrimination between Christians and Muslims still exist. On the one hand, both the government under President Touadéra and the military are still perceived to be on the side of the anti-balaka militias, and Muslims feel underrepresented in both the military and the public sector.⁸¹ On the other hand, the programme of demobilisation, disarmament, reinsertion, and repatriation (DDRR) for the armed groups, which should help re-establish a professional multi-ethnic army, includes the reintegration of former ex-Séléka

⁷⁸ Dieudonné Nzapalainga, interview by author, Vienna, April 24, 2018.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ World Bank, s.v. "Literacy rate, adult total (% of people ages 15 and above)," accessed on 2018, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.ADT.LITR.ZS?locations=CF>.

⁸¹ Djamel Babani, interview by author, Bangui, April 30, 2018.

combatants, which is then perceived as a problem by Christian groups.⁸² Similarly, the cabinet of the president includes former armed group members, which is seen as a success of the Bangui National Forum but may be problematic for certain groups. In this regard, an inclusive approach is needed to ensure equal representation of all ethnic and religious groups in the FACA and the CAR's political system.

Hence, the current situation which is lacking inclusivity and equal representation is another factor that prevents sustainable peace in the CAR. These cleavages can also be observed in ethno-tribal conflicts in rural areas where ethnic bonds are very strong, and many groups can easily be identified by common characteristics such as tattoos or scars. As such, many incidents of hostility and violence occur towards Chadian refugees, the Fulani Mbororo, and Pygmy people. All of them are small groups without any representation in the political arena, which makes them easy targets for discrimination. The Chadian refugees and the Mbororo nomad cattle herders are seen as foreigners in the CAR, whereas Pygmies experienced a history of social and economic discrimination and exploitation which created prejudice among all other groups.⁸³

Narratives between different identity groups always existed, be they based on ethnicity, religion, or another common identity. Then, these differences became prejudices due to the incitement of certain aggressive leaders who tried to create and mobilize their identity group for the struggle for power. Today, after all the violence committed in the 2013-2015 crisis, cleavages between ethnic and religious groups have intensified. Thus, the social divide has increased and makes it even more difficult to reconcile and unite all ethnic and religious groups in the country.

It will take years of reconciliation efforts to overcome all the traumatic incidents of ethnic- and religious-based violence. As Volkan explains, 'the group draws a mental representation of a traumatic event *into its very identity*. It passes the mental representation of the event – along with associated shared feelings of hurt and shame, and defenses against the perceived shared conflicts they initiate – from generation to generation'.⁸⁴ To address this deeply rooted social divide between the constructed large-group identities, reconciliation and public education efforts, such as media campaigns and problem-solving workshops to combat hate speech, are

⁸² International Crisis Group, "Avoiding the Worst".

⁸³ Yakoubou.

⁸⁴ Volkan, 1994, in Peter Uvin, "Prejudice, Crisis and Genocide in Rwanda," *African Studies Review*, v. 40, no. 2 (1997), 105.

much more effective than peacebuilding missions.⁸⁵ Moreover, an increased level of education would help to make the CAR's people more critical towards narratives and prejudices against other groups and less prone to follow the incitement of certain aggressive leaders.

2.3. The Instrumentalization and Amalgamation of Religion

A closer look at the CAR's post-colonial history has underlined the assumption that both ethnic and religious cleavages evolved due to certain elites inciting groups for their personal power struggles. As explained in the chapter before, the reason for the seizure of power by the Séléka in 2012 was not a religious one but the desire to control the country, supported by frustrated, mainly young people from the poorer, marginalised northern provinces. Religious divisions are more recent, and come as a consequence of the latest crisis, with a growing polarization between Muslim and non-Muslim communities. The 2013-2015 crisis was not initially based on a religious cleavage but rather on the continuing feeling of marginalization and discrimination, which spilled over to the northeastern Muslim population. The instrumentalization of religion and ethnicity for political purposes fuelled longstanding narratives of religious and ethnic-based discrimination. Only with the Séléka rebellion of 2012-2013, amalgamation of the Séléka and Islam occurred. Cleavages between Muslims and Christians evolved and thus turned the CAR crisis into a conflict which still is perceived as a religious one.

Both Christianity and Islam came to the CAR during French colonial rule and have coexisted peacefully in the CAR for more than a century. The first Catholic missionaries reached the CAR in 1893 and quickly went up the Oubangi River and its tributaries. Protestant missionaries followed in the early 20th century with the first Baptist mission in 1915, followed by Pentecostal missionaries in the southwest of the Oubangi-Chari colony. In order to avoid duplication, the different churches agreed on different settlement areas for their communities.⁸⁶ The first Muslim populations, however, were recruited by the colonial administration for the military and came from different Western and Central African countries. With independence of the CAR, most Christian churches also became more independent from the influence of foreign missionaries, which strengthened the Christian communities in the CAR. At about the same time, in the 1960s, a greater influx of Muslims from neighbouring countries came to the CAR, either as refugees from conflicts in their home countries, or to start up commercial businesses in the rapidly developing city of Bangui. Hence, most of the Muslim population was of

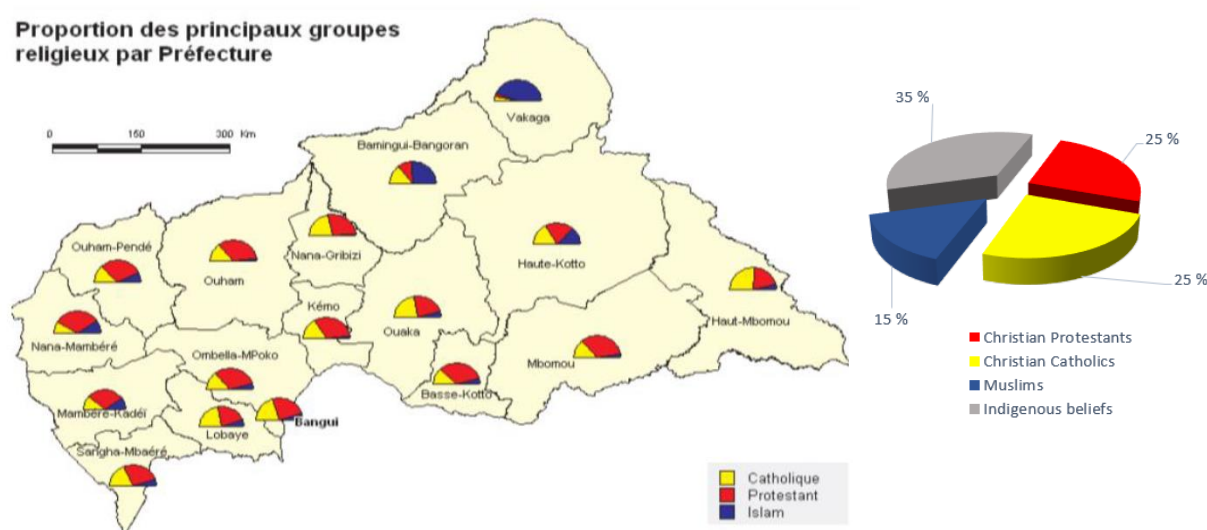
⁸⁵ Kaufman.

⁸⁶ Yakoubou.

Sudanese and Chadian origin and their descendants, which constitute the majority of the Muslim population today, are still referred to as ‘Chadians’, despite living in the CAR for two or three generations.⁸⁷

Current numbers on the distribution of religious groups are hard to find. A 2003 census concluded that 85% of all Central Africans are Christians, 10.1% Muslims, and 4.9% either animists or adhere to other local religions. Over the last twenty years, the confessional configuration of the CAR has significantly changed, and several sources claim that the Muslim community now constitutes about 15% to 20% of the country’s population.⁸⁸ Although Muslims are to be found in all 16 provinces of the CAR, most of them are still located in the northeastern provinces, such as Vakaga, where they made up 85.6% of the population in the 2003 census, Bamingui Bangoran (44.3%), and Upper Kotto (around 25%). In Bangui, there are an estimated 50,000 Muslims (8.2%), most of them living in the PK5 neighbourhood.⁸⁹

Figure 2: Religious Regional Diversity in 2012 and Estimated Current Composition



Sources: Yakoubou;⁹⁰ and CIA World Factbook, s. v. “Central African Republic,” accessed September 2, 2018, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ct.html>.⁹¹

⁸⁷ “Comprendre La Crise Centrafricaine,” *Observatoire Pharos*, 2015, accessed June 6, 2018, <https://www.observatoirepharos.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Rapport-Pharos-Centrafrique19-02-2015-définif.pdf>.

⁸⁸ CIA World Factbook, s.v. “Central African Republic,” accessed September 2, 2018, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ct.html>.

⁸⁹ Yakoubou.

⁹⁰ This map shows the regional distribution of religious groups in 2012, which differs from the contemporary situation. The configuration of religious groups has significantly changed during the 2013-2015 crisis.

⁹¹ The estimated current composition of religious affiliations is drawn from the CIA World Factbook with the note that animistic beliefs and practices strongly influence the Christian majority. The statistical discrepancy with the 2003 census, thus results from both the effects of the 2013-2015 crisis, as well as the different methods of allocating the religious affiliations of animists and indigenous beliefs.

The fact that most of the Muslim minorities have always been perceived as foreigners in the CAR certainly played a role in the amalgamation of Islam with the Séléka rebellion of 2012-2013. When the Séléka descended from the northern provinces and took over control of Bangui and the rest of the country, they were already perceived as Muslims coming from the north. Moreover, Djotodia and the other leaders of the Séléka had recruited Chadian and Sudanese mercenaries to fight for the Séléka. A strategy that Bozizé also pursued in his coup d'état of 2003. Since he did not pay them, many of the Chadian mercenaries of 2003 started looting and stayed in the country for another ten years. When the Séléka arrived in 2013, the mercenaries, who did not speak French or Sango, could communicate with some of them in Arabic and contributed to the circumstance that the Séléka were also called 'Arabs with weapons'. Together with the fact that most Muslims were already perceived as foreigners, the amalgamation with the predominantly Muslim Séléka fighters and the foreign mercenaries led to the wrong perception of the Séléka as a 'Muslim alliance' and incited hatred and violence based on religious differences in communities which have peacefully coexisted for generations.⁹²

Likewise, revenge against the Séléka raid by anti-balaka militias was not only undertaken by Christians. Animists, and even some Muslim Fulani were part of the self-defence militias who wanted vengeance for their killed family members and their burnt villages. However, when Bozizé then integrated members of anti-balaka into the FACA, violence and hatred was taken to another level. It was at this time that the anti-balaka, who were originally formed as self-defence militias against the Séléka, directed their aggression and wish for revenge towards every Muslim, as they were convinced – wrongly – that it was 'the Muslims' who drove them out of power and committed violence against them. Certainly, parts of the Muslim population had followed the Séléka when they arrived in the western parts of the country, but many refused to follow them, some had to flee, others became victims themselves.⁹³

Hence, a closer look on the recent crisis of 2013-2015 shows that labelling the CAR conflict a religious conflict is an oversimplification. As with all coup d'états, mutinies, and rebellions in the CAR, large-group identities were addressed for an 'us against them polarization' for the struggle for power. Only this time it was religion that was instrumentalized. The longstanding narrative that the Muslim population were foreigners in the CAR (and the widespread absence of identity cards) facilitated the amalgamation of religious communities and armed groups and led to religious-based violence between Christians and Muslims. Even after the 2013-2015

⁹² Omar K. Layama, interview by author, Vienna, April 24, 2018.

⁹³ Ibid.

crisis, stereotypes and suspicion between Christians and Muslims are widespread and large parts of the population still – wrongly – blame religious differences to be the cause of the conflict. Scapegoating and hate speeches occur daily both in media as well as between communities. The recent Fatima Church attack of 1 May 2018 clearly showed that armed groups continue to conduct violence on a religious basis and parts of the population follow the example. However, the majority of the population ‘does not link conflict resolution with the need for a shared understanding of the challenges and with the potential that each religion has for peace and reconciliation’.⁹⁴

Since the last crisis has led to religious divide, reconciliation and dialogue efforts between religious communities are more important than ever before. Both Islam and Christianity are religions that should advocate peace and only by manipulation and instrumentalization for political interests can religion be used to justify violence. Thus, interreligious dialogue efforts must be used to strengthen the understanding and appreciation of religious differences. This form of dialogue must be encouraged on a political level, in the educational system, on a community level, as well as in media workshops to combat longstanding narratives, prejudices, hate speech, and constructed misunderstanding between different religious groups.

