Chapter 9

The Limitations of Peace Negotiations and Identity Constructs in Conflict-Prone Countries in Africa: A Focus on the Central African Republic (CAR)

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> *We will respect human rights when we have the means.*
>
> *(Noureddine Adam, minister of public security,*
> *Seleka General, 2013)*

Introduction

The African continent is plagued by the continuous failure of peace agreements. These agreements follow a standard model which includes Demobilization, Disarmament and Reintegration (DDR) initiatives, transitional governments, cease-fires, reforms and elections (De Zeeuw 2008). These agreements are supposed to be implemented or monitored by peacekeeping forces from regional or international stakeholders. These initiatives based on the agreements are repeated continuously but they fail to have long-term, or even relative short-term, effects (Alden et al. 2011). This is due to several reasons: the lack of support from stakeholders, the lack of commitment by interested parties to the negotiations, the absence of mechanisms to support any investigations and bring perpetrators to justice, skewed attitudes that allow certain groups to escape arrest and prosecution, and finally delayed implementation of these peace agreements that indirectly exacerbate residual tensions and allow the conflict to continue if not escalate.

Numerous African countries have negotiated peace agreements since the end of the Cold War but the majority have failed and have led to further conflicts, to the detriment of their economies, their armies (Ferreira 2014) and their civilian populations (Vinck and Pham 2010). These peace agreements have instead become part of

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the endgame of many warlords and governments in order to negotiate better personal terms. Warlords are known for using fighters to delay entering the DDR programs or to apply to several programs in order to receive the financial rewards which are then redistributed rather than used by the intended recipient.

This demonstrates that the manner in which peace agreements are designed and implemented is flawed. Yet the same process is implemented over and over again rendering the same results. Agreements such as MONUC (United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo) and the Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement signed in 1999 did not bring about peace or stability. Often the same parties are brought into negotiations over a number of peace agreements and the number of signatories is few rather than a representative number of the parties participating in the conflict. Militias claim to represent rural or oppressed populations who are marginalized by the national government but on closer investigation the role of militias is varied.

Warlords, or regional strongmen, enjoy control over a small region and create a hierarchy of clientelism (Marten 2012). Warlords are often former bureaucrats within the state institutional structures, former cabinet ministers or rural leaders with traditional authority or claiming such authority. These individuals, while claiming to espouse a particular ideology in defense of their communities, seek financial assistance from government or external stakeholders in order to maintain control over particular areas. Warlords are seldom interested in assuming national political leadership but instead are focused on controlling a small region in order to access and extract mineral resources. They are opportunistic and will often eliminate any economic incentives in areas under their control in order to control the population. The question posed is *whether the manner in which militia leadership is targeted for negotiation offers the best manner in which to facilitate peace and nation building in a war-torn country?* The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate that without understanding the motivation of governments, particularly state leaders, or those of warlords and strongmen, it is unlikely that peace agreements can work effectively. Rather, these individuals recognize that maintaining conflict is a source of personal enrichment and grants them social and political power (Isaacs-Martin 2015). In such an environment of limited economy the warlord and those in political power are able to strengthen clientelistic relationships. This creates a pyramid of dependence and loyalty and is not the mutualistic benevolent relationship as often portrayed (Marten 2012).

This chapter does not intend to unpack all peace agreements signed in Africa or even in a particular region but rather an attempt is made to offer a cursory explanation. The Central African Republic (CAR) is demonstrated here as a case of how several peace agreements have failed to deliver on the articles presented and as signed by those attending the negotiations. This is not an exhaustive search and analysis of all the agreements but rather a focus on four intra-state negotiations. The conclusions drawn are that these agreements proved ineffective because of their generalized nature and the fact that they served to provide rewards for the participants rather than a method by which to seek effective solutions.

Methodology

Africa is confronted with persistent and recurring small wars and rural conflict, with occasional rather than continuous peaceful periods (Ferreira 2014). Even with the intervention of international stakeholders to implement peaceful transitions and the attempted restoration of normative society the trend remains a default to violence. The overwhelming ideology of these peace agreements is to implement democratic processes, in particular hosting general elections and bringing about governments of national unity. Yet countries such as the CAR have rarely experienced democracy and certainly the institutions of governance are ill equipped to facilitate democratic processes and transition but rather ensure employment, and enrichment, for particular ethnic groups aligned to political leadership interests.

The chapter attempts to scrutinize intra-state peace agreements. Owing to similarities in the content of these agreements it was decided to limit the explanation to four CAR agreements and ceasefires in understanding attempts to restore peace, ensure democratic elections, install representative government and create institutions that ensure human rights and uphold democratic processes. The four peace agreements include the Bangui Agreement of 1997, the Birao Peace Agreement signed in 2007, the Libreville Ceasefire and Peace Agreement signed in 2008, the National Reconciliation Pact of 1998 and the Transitional Government and the Armed Groups on the Principles of Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration and Repatriation Agreement signed in 2015.

Using a desktop literature review, documentary sources were extensively scrutinized with the main premise being that peace agreements are ineffective, and that indirectly these processes exacerbate the proliferation of warlords. In creating such generic agreements the mandate is flawed and rather than 'contributing to the development and promotion of survival of societal systems' it becomes an effective tool that warlords and strongmen can use to ensure their movement towards political power, maintenance of their rural political fiefdoms and further financial enrichment (Ferreira 2014; Kaplan 1994).

While peace agreements and DDR programs are negotiated and signed, the length of time in terms of implementation and the required funding often leads to resentment amongst militias and communities. Many are not punished or held accountable for their actions and this adds to an already volatile situation (Mudge and Le Pennec 2013). Armed groups are unwilling to admit to or be held accountable for the atrocities they stand accused of committing. Often the accusations are also one-sided and prejudicial in favor of a particular group so this undermines the peace treaties. Often atrocities continue once the agreements are signed and according to international law governments are required to prosecute perpetrators.