2.4. Natural Resources, Economic Underdevelopment, and the Militia Problem

Another factor that must be discussed in the CAR conflict is the economic situation of the country. As an internal KAICIID needs assessment study thoroughly describes:

The CAR is rich in natural resources, which are largely unexploited, such as diamonds, gold, uranium, timber, ivory, and other minerals. Diamonds, mostly raw, are the largest export of the CAR, accounting for 40% of exports, but it is estimated that 30-50% of diamonds produced annually leave the country illegally. However, and despite its potential (vast agricultural land, good rainfall, the density of the river system, subsoil richness, etc.), the CAR remains one of the poorest countries with an estimated human development index of 0.341, placing it at the 187th rank out of 188. It is classified as a Least Developed Country and considered a fragile state because of the cyclical nature of the crises it has experienced.⁹⁵

This combination of a fragile state with low economic development, despite its large reserves of national resources, constitutes another source of conflict. Tensions related to the exploitation of mineral resources emerged among different armed groups. The great number of armed groups, most of them splinter groups from the former ex-Séléka and anti-balaka militias,

⁹⁴ Yakoubou.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

control roads in mining areas which allows them to collect taxes, poach ivory, and exploit timber to finance their existence. Moreover, frequent tensions between farmers and stockbreeders have evolved, notably in the CAR's northern provinces, and present another division of different communities due to economic interests. Economic underdevelopment and the country's trade potential because of its natural resources should not be ignored as yet another source of conflict.

Bangui, with its good geopolitical position in the heart of Africa, was known for its charm during French Colonial rule. After gaining independence "La Coquette", as the French used to call the capital, was known for its rapid development and attracted migrants from neighbouring states to invest and start businesses. Due to repeated political instability, however, it lost both its attractiveness for investment and stopped growing economically, as did the entire CAR. Several times, the devastating social situation was reflected in political discontent and led to rebellions and outbreaks of violence, such as under Patassé in 2001, and numerous times under Bozizé. Furthermore, the incapability of the CAR to profit from its rich natural resources made it even more dependent on external partners such as France, the US, China, and Chad who, for instance, are interested in the CAR's oil fields in the north. The fact that Bozizé made deals with Chinese, Libyan, and Malaysian state oil companies, which were more lucrative for himself than for the country, certainly played a role in the 2012 Séléka rebellion.⁹⁶ His plans to exploit petroleum in the northern Vakaga province without informing and including local stakeholders were another fundamental cause of the rebel groups taking up arms against the president.⁹⁷

After the 2013-2015 crisis and the elections of 2016, the situation even worsened. Despite the continuation of financial assistance from UN agencies and various funds, the economic performance of the CAR remains lethargic. 'Compared to 2016, the economic growth is weak and there has been no increase in fiscal and customs revenues.'⁹⁸ The level of poverty is one of the highest in the world, with more than half of the population (2.3 million people) needing humanitarian assistance and 76% living in extreme poverty.⁹⁹ Both UNDP and the *World Food Programme* (WFP) as well as several NGOs launched projects in the cotton, timber, and agricultural sector, but lack of investment, the growth of customs and taxes make it difficult for

⁹⁶ Stephen W. Smith, "The Elite's Road to Riches in a Poor Country", in Carayannis/Lombard, 102-122.

⁹⁷ An Bollen, "Natural Resources at the Heart of CAR Crisis." *New Internationalist*, 18 December 2013, accessed June 8, 2018, <https://newint.org/blog/2013/12/18/central-african-republic-natural-resources>.

⁹⁸ International Crisis Group, "Avoiding the Worst": 2.

⁹⁹ World Bank, s.v. "Central African Republic," May 16, 2018, accessed June 8, 2018, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/centralafricanrepublic/overview>.

these projects to thrive.¹⁰⁰ The high level of corruption is another issue that lets the country slide back into the bad practices of the past and aggravates finding donors and investors. Additionally, the slow economic growth and the low state budget make the implementation of ambitious peace agreements, including strategic government plans for reforms in various sectors, unrealistic.¹⁰¹

Another problem is that armed groups took over control of the CAR's natural resources. According to Dalby, 'the diamond business illustrates several engrained characteristics of the country's political economy that help explain its current situation'.¹⁰² In the southwest and the northeast of the CAR, diamonds have become the main source of income for many people. While the state introduced high taxes on diamond mining and officials are perceived as corrupt, the black market is much more lucrative for the diamond business. Hence, illicit diamond smuggling networks stretch far into the CAR's neighbouring countries, including Cameroon, Chad, Sudan, and the DRC. Dalby underlines the fact that most of the main leaders of the northeastern rebel groups had previous experience in the diamond sector. Not only have diamonds become a source of income for northeastern rebel groups, it is also due to the smuggling network that the leaders of the 2012 rebellion made contacts in neighbouring countries, which allowed them to buy weapons and recruit mercenaries. A similar development can be observed in gold mining and in the exploitation of other natural resources.¹⁰³

Militias and armed groups still control most natural resources, including timber harvesting, ivory poaching, and gold and diamond mines.¹⁰⁴ As the central government barely controls development in the provinces, warlords and various small armed groups have emerged and finance themselves through controlling mines, blocking roads, and collecting taxes. The control of natural resources and road blocking not only permit armed groups to finance their weapons and recruitment, but also allow them to offer employment to civilians 'in areas of extreme poverty and high unemployment'. Hence, warlords and militias are in a powerful position as they offer employment and security in areas where the state has little to no control. Consequently, they are always potential spoilers to peace agreements and DDR processes: 'Warlords are reluctant to disarm their militias during peace agreements, like the 2008

¹⁰⁰ International Crisis Group, "Avoiding the Worst".

¹⁰¹ Malika Grogga-Bada, interview by author, via Skype, May 11, 2018.

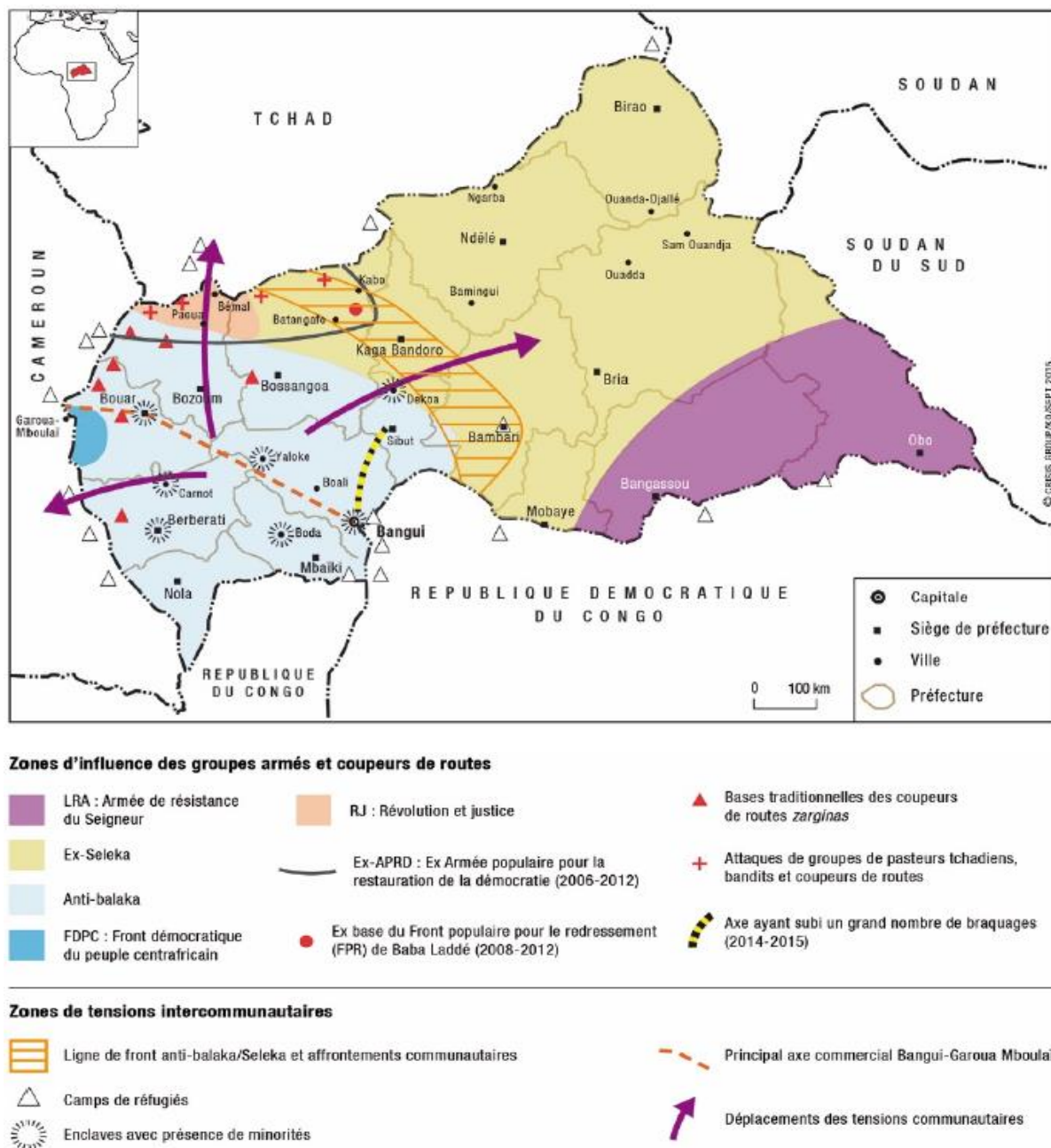
¹⁰² Dalby, Ned "A Multifaceted Business" in Carayannis/Lombard, 123.

¹⁰³ Ibid, 123-141.

¹⁰⁴ Bollen.

Libreville Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed by the three militia coalitions in the CAR.¹⁰⁵ Peace, disarmament, and a stable country are of course against their interests.

Figure 3: Map of Armed Groups' Zones of Influence in 2015



Sources: International Crisis Group, “Central African Republic: The Roots of Violence,” *Africa Report* no. 230, September 21, 2015, accessed June 2, 2018, <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/230-central-african-republic-the-roots-of-violence.pdf>.

¹⁰⁵ Wendy Isaacs-Martin, “The Motivations of Warlords and the Role of Militias in the Central African Republic,” *African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes*, December 23, 2015, accessed June 8, 2018, <http://www.acCORD.org.za/conflict-trends/the-motivations-of-warlords-and-the-role-of-militias-in-the-central-african-republic/>.

To sum up, economic underdevelopment and the loss of control over natural resources constitutes crucial factors when examining the roots of the CAR conflict. The current militia problem can be traced back to the weak economic situation of a country that is rich in natural resources. Moreover, the low state budget is one of the reasons why ambitious peace agreements and DDR processes could not be implemented in the past. Without the necessary financial means, it is difficult to start structural economic reforms and to incentivize armed groups to participate in peace and DDR processes. Certainly, the existence of natural resources does not make a country rich if its government has no control over most of its territory, as shown in many resource abundant but fragile states.¹⁰⁶ Hence, the CAR will continue to be in need of financial assistance but all contributions need to be used in a reasonable manner. Regaining state control over natural resources should be among the priorities as armed groups would be cut off from their main financial source, which would also lead to a decrease in the influx of weapons to militias. In the long-term, decentralization as well as structural economic and land-tenure reforms are needed to promote local economic development.¹⁰⁷

2.5. International Factors: Geopolitical Interests and Regional Dynamics

The interference of the CAR's regional neighbours and other players often played a decisive role in the several coups and changes of political elites in the past. France, as the former colonial power, Libya under Gadhafi, and regional neighbours such as Chad under Idriss Déby Itno consistently interfered in the CAR's domestic politics. With its vast natural resources, including diamonds, gold, uranium, oil, timber, and ivory, the CAR presents an economic interest for foreign players. Moreover, its position in the heart of Africa made it a geopolitically interesting country, something understood by the French during the colonial era and they built a military airbase in Bangui in 1931. Encircled by politically unstable countries such as Chad, South Sudan, the Republic of Congo, and the DRC, the CAR is facing several cross-border conflicts spilling over from its neighbours and help make it a paradise for armed groups and criminals who finance themselves with smuggling and poaching.

France, as the former colonial power, continued to interfere in the CAR's domestic politics after independence, and still has a military presence in the CAR in the form of MINUSCA. Almost all presidents of the CAR up to Michel Djotodia profited from the backing of France in their struggle for power. The French assisted in the successful military coups in 1965, 1979,

¹⁰⁶ Jeffrey D. Sachs, and Andrew M. Warner, "The Curse of Natural Resources," *European Economic Review*, v. 45, no. 4-6 (2001).

¹⁰⁷ Bollen.

and 1981,¹⁰⁸ and discreetly assisted Bozizé, who was also backed by Chad, on his way to power in 2003. Although the French military bases in Bouar and Bangui were closed after the end of the Cold War, France did not want to give up completely its presence in the CAR.¹⁰⁹ With unilateral military interventions such as their latest, Operation Sangaris in 2013-2016, or integrated into multilateral peacekeeping operations such as EUTM-RCA and MINUSCA (both since 2014), French military presence has remained in the CAR since independence.

Until today, no country has more influence on the CAR government than France. The US stayed out of the CAR with the exception for some special forces to combat the LRA in the southwest. It would only consider a broader engagement if the establishment of radical Islamist forces materialized. China has so far only shown economic interests but does not bother to interfere on a political level. Who remains in the game of outside powers is “La Grande Nation”. Almost all political regimes were dependent on the political and military backing of France. This is still the case with the current government and puts France in a powerful position which the former colonial power could use when addressing the government in state- and peacebuilding efforts.

Table 5: French Participation in Military Operations in the CAR, 1979-2018

OPERATION	COUNTRY	DATE OF DEPLOYMENT - WITHDRAWAL
BARRACUDA	CAR	September 1979 – June 1981
BIOFORCE	CAR	March – April 1992
ALMANDIN I/II	CAR	April 1996 – June 1997
BUBALE	CAR	January 1997 – April 1998
ALMANDIN III	CAR	June 1997 – April 1998
MINURCA	CAR	April 1998 – February 1999
BOALI	CAR	October 2002 – December 2013
EUFOR CHAD-RCA	Chad/CAR	January 2008 – March 2009
SANGARIS	CAR	November 2013 – October 2016
EUTM-RCA	CAR	February 2014 –
MINUSCA	CAR	September 2014 –

Sources: Valentin Germain, “RCA: Une Histoire De Conflits Marquée Par Les Opérations Françaises,” *Ondes De Choc*, October 06, 2015, accessed June 12, 2018, <https://ondesdechoc.wordpress.com/2015/05/26/rca-une-histoire-de-conflits-marquee-par-les-operations-francaises/>; and Barbelet, 5.

In addition to France’s interference, the CAR has also been caught by the game of rivalry between the regional powers. Libya under Gadhafi had good relations with the Bokassa regime

¹⁰⁸ See chapter 1.1.

¹⁰⁹ Patrice Gourdin, “République centrafricaine: géopolitique d’un pays oublié,” *Diploweb.com*, October 1, 2013, accessed January 24, 2018, <https://www.diploweb.com/Republique-centrafricaine.html>.

and sent soldiers to support Patassé when Bozizé, who was backed by Chad and France, staged his coup in 2003. When Gadhafi was toppled in 2012, Libya removed from the geopolitical games, which increased the importance of the CAR's neighbouring states. Chad under Déby had interests in the CAR's oil, uranium, and other mineral resources, and thus became a close ally with of the Bozizé regime and remained a partner till today. Chad has common interests with the CAR regime in fighting rebel groups in the border areas in northeastern CAR and southeastern Chad. Like other neighbouring states and ECCAS members, Chad's primary interest is a stable situation in the CAR to prevent a spillover of the internal conflicts.¹¹⁰

With the first uprisings against the Bozizé regime, the CAR's neighbouring countries and ECCAS engaged in mediation attempts and supported the regime with the military missions FOMUC and MICOPAX. However, the one-sided support of the regime in both its military missions and mediation efforts failed to address the root causes of the civil unrest:

By primarily serving state interests and regime security FOMUC has not sufficiently addressed the population's needs and neglected human security. This failure creates new insecurities. It causes discontent, erodes confidence and credibility in the government, and thereby breeds civil unrest and rebellions. The pursuit of particular interests, state security and "sovereignty boosting," even if through a multinational operation, works against promoting self-sustaining security because it neglects the underlying causes of insecurity.¹¹¹

Ceasefire agreements with rebel groups were short-lived and violence in the CAR continues to erupt. Conflicts cannot be resolved if only one counterpart is addressed, which unfortunately is often the case as external actors are legally bound and limited to assist through state institutions. But in fragile states with corrupt leaders, the government's 'impact at the margins is minimal as most resources sink into heavily centralised bureaucracies.' This is the case in most of Central Africa's border areas where the state is 'not necessarily the most influential or legitimate' actor.¹¹²

Whereas the governments of the CAR's neighbouring states supported the Bozizé regime on a macro-level, cross-border relations between armed group factions in southeastern Chad or Darfur and northeastern CAR developed on a micro-level. Ethnic and linguistic links between different cross-border communities and criminal networks that developed with the illicit trade of diamonds and arms, strengthened the ties between Central African armed groups and rebel

¹¹⁰ Somerville.

¹¹¹ Meyer, 168.

¹¹² Conciliation Resources, "Preventing Conflict along Central Africa's Borders: Understanding Power at the Periphery," February, 2016, accessed June 12, 2018, <https://reliefweb.int/report/central-african-republic/preventing-conflict-along-central-africa-s-borders-understanding>

movements in neighbouring countries. Cross-border conflicts emerged with spillover from conflicts in Chad and Sudan to the northeast, and from the DRC and Uganda to the southwest of the CAR. Hence, much of the instability in the CAR also results from internal problems in neighbouring countries. The whole region of Central Africa has been unstable for decades, which had led to an extreme militarization, especially in the rural cross-border areas.

To conclude, geopolitical interests and regional dynamics in Central Africa had a strong influence on the evolution of conflicts in the CAR. France consistently interfered in the CAR's domestic politics and remains the most influential external actor in regard to the CAR government. However, focusing on peacebuilding through state institutions and backing the regimes in power failed, especially in rural areas. Regional instability led to cross-border conflicts in the CAR that spilt over from internal conflicts in neighbouring states. Hence, 'any peace settlement and any DDR-programmes should be designed as part of a comprehensive and regional strategy.'¹¹³ At the community level, the state plays a limited role and has virtually no influence in marginalized rural areas and cross-border communities. In these areas, a sustainable peace can only be reached with the integration of local grassroots and non-state actors.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ Marielle Debos, "Porous Borders and Fluid Loyalties: Patterns of Conflict in Darfur, Chad, and the CAR," *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, May 20, 2009, accessed June 08, 2018, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/porous-borders-and-fluid-loyalties-patterns-conflict-darfur-chad-and-car>

¹¹⁴ Conciliation Resources, "Preventing Conflict".

3. The Weaknesses of Past Peacebuilding Efforts

This chapter concentrates on assessing past and current peacebuilding efforts that have been undertaken to resolve conflict in the CAR. In the last chapter, several factors have been identified to be the main roots and drivers of current conflicts. As conflicts are still ongoing in the CAR, the following chapter evaluates why past peacebuilding efforts have failed to address these roots and conflict drivers. Analysing these, mainly top-down peacebuilding efforts such as international peacekeeping missions and mediation attempts as well as the gap in the implementation of peace agreements and the role of the national government points out several reasons why these efforts have failed to establish a sustainable peace. This analysis of past mistakes then provides the basis for the last chapter which made proposals as to how peacebuilding could prevent such mistakes in the future.

3.1. The Short-Lived Impact of Foreign Peacekeeping Missions

For good reasons, the CAR is known as a ‘world champion of peacekeeping missions’¹¹⁵ since 1997. Due to the relentless conflict, the regional and international communities have intervened with numerous peacekeeping and peacebuilding missions. Despite this endeavour, the conflict has now endured for years at a high level in some parts and at a low level in other parts of the country. It is argued that the various peace operations in the CAR ‘have lacked a clear political strategy and a clear understanding of the situation, as well as the necessary sustained engagement from both regional and international actors’.¹¹⁶ Certainly, the peacekeeping missions were important to prevent the worst in the CAR, but a closer look at the impact of these missions show that they have also created certain problems.

First, constantly intervening by deploying foreign (peacekeeping) troops to a country creates security-related dependency. In the CAR, civil conflicts already occurred before the first peacekeeping missions in the 1990s. As the analysis of the historical roots and current conflict drivers shows, the combination of fragile state structures and continuous intervention by the French and regional neighbours made it impossible for the CAR to stand on its own feet. Throughout history, political leaders of the CAR requested foreign intervention against social uprisings in the country. In the first decades after independence, the French continued to meddle in the CAR and were responsible for the three successful military coups in 1965, 1979,

¹¹⁵ AFP, 2014, in Carayannis/Lombard, 1.

¹¹⁶ Carayannis/ Fowles, 220-236.

and 1981. Then, the international monitoring missions MISAB and MINURCA and the regional peace operations FOMUC and MICOPAX were established and mainly strengthened the regimes of Ange-Félix Patassé and François Bozizé, who were both completely dependent on the support of foreign troops. President Touadéra, in his first year in office asked for a prolonging of Sangaris and MINUSCA in September 2016,¹¹⁷ and since then the situation has barely changed with the government still being dependent on peacekeeping forces.

Most military interventions and the deployments of peacekeeping troops were necessary for the CAR and probably did prevent mass killings on a larger scale. However, the dependency on foreign forces, owing to the absence of strong domestic security structures, is one reason for the instability in the CAR. The FACA is among the weakest militaries on earth while the country is full of armed rebel groups. The 2018 military strength index compiled by *GlobalFirepower* ranked the CAR military capacity 130th out of 136 countries. With active military personnel numbering only 5,825, few aircraft and ground force vehicles, and a defence budget of only 18,500,000 US dollars, these statistics show the weakness of the Central African Armed Forces.¹¹⁸ If the situation does not change, foreign peacekeeping soldiers will be doomed to stay in the CAR for even more decades.

More attention needs to be drawn to restructuring and reinforcing an independent, representative military. So far, equipment and capacity building for the FACA had little impact on the strength of the national security force. Malicious rumours have circulated in the CAR that such an empowerment would be against the interests of the countries who are involved in the lucrative business of peacekeeping in the CAR.¹¹⁹ The fact that the four countries, CAR, Burundi, Guinea Bissau, Sierra Leone, in which the UN spent the most money on peacekeeping missions continued to be conflict countries, may support this argument.¹²⁰ But peacekeeping missions are meant to provide aid in emergencies and should not constitute a long-term solution. ‘Only by building state capacity can the international community avoid repeating the failures of past peacekeeping missions.’¹²¹ In the case of the CAR, one problem is that the FACA mainly

¹¹⁷ United Nations, Department of Public Information, “At UN, Central African Republic President Outlines Country's Peace, Reconciliation Process,” September 22, 2017, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2017/09/566442-un-central-african-republic-president-outlines-countrys-peace-reconciliation>.

¹¹⁸ Global Firepower, „2018 Central African Republic Military Strength,” accessed August 3, 2018, https://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.asp?country_id=central-african-republic.

¹¹⁹ Djamel Babani, interview by author, Bangui, April 30, 2018.

¹²⁰ “A Look at 10 UN Peacekeeping Missions in Africa,” *Africa.com*, accessed August 15, 2018. <https://www.africa.com/look-10-un-peacekeeping-missions-africa/>.

¹²¹ Misha Boutilier, “Central African Republic: State Building Is the Only Way Forward,” *Geopolitical Monitor*, July 31, 2014, accessed August 03, 2018. <https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/central-african-republic-state-building-way-forward/>.

consist of Christians, which is why many Muslim rebel groups are reluctant to disarm and reintegrate its structures. In the long run, however, establishing a strong ethnically and religiously inclusive military should be a focus of the international peacebuilding missions, as well as that of the national decision-makers.

The second problem of past peacekeeping missions in the CAR was that they underestimated the extent of the conflict and lacked sufficient military capacity to respond to threats.¹²² The first response to the Séléka rebellion of 2012-2013, namely the AU-led MISCA, for example, was not able to prevent mass killings and displacements as they lacked the logistics to do so. Consequently, the UN took over control, but the transition from MISCA to MINUSCA was very confusing. The distribution of responsibilities and hierarchies was often unclear, and most soldiers lacked sufficient training to fulfil their responsibilities. The EU-training mission EUFOR RCA has a robust mandate but modest military strength with only 750 troops. The non-deployment of an EU Battle Group on this occasion was also deplored, as the situation seemed to ideally match the conditions for its use. But it seemed that the parallel Ukrainian crisis was accorded more priority. The primary goal, to stabilize the country and to ‘bridge’ until the greater UN-mission, MINUSCA, took over, was met.¹²³ However, human rights violations could not be prevented and today, ‘MINUSCA, comprising over 12,000 peacekeepers, has failed to compensate for the departure of the French Sangaris force in October 2016 and to exercise a real military deterrence against the armed groups.’¹²⁴ If northern groups descend again on to Bangui, MINUSCA would probably not be in a position to resist and could instead become an observer of another coup d’état and severe acts of violence.¹²⁵

The third problem of international interventions and peacekeeping missions is that – even under the united command of the UN – national interests often play a decisive role in the daily behaviour of troops. MINUSCA is also facing internal problems with troops being sent from different contributing countries performing different interests. The ‘Operation Sukula’, in which MINUSCA-troops entered the PK5-community on 8 April 2018 and tried to ‘neutralize’ the rebel group leader ‘Force’, constitutes one such clear example of how national interests prevented a MINUSCA-operation from being effective.¹²⁶ According to an anonymous

¹²² Carayannis/Fowlis.

¹²³ Tardy.

¹²⁴ International Crisis Group, “Avoiding the Worst”.

¹²⁵ Interview with a MINUSCA field officer, Bangui, April 5, 2018.

¹²⁶ “RCA : Opération De La Minusca Contre Un Groupe D'autodéfense Du PK5 à Bangui,” *RFI Afrique*, April 8, 2018, accessed August 3, 2018, <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20180408-rca-centrafrique-operation-minusca-onu-groupe-chef-general-force-pk5-bangui>; See also “SC Press Statement on Attack against MINUSCA,” SC/13291-PKO/724.

MINUSCA field officer, ‘Muslim majority countries refuse to shoot other Muslims although they might be armed group members. In Operation Sukula, Egyptian troops were a full 50 minutes late for the operation. Sudanese and Lebanese forces simply refused to shoot for the reasons discussed earlier. Then the Portuguese and Rwandese troops were caught into a crossfire.’¹²⁷ Similarly to these claims, previous peacekeeping missions have also shown that undeclared national caveats can lead to ineffective command and control of UN troops.

In a nutshell, intervention and peacekeeping missions are important in cases of emergency, but they are not unproblematic and should not be designed to stay for a long period. Peacekeeping, unlike peace enforcement, can only be done with the consent of the state authority.¹²⁸ Hence, the continuing presence of peacekeeping missions increases the dependency of the local government, which may create even more instability in a long term. International intervention and peacekeeping missions cannot address the root causes and drivers of a conflict. MINUSCA is still important for both the stabilization of the CAR and for (non-binding) political advising to the government, but it cannot create inclusion of ethnic and religious groups, nor create economic development, which is indispensable for a sustainable peace. In the long term, the impact of peacekeeping missions – without building up the capacity of the receiving state – is very small.

3.2. Mistakes in Mediation Between the Government and Armed Groups

‘The history of the CAR is littered with political mediation efforts – in 1997, 2003, 2007, 2008, 2013 and 2015’,¹²⁹ but none of them were really implemented and they could not prevent the 2013-2015 crisis. According to the famous theory of I. William Zartman, a conflict must be ‘ripe’ for mediation and resolution, namely when both belligerents come to an unavoidable stalemate.¹³⁰ Many mediators in the CAR struggled in the past because armed groups were not ready to give up fighting. Since 2015, the conflict should be ripe for mediation as both the government and the main armed groups want the dialogue. However, certain lessons from the past need to be drawn in order to prevent mistakes in the future.

Most of the former peace agreements, especially during the era of Bozizé’s rule between 2003 and 2013, lacked inclusivity and thus had to face a list of spoilers. The first mediated accords after several rebel group attacks on the FACA in the northeast of the CAR only included

¹²⁷ Interview with a MINUSCA field officer, Bangui, April 5, 2018.

¹²⁸ United Nations, “Principles of Peacekeeping”, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/principles-of-peacekeeping>.

¹²⁹ International Crisis Group, “Avoiding the Worst,” 22.

¹³⁰ I. William Zartman, *Ripe for Resolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

the three main rebel groups (APRD, FDPC, and UFDR)¹³¹ and could not prevent attacks from smaller splinter groups. As a result of the ongoing violence, many members the main rebel groups – despite being promised general amnesty – refused to disarm and reintegrate in the FACA. This cycle of violence and constant violations of the peace agreements caused a progressive loss of confidence in both the regime and the mediators and made it even more difficult to convince armed groups to conclude peace agreements. Moreover, many mediation efforts, especially the ones by the CAR's regional neighbours, were very supportive of the Bozizé government and mainly aimed for quick solutions before even starting the dialogue with armed groups. The concluded peace agreements then lacked agenda-setting ownership of the armed groups who were not included in the initial phase of the peace negotiations which took only place between the mediators and the government.

During the 2013-2015 crisis, the alarming situation prompted mediation by all three actors, the regional ECCAS, the AU, and the UN. However, the different interests of the external players led to interorganizational disputes among the mediators. In 2013, Michel Djotodia was doomed to be isolated by the AU but was accepted as head of state by ECCAS, who did not want another regime change. In 2015, Denis Sassou-Nguesso, the President of Congo-Brazzaville, organized a meeting for secret negotiations between Michel Djotodia and François Bozizé for a peace accord that also afforded both of them amnesty. The UN, however, was unaware of the meeting, 'which undermined the transitional government and the national dialogue process' as the UN Security Council considered the guarantee of amnesty for Michel Djotodia and François Bozizé to be destructive for the peace process.¹³²

Similarly, after 2015, uncoordinated parallel mediation efforts were launched by different actors. In 2017, the AU, together with regional militarily strong neighbours such as Angola and Chad, finally took the lead and organized a joint mediation initiative, which resulted in the 2017 *Libreville Roadmap for Peace and Reconciliation*. The Catholic Sant'Egidio Group also joined the table of mediators with the agreement of 19 June 2017, and the EU parallelly organized a Round Table on the CAR in Brussels on 21 June 2017. However, the cycle of violence on the ground prevented all these peace efforts from coming into effect. 'Divergent agendas, institutional rivalries, and differing approaches have led these various actors to propose remedies that [looked] at times contradictory, especially concerning amnesty of rebel leaders, the integration of combatants into the army or the return of former presidents [to their

¹³¹ See Table 6 (p. 44-45): Sirte and Birao, 2007; Libreville, 2008.

¹³² Laurie Nathan, "How to Manage Interorganizational Disputes over Mediation in Africa," *Global Governance*, v. 23 (2017), 154.

countries].¹³³ Now, the AU is preparing a new all-inclusive dialogue forum which should include even more rebel groups than the Bangui National Forum 2015.¹³⁴ But this new peace initiative can only be successful if all the international and regional mediating actors (UN, AU, EU, ECCAS) finally decide to coordinate their peace initiatives and step back from their entrenched national or regional interests.

Table 6: List of Peace Agreements Signed in the CAR between 2007 and 2017

DATE AND LOCATION	ACTORS INVOLVED	MAIN POINTS OF AGREEMENT
2.2.2007 SIRTE	Bozizé, Government, FCPC, UFDR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cessation of hostilities - FDPC+ UFDR integrated into the government - Liberation of prisoners - Return of refugees and IDPs - DDR: Rehabilitation and integration of FDPC & UFDR combatants into the FACA - General amnesty for FDPC and UFDR
1.4.2007 BIRAO	Government, UFDR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cessation of hostilities - UFDR in government - Liberation of prisoners - Rehabilitation and integration of UFDR combatants into the FACA - General amnesty for UFDR
21.6.2008 LIBREVILLE	Government, APRD, FDPC, UFDR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Immediate ceasefire - The principal of participation of APRD, FDPC, and UFDR after inclusive dialogue - Liberation of prisoners - DDR & dissolution of militia - General amnesty for APRD, FDPC, and UFDR except for ICC-relevant crimes
11.1.2013 LIBREVILLE	Most opposition politico-military groups + Séléka coalition (UFDR, CPJP, CPSK, UFR)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cessation of hostilities - National Unity Government of one year with Djotodia as prime minister - Withdrawal of the Séléka from occupied cities; Justice reform; Liberation of prisoners; Dissolution of militias
18.4.2013 DECLARATION OF N'DJAMENA	ECCAS summit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Transition fixed for 18 months with free elections within this period - Judiciary reform: Creation of a Constitutional Court to monitor the legality of laws during the transition period - Return of refugees and IDPs - DDR & Reorganization of defensive forces
7.11.2013 REPUBLICAN PACT OF BANGUI	President Djotodia, Prime Minister + President of the TNC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cessation of hostilities - Establishing a constructive dialogue - Return of refugees and IDPs - Disarmament of militias
23.7.2014 BRAZZAVILLE	The Belligerents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - An immediate end to all violence - Free movement; refusal of partition - Establishment of a follow-up Committee with: Politico-military groups + G8 + President + TNC + Government - Return of refugees and IDPs - DDR - No to impunity but without concrete modalities
8.4.2015 NAIROBI (NOT RECOGNIZED)	FRPC+ anti-balaka	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ceasefire for 72 hours & cessation of hostilities - Creation of a new transitional authority with all political and religious parties to revise the National Transitional Charter - DDR & Integration of combatants into the FACA with new hierarchies

¹³³ International Crisis Group, "Avoiding the Worst".

¹³⁴ Malika Grog-Bada, interview by author, via Skype, May 11, 2018.

11.5.2015 BANGUI NATIONAL FORUM	Government + Political parties + 11 politico-military groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Immediate implementation of the cessation of hostilities - Elections & Referendum - Constitution to have a statute for the ex-presidents - Muslim holiday - Return of refugees and IDPs - Introduction of a constitutional clause prohibiting the international crimes + Special Criminal Court (SCC) + International Penal Court (ICC)+ Tribunals - No amnesty for international war crimes; - Voluntary and immediate disarmament of politico-military groups
15.12.2016 BENGUELA, ANGOLA (NOT RECOGNIZED)	Ex-Sélékas Nourredine Adam; Zakaria, Mahamat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cessation of hostilities - Armed groups accept transforming into political parties - Armed groups appoint the PM and 30% of the ministers - Statute for ex-presidents - Return of refugees and IDPs - Justice: 1 year of Truth and reconciliation commission - no concrete modalities - Amnesty of war criminals as a political and judicial solution, end of sanctions, repentance for the perpetrators - DDR: 30% representation of armed groups in the FACA and 30% representation in political functions
JUNE 2017, SANT'EGIDIO AGREEMENT SIGNED IN ROME	Government + armed groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Immediate ceasefire for the purpose of the cessation of hostilities - Unity of the CAR - Transformation of politico-military groups to political parties - Respecting the result of the 2016 elections - Liberation of prisoners - Return of refugees and IDPs - Truth and reconciliation commission for 1 year + SCC+ICC+ presidential pardon - DDRR & integration of combatants into the FACA - Consultations to lift SC sanctions against those targeted
17.7.2017 LIBREVILLE	Government + AU + Groups affiliated to the DDRR process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ratifying decisions of the FNB, considering the Sant'Egidio agreement - Creating a facilitation panel under the AU - Return of refugees and IDPs - Transitional Justice & endogenous conflict resolution mechanisms - DDRR & integration of combatants into the FACA and political functions - No to impunity but no concrete modalities

Sources: Pierre Hazan, “Centrafrique: dix ans, une douzaine d’accords de paix jamais appliqués,” *Justice Info*, September 20, 2017, http://www.justiceinfo.net/media/k2/attachments/RCA/VF-Centrafrique-tableau_accords.pdf; and relevant peace agreements (see Appendix A: Primary Sources).

Out of all these mediation efforts, the Bangui National Forum of 2015 was the most successful so far. Due to the inclusion of a large number of belligerent parties, namely the government, all political parties, and eleven politico-military groups, a constructive dialogue was held and provided the basis for the drafting of the constitution, which was approved by referendum on 15 December 2015. The constitution bears much resemblance to the constitution of the Fifth French Republic and prepared the way for the presidential elections on 14 February 2016. Despite the democratic achievement of free and fair universal suffrage, the current elected government is still lacking inclusivity, and thus large parts of the Muslim population accuse the government of taking the side of anti-balaka militias.¹³⁵ Inclusivity, however, stands as a key element for a government to ensure a sustainable peace. In this regard, a proportional electoral

¹³⁵ Djamel Babani, interview by author, Bangui, April 30, 2018.

system could very well be the solution to ensure equal representation of all ethnic and religious groups in the CAR's political system.

While the government – inclusive or not – is still the easiest party to address in peace negotiations, past mediators struggled to deal with the numerous and disorderly armed groups. The DRR-process was not entirely successful because armed groups constantly demanded too much. They all wanted amnesty like the main rebel groups were granted in three peace accords during General Bozizé's rule.¹³⁶ But the results of these agreements in the run-up to the 2013-2015 crisis showed that amnesty is counterproductive and often leads to an increase in armed group violence as there is no punishment inflicted upon them. Now amnesty is trying to be avoided by mediators, but armed groups continue to ask for it.¹³⁷ Hence, mediators are facing not total but greedy spoilers to any peace negotiations and need to find a way to incentivise armed groups to step back from their high demands and to be ready to make concessions. Enticing as they may appear first, financial rewards by the CAR government and regional neighbouring states as instruments to bring armed groups on the negotiation table only strengthen armed groups in their position and does not reduce the existence of rebel groups.

Another recurrent mistake that has been made in past mediation efforts is that they focused solely on conflicts between ex-Séléka and anti-balaka factions. However, most of the present skirmishes are both inter-community and cross-border conflicts at the local level, as the International Crisis Group reports:

The sometimes conflictual relationships between communities evident in the north and east have received no attention. So, the confrontations between Gula and Runga or, more recently, between the UPC Fulanis and the other ex-Seleka factions are neglected. If the negotiations that lie ahead are to tackle the sources of instability, they need to take account of such “north-north” or “east-east” relations.¹³⁸

Stability at the local level, however, is a key issue related to resolving conflicts in the CAR. Within most communities, the state plays a limited role and people only follow the rules of local grassroots leaders. In such often marginalized areas and cross-border communities, a sustainable peace can only be reached with the integration of local grassroots and non-government actors in the peacebuilding process.¹³⁹ Here, local religious community leaders could play an important role if included in future peacebuilding initiatives.

¹³⁶ See Table 6 (p. 44-45): Sirte and Birao, 2007; Libreville, 2008.

¹³⁷ International Crisis Group, “Avoiding the Worst”.

¹³⁸ *Ibid*, 23.

¹³⁹ Conciliation Resources, “Preventing Conflict”.

3.3. Gaps in the Implementation of Peace Agreements

A report of the *Center For International Security and Cooperation Stanford University*, based on literature on peacemaking in civil wars, suggests that the implementation of peace agreements often depends on whether an agreement already existed before a foreign intervention and whether belligerents were coerced into signing a peace agreement or if they are voluntarily ready to do so. The researchers further argue that rather than having no peace agreement between conflicting parties, it is better to have a coerced agreement, because ‘the absence of a peace agreement implies a lack of problem-solving, trust, and confidence-building among the warring factions, thus producing a more difficult implementation environment’.¹⁴⁰ This may certainly be true, but if the case of the CAR is showing anything, it is that when a peace agreement is signed, the peace process is still far from being completed, as mere signatures do not necessarily entail implementation. As many as twelve peace agreements have been signed in the CAR in the last ten years, but most measures have yet to be implemented in order to end the ongoing conflicts.

One major reason for the lack of implementation of most peace agreements concluded in the CAR is that they only involved the top-level leadership of the rebel groups. Rebel group structures, however, are not always entirely hierarchical and a concluded agreement by the top-leaders of a rebel group does not mean that all members agree to it and follow the orders of their leaders. In the past, rebel group leaders were only prone to engage in peace negotiations because they were promised certain privileges such as amnesty or political participation. The rest of the rebel group, however, did not profit from the peace agreements and thus refused to adhere to them. The Séléka alliance, for example, was officially disbanded soon after Michel Djotodia’s seizure of power in 2013. However, most rebel fighters refused to disarm, and numerous splinter groups emerged.

There could be at least three main reasons why so many rebel group members refuse to disarm and continue fighting in the CAR. First, there are hardly any lucrative alternatives to being part of a rebel group due to the CAR’s economic underdevelopment, a nation where 76% of the population live in extreme poverty.¹⁴¹ Hence, many rebel group fighters refuse to disarm for economic reasons as fighting for an armed group is their only possible source of income. Secondly, exiting an armed group is often dangerous, as it might mean to becoming an enemy

¹⁴⁰ Stephen J Stedman, “Implementing Peace Agreements in Civil Wars: Lessons and Recommendations for Policymakers,” *International Peace Academy*, Center For International Security and Cooperation, Stanford University, May 2001, New York.

¹⁴¹ World Bank, s.v. “Central African Republic”.

of both the armed group and those who fear them.¹⁴² Once in the cycle of violence, it can have deadly consequences to exit it. The third reason is the unresolved hatred between different rebel factions, of which much is still outwardly defined by their religious group identity. Whether it is between anti-balaka and ex-Séléka factions or between any other rebel group and the government, as long as belligerents continue to hate each other, a ceasefire agreement is ineffective and not going to last for long.¹⁴³ As the Symbolic Politics Theory suggests, reconciliation and public education efforts, such as media campaigns and problem-solving workshops to combat hate speeches, are among the only long-term measures to successfully prevent conflict.¹⁴⁴ These measures must be done at both state and community levels in order to successfully implement peace. In addition to that, creating economic incentives to disarm and stop fighting is indispensable. Much money coming from international donors will still be needed to give carrots ('cash for work')¹⁴⁵ and parallelly wave sticks in front of armed groups in order to convince them to put down their arms.

As discussed, the 2015 Bangui National Forum was a very important step towards peace implementation. One of the reasons why it was so successful was that the inclusive dialogue forum not only included the main ex-Séléka armed groups but comprised 11 politico-military groups who were also willing to negotiate. Wide inclusion is certainly the key to successful peacebuilding. However, there are hundreds of splinter groups and smaller local militias in the CAR, an inclusive dialogue with every single one of them is practically impossible. Hence, peacebuilding and mediation efforts should be done at two levels, at the political level including the top-leaders of the armed groups and the national government, and at the community level including influential grassroots leaders and significant local defence militias. At a political level, the AU is currently planning another inclusive dialogue forum which could comprise even more armed groups than the 11 who took part in 2015. Many armed groups have understood the necessity to stop fighting and they are ready to negotiate. However, as we all are aware, any negotiation can only be successful if the cycle of violence is ended at a community level.

The current stalemate presents the opportunity for peacebuilding within the communities. In the last three years, more than 300 voluntary-led *Local Peace Committees* (LPCs) have

¹⁴² Conciliation Resources, "If I Stay I Am Safe: Voices of Armed Groups in the Central African Republic," July 5, 2018, accessed August 05, 2018, <http://www.c-r.org/news-and-views/comment/if-i-stay-i-am-safe-voices-armed-groups-central-african-republic>.

¹⁴³ Germain.

¹⁴⁴ Kaufman.

¹⁴⁵ Malika Grog-Bada, interview by author, via Skype, May 11, 2018.

grown from grassroots dynamics and gain financial support by the local Ministry of Social Affairs and National Reconciliation, UNDP, and several other international organizations.¹⁴⁶ They focus on conflict sensitization and try to mediate between communities and armed groups.¹⁴⁷ In some communities, this worked well and the LPCs gained enough confidence to be respected as mediators between the local population and the armed groups. In other communities, however, the LPCs are perceived to be affiliated with the CAR government and MINUSCA,¹⁴⁸ which makes it impossible to gain the trust of the local population and especially the armed groups. In such areas, such as Bangui's problematic communities PK5, Fatima, and Kokoro, the only ones who are still seen as credible authorities are religious leaders.¹⁴⁹

3.4. Lack of Financial Resources, Confidence in, and Commitment by the Government

Another reason why the past peacebuilding process is not reaching out to all parts of the country owes to the weak role of the national government. The latest concluded peace agreements, starting with the Bangui National Forum of 2015 and continuing with the Sant'Egidio and the Libreville agreement of 2017, contain a wide range of issues, and many ambitious provisions demand much (financial) effort by the government. Those agreements include the redeployment of civil servants, the restoration of basic services, the return of refugees and IDPs, DDRR and integration of combatants into the FACA, as well as transitional justice with a truth and reconciliation commission and national economic development programmes.¹⁵⁰ Most of these agreed provisions, however, have not been fully implemented because the government either did not have the political will or lacked the financial resources and the institutional capacity to do so.

As a major example for the apparent lack of commitment by the CAR government, little has been done to ensure social cohesion and to prevent future group polarizations that had triggered the numerous crises in the CAR's history. Media often characterize armed groups as 'mercenaries' and categorize them after their religious affiliations, which is a big mistake from a psychological standpoint. The state should intervene and prevent the use of amalgamations and hate speech that incites prejudice, violence, and social division. Strong messages by the government are needed to combat this development and to educate people, especially through

¹⁴⁶ Malika Grog-Bada, interview by author, via Skype, May 11, 2018; Conciliation Resources, "If I Stay".

¹⁴⁷ See chapter 3.2 (p. 55) for more details about the LPCs.

¹⁴⁸ Djamel Babani, interview by author, Bangui, April 30, 2018.

¹⁴⁹ Malika Grog-Bada, interview by author, via Skype, May 11, 2018.

¹⁵⁰ See Table 6 (p. 43-44): Bangui National Forum, 2015; Sant'Egidio and Libreville, 2017.

training journalists, who often lack education and do not have the sensitivity and skills needed for their important role. More efforts are needed which focus on clearly stating that all citizens are Central Africans, ‘regardless of ethnic identity or religious beliefs’.¹⁵¹ Although the parties agreed to ‘stopping all forms of propaganda and hate speech which creates division along ethnic, tribal, or partisan lines’¹⁵² as part of the cessation of hostilities, the past years showed that written agreements do not necessarily ensure the commitment to implementation.

The educational system could present the key to prevent future group polarizations and ensure social cohesion in the long run. The government needs to foster an appropriate educational system from primary to secondary and to university levels in which youth is taught to accept each other in the school environment and through the teaching of well-designed curricula. Unfortunately, the mutual understanding of different ethnic and religious groups has not yet been strengthened enough by the government, and discrimination both among students and on behalf of teachers still exists in many schools.¹⁵³ Moreover, the educational system of the CAR, like in most sub-Saharan African countries, does not instil on their learners, the wish to study *local* realities and to solve *local* problems. Many teachers lecture about far away land and illusionary paradises, which incites people to emigrate rather than solving problems in their own country. However, a restructured, well-managed educational system increases the population’s self-responsibility and thus creates independence from foreign actors.

The lack and poor use of available financial resources by the government presents the second reason why peace agreements could not be implemented. Measures such as establishing national development programmes and labour-intensive projects for ex-combatants and youth, or organizing technical training courses, were promised in the most recent peace agreements.¹⁵⁴ However, all these ambitious intentions saw limited implementation. Peace agreements must be more realistic in regard to the terms of implementation, taking into account both the (still) weak authority and the lack of financial resources of the government. Clear indicators are needed to be able to monitor the implementation of certain provisions. Then investment must be done in a sensible way depending on these indicators. The CAR government will continue to need financial assistance, ‘but all contributions need to be used in a reasonable manner with

¹⁵¹ Picco.

¹⁵² “Accord de cessation des hostilités en République Centrafricaine,” Brazzaville, July 23, 2014.

¹⁵³ Aboubakar Moukadas-Noure, interview by author, Bangui, May 3, 2018.

¹⁵⁴ “‘Entente de Sant’Egidio’: Accord politique pour la paix en République Centrafricaine,” Rome, July 17, 2017.

a commitment of donors for at least three years, which was not the case in the follow-up of the Bangui National Forum.’¹⁵⁵

The third reason why the government struggles to implement many provisions of the concluded peace agreements is because of the lack of trust by both armed groups and large parts of the population after years of political mismanagement. When taking office in 2016, the newly elected president Touadéra announced that he would focus on two things: establishing justice and continue disarmament of rebel groups. However, ‘the state lacks the institutional capacity to enforce justice and the rule of law’.¹⁵⁶ The UN War Crimes Court has now started a probe in the CAR and a hybrid Special Criminal Court was established.¹⁵⁷ These war crimes courts may contribute to justice, but this can be counterproductive for ensuring reconciliation between the warring parties. Moreover, the allegations of sexual abuse by international peacekeeping soldiers which remained without convictions,¹⁵⁸ additionally lowers the trust of the population for any judicial system in which the UN is involved. So far, the problem of large impunity for war criminals has not yet been tackled with clear modalities and people have already lost much confidence in both the current government and international peacebuilding actors. Similarly, the DDRR process has not produced many results so far beyond collecting small weapons and offering a few months of work to participants. The continuation of violence and the lack of confidence in the government by most armed groups makes the DDRR process nearly impossible.

In short, the CAR government still struggles to implement peace due to a lack of commitment, financial resources, and confidence of the people. The DDRR process is hindered by the continued cycle of violence, the security vacuum, and the lack of (economic) incentives for smaller armed groups and local militias to lay down their arms. The past peacebuilding process has shown that agreements were made between the government and the top leaders of the main armed groups but failed to reach out to the majority of the population. The concluded peace agreements do not include the grassroots and middle-range leaders, and thus do not get implemented in most communities, as illustrated in Figure 4. Hence, future peacebuilding efforts ‘need to diversify their national partners for peace and use their leverage to force the country’s leadership to step up.’¹⁵⁹ Integrating grassroots actors and religious leaders in the

¹⁵⁵ Malika Grog-Bada, interview by author, via Skype, May 11, 2018.

¹⁵⁶ Barbelet.

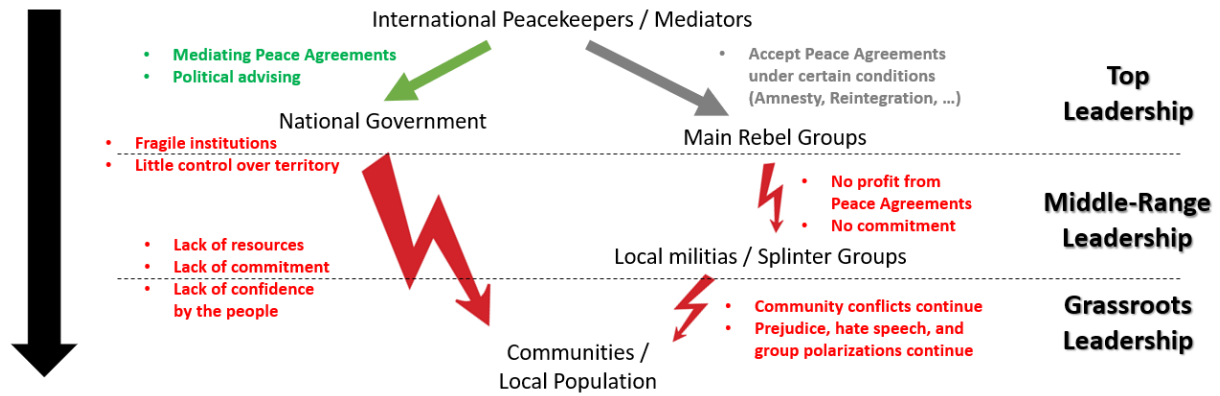
¹⁵⁷ “War Crimes Court to Start Probe in Central African Republic: UN,” *Africanews*, May 29, 2018, accessed August 8, <http://www.africanews.com/2018/05/29/war-crimes-court-to-start-probe-in-central-african-republic-un//>.

¹⁵⁸ See chapter 1.5 (p. 21) for more details about the sexual abuse cases.

¹⁵⁹ Picco.

peacebuilding process could constitute such a form of diversification, which would make peacebuilding efforts less dependent on the CAR government and, in parallel, could help address the armed groups problem at the community level.

Figure 4: The Weaknesses of Past Peacebuilding Efforts



Source: Author, 2018.

4. The Impact of Local Religious Leaders in Peacebuilding

The following case study provides closer insight into the role of local religious community leaders in peacebuilding. This involves the role of religious leaders as first responders during the 2013-2015 crisis, the impact of interreligious dialogue initiatives, as well as the potential of religious leaders in promoting the implementation of peace agreements and the DDRR process. Then, combining the information of the last chapter on the weaknesses of past peacebuilding efforts with the potential of religious leaders helps to answer the question of how religious leaders could be further involved to improve the current peacebuilding process. The result of this case study supplies useful policy recommendations to peacebuilding actors.

4.1. The Role of Local Religious Leaders during the Crisis

Religious leaders were one of the ‘first responders’¹⁶⁰ to the beginning of religious-based attacks in 2012 and played an essential role in protecting civilians during the entire 2013-2015 crisis. Not only did they provide shelter and a place to hide, but also engaged in offering ‘food, water, and health services, and in one instance helping in the safe evacuation of communities at risk.’¹⁶¹ In addition to supplying internally displaced people with basic needs, religious leaders also stepped up during the crisis and mediated with armed groups in order to protect civilians from violent attacks – regardless of their religious affiliation.

In provincial towns some priests have acted as *ad hoc* mediators in order to protect Muslim communities under siege. These spontaneous mediation initiatives resulted from the fact that Muslims persecuted by anti-balaka often sought refuge near or in churches. Priests found themselves involved in the conflict and became natural mediators in the enclaves where Muslims were and still are surrounded by anti-balaka groups and a hostile population (e.g. Bouar, Boda, Yaloké). At the peak of the anti-Muslim violence in early 2014, some local priests were able to provide assistance to Muslims in jeopardy and protect them from the anti-balaka’s rage.¹⁶²

In almost all parts of the country, local religious leaders continued to engage in the conflict. They were one of the few actors who were there to help from the beginning until the end of the crisis and thus became respected moral authorities and symbols for continuity, unlike many international actors or transitional government authorities who only started to engage in peacebuilding during or towards the end of the 2013-2015 crisis.

¹⁶⁰ Barbelet, 9.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Conciliation Resources, “Analysis of Peacebuilding”.

In December 2012, both Christian and Muslim religious leaders from various communities met to discuss their possible contribution to reduce tensions and mitigate the upcoming conflict. As a result, the heads of the three main religious communities in the CAR, Imam Omar Kobine Layama, the Catholic archbishop and now Cardinal Dieudonné Nzapalainga and Reverend Nicolas Guerekoyame-Gbangou of the Protestant faith community, created the *Platform of Religious Confessions of the Central African Republic* (PCRC, or ‘Interreligious Platform’) to promote interreligious dialogue as well as social cohesion and peaceful coexistence of the three main religious communities.¹⁶³ During the crisis, this Interreligious Platform became a crucial organ to counter religious-based violence by conveying messages of peace and tolerance in order to ease tensions among different faith groups and to denounce the instrumentalization of religion in the politico-military crisis. In the CAR, where people are generally very religious, these peace messages had an important impact on containing the population after violent attacks in order to avoid other escalations of violence. At the community level, ‘the Interreligious Platform has created spaces for dialogue within and between communities, reaching more than 200 religious and community leaders.’¹⁶⁴

Soon during the conflict, the Interreligious Platform gained recognition at an international level. Cardinal Dieudonné Nzapalainga and Imam Omar Kobine Layama were among the first to address the international community to intervene with a peacebuilding mission and lobbied for international support by writing articles for international newspapers¹⁶⁵ They also took part in discussions hosted by international think tanks.¹⁶⁶ These advocacy efforts from the heads of the Interreligious Platform are believed to have triggered the discussions within the UN Security Council which in the end led to the deployment of MINUSCA with a more robust mandate than the former AU-led peacekeeping mission MISCA. Moreover, the engagement of the three main religious leaders ‘played a major lobbying role in the CAR and abroad to put reconciliation high on the agenda of the transitional government and international actors (EU, UN, France, USA).’¹⁶⁷ As a symbol for their international appreciation and recognition, all three top religious leaders were voted among the 100 most influential people in the world in 2014 by the

¹⁶³ Conciliation Resources, “Analysis of Peacebuilding,” 21.

¹⁶⁴ Neal, 2014, in Barbelet, 2015, 9.

¹⁶⁵ Omar K. Layama, and Dieudonné Nzapalainga, “Central African Republic Needs International Help before It Succumbs to Religious War,” *The Washington Post*, December 27, 2013, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/central-african-republic-needs-international-help-before-it-succumbs-to-religious-war/2013/12/27/2b850a48-6e4a-11e3-aecc-85cb037b7236_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.b1c08e23939c.

¹⁶⁶ Chatham House, “Conflict in the CAR: Religion, Power and Prospects for Reconciliation,” January 27, 2014, accessed August 10, 2018, https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/home/chatham/public_html/sites/default/files/270114CAR.pdf.

¹⁶⁷ Conciliation Resources, “Analysis of Peacebuilding,” 21.

US-based *Time* magazine.¹⁶⁸ Moreover, in 2015, they were awarded the UN Peace Prize and the Aix-la-Chapelle Peace Prize for launching the PCRC and their efforts to establish peace in the CAR.¹⁶⁹

4.2. Trust, Proximity, and Influence: The Large Potential of Religious Leaders

Due to their significant role during the 2013-2015 crisis, religious leaders established their role as credible and moral authorities in the CAR. Their impact on people in promoting peaceful coexistence still is of high importance. Religious leaders continued to spread messages of peace to ease tensions after every major armed group attack. For example, during the Fatima Church Attack on 1 May 2018,¹⁷⁰ Cardinal Nzapalainga and Imam Layama reacted quickly and issued a joint statement, which on the same day was broadcasted on the nation-wide radio, to hold back the population from committing additional acts of retaliation against innocent civilians. It is certainly difficult to measure such preventive actions, but according to local civilians, these messages do have a crucial impact on the behaviour of people.¹⁷¹ The advantage of religious leaders is that they never gave up their positive actions for the CAR and continued to remain engaged for peacemaking during and beyond the 2013-2015 crisis. Hence, the vast majority of the local population continues to trust and respect them, which is why religious leaders have more influence on the local population than any other peacebuilding actor.

The influence of religious leaders is an important tool that can be used for peacebuilding efforts. Due to their established trust and respect, people tend to listen to them and follow the messages and the teachings of religious leaders. Not only civilians but also armed group members and local defence militias listen to their respected local religious leaders. Hence, their peace efforts tend to be much more effective than those of most other actors, because their leadership is perceived as more legitimate by both the local population and the local armed groups. Several studies, which include interviews with the local population, reveal that in event of a crisis, people considered that ‘religious leaders had the legitimacy to intervene and calm down the situation, but that the *chefs de quartiers* did not. The latter are tainted in the eyes of the public because they are seen as either corrupt or as the representatives of the government of

¹⁶⁸ Jim Wallis, “Imam Omar Kobine Layama, Archbishop Dieudonné Nzapalainga and The Rev. Nicolas Guérékoyame-Gbangou,” *Time*, April 23, 2014, accessed August 10, 2018, <http://time.com/collection-post/70894/nicolas-guerekoyame-gbangou-2014-time-100/>.

¹⁶⁹ Yakoubou.

¹⁷⁰ See chapter 1.5 (p. 19-20) for more details about the Fatima Church Attack.

¹⁷¹ Djamel Babani, interview by author, Bangui, April 30, 2018.

the day.¹⁷² Especially in the CAR, a country that has experienced political instability throughout its history, actors such as religious leaders seem to command much more influence than national government authorities or international actors. They enjoy better access to the people and can therefore directly confront violence based on religious identity.

At the community level, religious leaders have become key figures in supporting and participating in the Local Peace Committees (LPCs), which try to mediate in community conflicts. Not only do religious leaders participate in already existing LPCs, the PCRC, with the support of the government, has also taken the initiative and established new LPCs in 6 out of 7 districts of Bangui and are currently being established in the 16 prefectures. The LPC members are trained in early warning and awareness-raising techniques, to prevent inter-community conflict and alert the competent authorities of the risks of escalation of violence. They are formed by members of the three religious denominations and are advocates for tolerance and diversity.¹⁷³

Many of the LPCs are dependent on funding from the local Ministry of Social Affairs and National Reconciliation, UNDP, and other international organizations. This is sometimes problematic because a majority of LPCs only started to exist *after* the crisis when the international community and the national government started to fund peacebuilding. Hence, these LPCs which are sponsored by the government or foreign actors are often perceived to act in the interests of their donors. Religious leaders, and namely the Interreligious Platform, however, started to engage in peacebuilding in the beginning of the conflict and are perceived to be more independent from international actors, meaning that they are likely to continue their work well beyond the period of external aid. In this regard, the participation of local religious leaders in the LPCs is even more important, because they are seen as neutral and unbiased, and have much trust and influence among the local population. International actors who also include religious leaders in peacebuilding initiatives can benefit to a large extent from their participation. For example, many LPCs funded and supported by the UNDP work together with local religious community leaders in Bangui, Bambari, Bangassou, and Damarra, and also organized workshops together with the RCPC. Due to their inclusion of influential religious leaders, the impact of the UNDP funded LPCs increased significantly.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷² Conciliation Resources, "Analysis of Peacebuilding," 22.

¹⁷³ Yakoubou.

¹⁷⁴ Malika Grogga-Bada, interview by author, via Skype, May 11, 2018.

Bearing in mind their large impact, it also has to be mentioned that this key role of religious leaders can sometimes also be problematic. As such, it should nevertheless be indicated that some religious leaders have also taken sides during the conflict and sometimes regarded the humanitarian needs of their own faith community as more important than the needs of people from other religious denominations. Moreover, political interests can impact on the religious leader's neutrality. Some humanitarian organizations did not support local religious and community leaders because they had to follow the humanitarian principle of systematically targeting the most vulnerable, which was not ensured when religious and community leaders asked for help for their own faith communities.¹⁷⁵ As a solution to this problem, it is essential that the Interreligious Platform has a strong institutional structure with checks and balances in order to ensure that religious leaders contribute to peacebuilding with goodwill and in a neutral, unbiased way. To ensure that, the composition of the platform comprised of one Catholic, one Protestant, and one Muslim representative is ideal for guaranteeing unbiased, neutral work by local religious leaders.

In order to strengthen its effects outside of the capital Bangui, the Interreligious Platform is currently creating sub-divisions of the Platform in all the 16 prefectures of the CAR. These sub-divisions should follow the original model and be created with the same structure as the top level of the Platform, meaning it is comprised of one Catholic, one Protestant, and one Muslim representative. On the one hand, these sub-divisions are intended to increase the Platforms' visibility and proximity to the local population living outside of Bangui.¹⁷⁶ On the other hand, this structure of one representative of each major faith community ensures the necessary checks and balances, which guarantees the platform's neutrality. Moreover, an increased country-wide institutional capacity and its local outreach will improve the PCRC's work in supporting the LPCs and other grassroots actors. Hence, with this strengthened Interreligious Platform as an umbrella organization, local religious leaders will become even more important players to be integrated into both bottom-up and top-down peacebuilding initiatives.

¹⁷⁵ Conciliation Resources, "Analysis of Peacebuilding".

¹⁷⁶ Isaac Jean Michel Service, interview by author, May 2, 2018.

4.3. The Impact of Intercommunity and Interreligious Dialogue Initiatives

Creating dialogue mechanisms and measures to ensure peaceful coexistence are essential for successful conflict resolution and preventive peacebuilding initiatives. As the detailed analysis of the roots and drivers of the CAR conflict reveal,¹⁷⁷ the nature of the conflicts has become very complex in the last decades, and then often a combination of various factors constitutes the basis of different nation-wide and community conflicts. This development requires sustainable conflict resolution mechanisms that must include mediation and dialogue capacities at both local and national levels. ‘Resilient societies are characterized by capacities for dialogue, mediation, and inclusive decision-making that prevent the escalation of violent conflict and enhance peacebuilding processes.’¹⁷⁸

In the CAR, the deliberate instrumentalization of religion and constructed group polarizations made religious identity one of the main factors driving violence. Hence, dialogue mechanisms and other initiatives fostering peaceful coexistence of religious communities are of vital importance in order to resolve conflicts at both the national and the community level. Religious leaders have a particularly critical and crucial role to ensure peaceful coexistence and social cohesion. On the one hand, they can act as role models and promote religious tolerance, and on the other hand, they can actively involve the local population by, for example, organizing ‘ecumenical prayers and joint celebrations of Christian and Muslim festivals as symbols of the imperative and value of religious tolerance.’¹⁷⁹ Especially through sports and other cultural events, wide segments of the population, in particular youth, can be engaged to promote peaceful coexistence through interreligious group activities.¹⁸⁰ Such events as well as organising social cohesion workshops are essential to create vitally important spaces for dialogue within communities and prevent conflicts over a long term.

The engagement of religious leaders in facilitating intercommunity dialogue in the CAR has resulted in the resolution of various community disputes in the past as in the following example of the engagement of Cardinal Dieudonné Nzapalainga in the facilitation of intercommunity dialogue in Yakolé, a town located at 200 kilometres north east of Bangui:

After the Anti-Balaka’s acts of violence, local Muslim peoples were confined to the city IDP camp, suffering restrictions to their freedom of movement. Thanks to the mediation of Cardinal Nzapalainga, a space of dialogue was created. The InovaRCA team [, an international

¹⁷⁷ See chapter 2.

¹⁷⁸ UNDP, “Dialogue and Mediation,” Accessed August 13, 2018, <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/democratic-governance-and-peacebuilding/conflict-prevention/dialogue---mediation.html>.

¹⁷⁹ Conciliation Resources, “Analysis of Peacebuilding,” 21.

¹⁸⁰ Yakoubou.

organization,] worked to facilitate dialogue between Christians and Muslim Peulhs. An LPC was put in place to continue raising awareness and ensure early warning regarding violence. Today, the IDPs have become residents of Yaloké and the camp has dissolved. While mistrust and stigmatization are still a reality, Muslims are able to circulate and can practice their trade in a relatively peaceful environment.¹⁸¹

Such examples show that religious leaders have indeed a huge potential in mediating between religious groups as they have better access to grassroots leaders and thus can directly promote mutual understanding between religious groups.

In addition to mediating and facilitating intercommunity conflicts, religious leaders also launched interreligious dialogue initiatives to further promote religious tolerance and thus prevent conflicts over the long term. Interreligious dialogue initiatives are extremely important to show that the CAR crisis did not start as a religious conflict but was the consequence of years of group polarizations and political leaders using religion as an instrument to pursue selfish political interests. Therefore, there is a strong need for dialogue between Christians and Muslims to denounce these false perceptions. Moreover, interreligious dialogue efforts, in which religious differences are discussed on a neutral basis, must be used to strengthen the understanding and appreciation of religious differences. This form of dialogue must be encouraged on a political level, in the educational system, on a community level, as well as in media workshops to combat longstanding narratives, prejudices, hate speech, and constructed misunderstanding between different religious groups.

4.4. Possibilities to Further Involve Religious Leaders in the Peacebuilding Process¹⁸²

Due to their great influence on the population in the CAR, local religious leaders can play a key role in facilitating the implementation of peace agreements and the DDRR process, given weak institutions and absence of the State in large areas of the national territory. For this very reason, in December 2017, religious leaders participated in a round table discussion in Dakar, Senegal, in which further possibilities to promote the peace process and national reconciliation in the CAR were thoroughly discussed. The adopted action plan of this Round Table provided useful information on the potential of religious leaders and the Interreligious Platform to facilitate the

¹⁸¹ Yakoubou.

¹⁸² Some information for this chapter draws from the “Religious and Community Leaders Plan of Action to Promote Peace & National Reconciliation in the Central African Republic”, which was adopted during a KAICIID organized Round Table held in Dakar, Senegal, on 8-11 December 2017.

implementation of peace agreements, which subsequently indicates possibilities to further integrate religious leaders in the peacebuilding process. Four main reasons were put forward:

First, religious leaders can contribute to the population's sensitization on intercommunal coexistence and create ownership to strengthen the bottom-up peace process.

As such, hate speech and religious-based discrimination can be countered through TV and radio show programs aimed at promoting reconciliation, intercommunal coexistence, and social cohesion. Moreover, the Interreligious Platform agreed to organize awareness-raising campaigns and interreligious dialogue initiatives to promote peaceful coexistence and mutual understanding in order to increase the ownership of the peace agreements and to facilitate the return of refugees and IDPs. Furthermore, sermons and lectures in the churches and mosques further provide an excellent opportunity to promote peace, coexistence, and the national constitution in the local Sango language, which is more accessible to the local population, and youth in particular, than official statements issued in French in a mainly Sango-speaking environment by national government representatives.

Secondly, religious leaders can participate and promote top-down peacebuilding initiatives which involve the national government. Together with the CAR government, religious leaders can launch joint advocacy efforts to promote the implementation of peace agreements. As such, they can advocate the equal celebration and media coverage of all religious holidays, monitor DDRR and development programmes, identify priority areas for investment in all regions, monitor the observance of ceasefire agreements, ensure the respect for equal representation and access to public services for all ethnic and religious groups, and be involved in future Truth, Justice, Reparation, and Reconciliation Commissions in the form of Interreligious Committees. Moreover, religious leaders can be further involved in the LPCs and assist the government in restoring its authority over the national territory. The involvement of religious leaders would strengthen the national government's credibility and moral authority, and create better access to the entire population.

Thirdly, religious leaders can take advantage of their better access to armed groups to plead for ceasefires and surrender of weapons. During the 2013-2015 crisis, they contributed to the establishment of a mechanism for continuing dialogue with the armed groups to monitor the implementation of ceasefire agreements and engage in dialogue with the latter to facilitate the return of refugees and IDPs. Furthermore, through facilitating dialogue and the building of trust-relations between armed groups, religious leaders can encourage armed group members to partake in the DDRR process and return to civil life. In symbiosis with the government and

MINUSCA, religious leaders can also support the identification of the persons eligible to participate in the disarmament process. The involvement of religious leaders in the dialogue with armed groups can immensely facilitate the mediation efforts of both the government and international mediators, who often do not enjoy the confidence and trust of the armed groups. Moreover, including religious leaders in the Local Peace Committees can help in the resolution of conflicts between armed groups and local defence militias.

Fourthly, religious leaders, especially in form of the Interreligious Platform, can constitute an unbiased, reliable source of information for the national government, international actors, and local media. During the crisis, religious leaders warned NGOs of potential attacks and knew where displacement was taking place.¹⁸³ Due to their role as first responders who also provided shelter to many people, religious leaders had a good overview of the number of genuinely displaced people and the nature of their exact needs. ‘In Bangui, faith-based actors functioned as an early warning system by providing international humanitarian organisations with IDP numbers and needs in their sites.’¹⁸⁴ Hence, religious leaders should be heard by the international community as they are important sources of information and thus represent reliable early-warning systems (EWS) in case of violent attacks. Similarly, religious leaders can represent a source of trustworthy information for media. Unlike many other local sources of media, the interreligious platform with members from all the three main religious denominations constitutes an unbiased source of information when reporting about rebel group clashes and attacks involving a certain number of casualties.

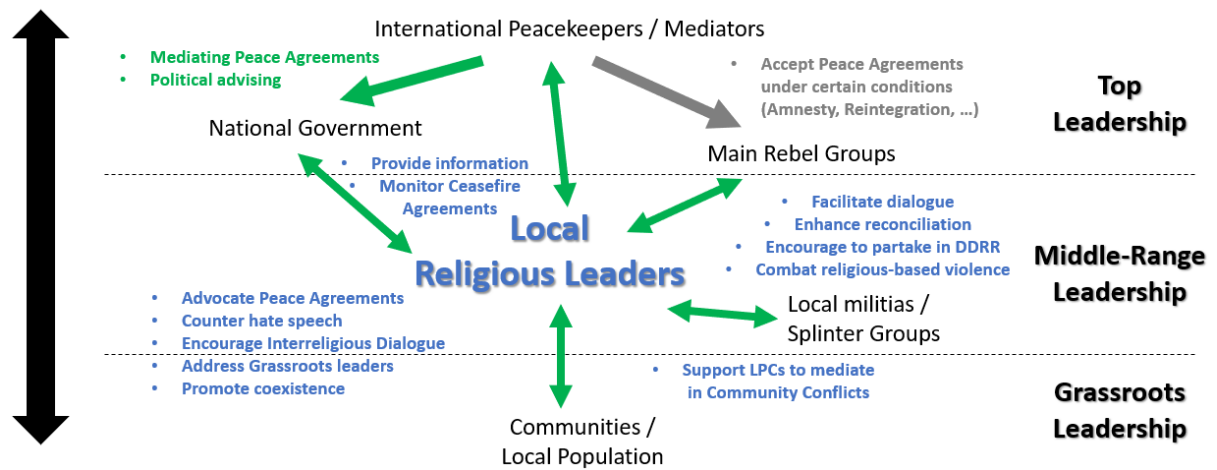
To conclude, involving religious leaders in the peacebuilding process represents an extremely important opportunity to improve current peacebuilding initiatives in the CAR. On the one hand, the influence of religious leaders on grassroots leaders, and the impact of interreligious dialogue initiatives on social cohesion and peaceful coexistence, can ensure bottom-up peacebuilding and long-term conflict prevention, as they lead to an increasing degree of self-responsibility and foster the population’s ownership, participation, and commitment to peace and reconciliation. On the other hand, the involvement of religious leaders can ensure better implementation of the top-down peace and conflict resolution efforts as they can promote peace agreements, DDRR, and facilitate mediation in community conflicts via Local Peace Committees. Finally, involving local religious leaders makes peacebuilding less dependent on

¹⁸³ Conciliation Resources, “Analysis of Peacebuilding”.

¹⁸⁴ Barbelet, 9.

the CAR government, and thus constitutes a diversification of the peacebuilding process, which will help prevent the repetition of the failures in the past peacebuilding process.

Figure 5: Involving Local Religious Leaders in the Peacebuilding Process



Source: Author, 2018.

Conclusion

This master's thesis aimed to analyse the historical origins and drivers of current conflicts in the CAR in order to assess the failures of past peacebuilding efforts and subsequently offer an alternative solution with the case study of local religious leaders in the peacebuilding process. In the course of the research, several answers to the research questions were found. A closer look on the recent crisis of 2013-2015 and its origins shows that labelling the CAR conflict a religious conflict is an oversimplification. The main conflict drivers are a combination of different factors, such as the lack of state authority, security, and the rule of law. Moreover, ethnic and religious group polarizations developed over years, fostered by aggressive elites with political interests who succeeded in influencing the local population due to the low level of education and the high level of poverty. Moreover, geopolitical interests and foreign intervention created constant dependency and prevented the development of a functioning state in the CAR.

Furthermore, past peacebuilding efforts failed due to a lack of commitment and financial resources by the CAR government as well as the lack of trust by the population in national and international peacebuilding actors. Moreover, peacebuilding missions only had a short-lived impact on long-term peacebuilding and several mistakes were made in past mediation efforts that prevented successful implementation of the dozen of concluded peace agreements in the last 10 years. This being said, local religious leaders have a huge potential for facilitating peacebuilding and enhancing reconciliation due to their high level of trust, influence, and proximity to the local population, which they proved during the 2013-2015 crisis. In particular in the form of the 2012 created Interreligious Platform (PCRC), religious leaders should be included more in both international peacebuilding strategies and state-led initiatives. In countries which suffer religious-based violence, the establishment of a strongly institutionalised and wide-ranging interreligious platform has a huge impact.

To successfully resolve conflicts in the CAR and create a sustainable peace, however, the mere involvement of religious leaders does not suffice. The peacebuilding process has to be accompanied by long-term reforms in most domains of public life and institutions. As such, the security capacity of the FACA must be strengthened in order to become independent from foreign peacekeeping forces. Equal representation of ethnic and religious groups must be ensured, for example, by establishing a proportional electoral system and the introduction of strict and rigid quotas for positions in public services and the national executive forces. State

authority must be strengthened, the educational system must be profoundly restructured, and economic development needs to be fostered. In addition, creating economic incentives to stop the fighting, disarm, and withdraw from occupying important natural resources is indispensable. Much money from international donors will still be needed to incentivize armed groups to lay down their arms.

One of the limits of this thesis was that much information was taken from international sources such as international research institutes, NGOs and international organizations active in peacebuilding in the CAR, and Western media. Certainly, the use of more African sources would have provided additional angles in the research, but local studies barely exist, and African sources are more difficult to access. However, most NGOs and international organizations which manage peacebuilding programmes in the CAR hire local country experts who conduct research for them, meaning that these external organizations usually have better sources of information than local research centers. Moreover, in order ensure an unbiased research approach for this thesis, eight interviews with both international and local grassroots peacebuilding actors as well as a high-level government representative were conducted. Certainly, future research, such as a PhD thesis or a comprehensive study by an international organization, could go more into depth on the topic, including local perceptions of the peace process with qualitative and quantitative empirical research conducted in the CAR.

Nevertheless, it is sincerely hoped that the thesis succeeded in making a supplementary contribution to research on conflict resolution both in the CAR and other conflict areas. As such, the exhaustive analysis of the historical roots and the current drivers of conflict offers comprehensive in-depth research which barely exists about the CAR, particularly in the English language. Moreover, the research and content of this thesis thoroughly assesses lessons learned from past peacebuilding efforts and seeks to underline the importance of involving religious leaders and other grassroots actors in peacebuilding and conflict resolution. Thus, the results of this study should supply useful policy recommendations for both international peacebuilding actors and national government authorities on how to improve current peacebuilding and conflict resolution mechanisms. As the case study reveals, further integrating local religious leaders in peacebuilding strategies and government policies could constitute an important improvement of peacebuilding processes in both the CAR and other conflict areas, in which acts of religious-based violence occur.

Appendices

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List of Conducted Interviews

#	Name of the person interviewed	Organization	Function	Location and Date of the interview
1	Nzapalainga, Dieudonné	Catholic Church; Platform of Religious Confessions of the Central African Republic (PCRC)	Cardinal and archbishop of Bangui; President of the Central African Episcopal Conference (CECA); Leader and founding member of the PCRC	Vienna, April 24, 2018
2	Layama, Omar Kobine	Islamic Community; Platform of Religious Confessions of the Central African Republic (PCRC)	Imam of the 7 th District of Bangui; President of the Central African Islamic Community (CICA), Leader and founding member of the PCRC	Vienna, April 24, 2018
3	Yakoubou, Boris	University of Bangui	Professor for Philosophy; KAICIID Country Expert	Bangui, April 30, 2018
4	Babani, Djamel	Local Peace Committee in the PK5 community in Bangui	Former member of a Muslim armed group; Now acting as mediator between armed groups, government, and MINUSCA in the PK5 community	Bangui, April 30, 2018
5	Service, Isaac Jean Michel	Platform of Religious Confessions of the Central African Republic (PCRC)	Permanent Secretary	Bangui, May 2, 2018
6	Moukadas-Noure, Aboubakar	CAR Government	Minister of education	Bangui, May 3, 2018
7	(Anonymous)	MINUSCA	Field Officer	Bangui, May 5, 2018
8	Groga-Bada, Malika	UNDP	Project Programme Officer for the CAR	Via Skype, May 11, 2018

B. Interview Questionnaire



**diplomatische
akademie wien**
Vienna School of International Studies
École des Hautes Études Internationales de Vienne

Questionnaire

Pour mener des entretiens pendant la visite en RCA du 30 avril au 5 mai 2018

Introduction :

« Bonjour. Je m'appelle Mathias Humenberger, je suis étudiant à l'Académie diplomatique de Vienne et en train de rédiger mon mémoire de master en coopération avec le centre de dialogue KAICIID. Je mène actuellement des entretiens à Bangui pour la réalisation de mon mémoire sur '*la résolution des conflits et l'impact des leaders des communautés religieuses locales en République centrafricaine*'. L'objectif de ce projet est de mener une étude approfondie sur (a) les origines et moteurs des conflits en RCA, (b) les efforts internationaux et gouvernementaux dans le cadre du rétablissement de la paix, et (c) les effets des leaders des communautés religieuses locales sur la paix et la réconciliation. Je vous remercie déjà par avance, M./Mme. _____, pour votre disponibilité et votre volonté de soutenir ce projet de recherche avec cet entretien. »

Confidentialité et consentement :

« Eventuellement, je vais vous poser quelques questions personnelles et vous n'êtes pas obligé(e) d'y répondre si vous ne voulez pas le faire. Vous pouvez terminer cette entrevue à tout instant si vous le souhaitez mais je voudrais souligner que toutes vos réponses m'aideront à mieux comprendre les dynamiques des conflits en RCA. Vos réponses seront totalement confidentielles. Si vous ne le voulez pas, votre nom n'apparaîtra pas dans le texte ou la bibliographie du mémoire ou de toute publication. En outre, vos remarques ne doivent pas nécessairement être associées à votre lieu de travail ou votre unité. L'entrevue devrait durer jusqu'à 60 minutes et vous m'avez accordé le consentement pour enregistrer/prendre des notes de cette interview. »

Informations personnelles :

Nom et prénom :

Fonction :

Nom du Réseau/ONG/Dénomination/Association :

Adresse complète :

Questions/Sujets des entretiens :

1. CONTEXTE DU PAYS

- Développement historique après l'indépendance
- Diversité ethnique et religieuse
- Scène politique du pays : dynamiques actuels
- Scène économique : développement et intérêts géopolitiques

2. IDENTIFICATION DES FACTEURS ET DYNAMIQUES DE CONFLITS

- Typologie des conflits actuels dans le pays
- Principaux origines et moteurs de conflits
- Liens entre les conflits et la religion, les groupes ethniques, intérêts politiques

3. LES EFFORTS INTERNATIONAUX ET GOUVERNEMENTAUX DE RÉTABLISSEMENT DE LA PAIX

- Les initiatives internationales sur le rétablissement de la paix : MINUSCA, MISCA, EUTM
- Problèmes dans la mise en œuvre des accords de la paix
- Le rôle du gouvernement dans le rétablissement de la paix et la réconciliation
- Le rôle du militaire dans le rétablissement de la paix

4. LE RÔLE DES LEADERS RELIGIEUX LOCAUX SUR LA PAIX ET LA RÉCONCILIATION

- Le rôle des leaders religieux pendant les conflits
- Le potentiel de la religion comme outil pour le rétablissement de la paix et la réconciliation
- Le potentiel des leaders religieux dans la promotion des accords de la paix et le processus de DDRR
- L'impact du dialogue interreligieux sur la réconciliation et la cohésion sociale
- Possibilités du gouvernement d'inclure les leaders religieux au niveau institutionnel ?