Literature Review

Weak governments deliberately sabotage their own bureaucracies in an attempt to reduce expenditure on state institutions. As a result of the poor economies, low employment and insufficient tax revenues, many governments in Africa were, or remain, dependent on the aid provided by international entities. These resources are then channeled into the armed forces, to main clientelism, and to reward strongmen and warlords in order to gain better traction with foreign stakeholders (Reno 1997). Because of the insecurities faced by bureaucrats many resort to plundering what little state resources exist, alternatively they become patrons to ethnic or regional group interests or they resort to becoming warlords (Mann 2005).

Warlordism and militias in Africa are widespread and demonstrate the crisis of the nation state (Lemarchand 1972). Warlords challenge the stable institutional structures and thus the motivations of warlords vary according to their ambitions, resources and political will. It is not the intention of all warlords to gain national political leadership and power but rather regional influence and control of populations and resources. In Africa, many fragmented unstable states underwent devolution of power, where power is delegated from the central government political authority to the peripheral regional administration. The militias that operate under the warlord, together, exploit this state fragility and its inability, or unwillingness, to exert control over the peripheral areas (Marten 2012). Often governments relinquish their socio-political governance of these regions and surrender it to the warlords (Mumford 2013). Governments believe that the warlords are able to control these problematic outlying regions but often, owing to the autocratic and corrupt practices of the warlord, usurpers challenge his position leading to conflict. Militias, under the leadership of commanders and warlords, claim to represent rural or oppressed populations who are marginalized by the national government (Hoffman 2007). Often these groups challenge the status quo and demand access to political power and resources, but it is civilians who are the casualties in these confrontations. It is often with the high mortality rate amongst civilians that international actors are eager to draft peace agreements.

Protecting civilians remains the primary reason that peace agreements are initiated yet they are seldom the beneficiaries. Rather civilians find themselves in a situation where criminality continues unabated; those who terrorize their communities continue to do so without being arrested and often act as a law unto themselves (Vinck and Pham 2010). Often peace agreements include the deployment of peacekeepers that do not quell violence but rather exist as a precursor to civil functionaries to engage in reform rather than enforcing law and order and resuscitating justice mechanisms to ensure peace and stability. The inclusion of all parties in the transitional government does not necessarily bring peace but rather creates political fiefdoms (Pouligny 2004). It has been shown that the parties (and individuals) selected to the transition governments have personal interests that do not extend to governance and socioeconomic growth.

Peace agreements in Africa, and particularly in the CAR, are a repetitive process. Seldom do these agreements acknowledge the political complexities of specific

countries, rather a generic draft is put forward that only accommodates certain strongmen at the negotiating table (Daley 2006). Existing government leaders and warlords who have control over and access to economic resources are invited to participate in these processes (Debos 2008). Opposition political parties that do not engage in violent activates and many smaller rebel groups are often excluded from these negotiations (Reno 1997). This ensures that only those who have already benefited from the conflict will continue to benefit from these negotiated settlements. DDR programs that form part of these agreements are manipulated by warlords to benefit themselves personally rather than their fighters or the general population. Warlords, those who have previously served as strongmen in rural areas or as state bureaucrats, are able to further secure senior positions in government (Mehler 2011).

Governments of national unity, or transitional governments, in an attempt to include all warring sides, do not solve the complex political issues nor do they address the issues that led to the conflict. Rather the agreements address issues that are standardized in terms of demobilization, disarmament and rehabilitation. Yet seldom is it considered that many warlords do not wish to cease fighting as the rewards of economic extraction in the regions under their control offer greater financial rewards. Secondly, these resources have to be surrendered to the government, undermining the possible influence, position and authority of the warlord over the region (Hills 1997; Reno 1999). Those who have served in these militias, or state forces, are manipulated into either giving any apportioned benefits they received to their commanders (in a clientelistic relationship) or they resume fighting if they have not received any financial reward (Debos 2008).

Fighters have little in common with professional soldiers and mercenaries so the armed groups are not homogenous (Pouligny 2004). Often fighting is not a fulltime occupation so there is diversity within the groups (Gerlach 2010). Initially, villages and communities create self-defense movements as government authority does not extend to these areas. In response to attacks, theft and intimidation, farmers form armed groups to defend their limited assets, usually grain or animals. These isolated groups eventually form allegiances with other armed groups, state and non-state, to secure better weaponry and other resources. Often these low-level fighters are not considered a central part of the conflict and they are not included in the programs. Funding needed for the demobilizing process is seldom forthcoming or it is delayed. Often women and children, who may be very loyal to their groups, may be fighters and are excluded from these programs as well (for example in countries such as Sierra Leone) (Kaplan 1994; Sullivan and Bunker 2002).

Warlords and Strongmen in Africa

Warlords and strongmen are not a simplistically defined group of individuals. Rather it should be considered that these are individuals who exert control over a small area using a "combination of force and patronage" (Marten 2012). Yet although a warlord exerts this control, his authority, as this is a male socio-political space, requires

external financial support either from the government or elsewhere to sustain his control and maintain his control (Aapengnou 2010). Therefore for him to maintain this control there must be collusion with state institutions. However, warlords in Africa must have financial support, often from external stakeholders such as nationals living abroad and donors, in order to maintain clientelistic relationships (Davis 2009).

As African states are weak and seldom meet the Weberian notion of an autonomous sovereign state, they are unable to exert legitimate force over their territorial space. As such the responsibility to maintain political control over the space is relegated to clients. However, as foreign governments no longer provide weaponry in terms of proxy wars this has reduced the influence that African political leaders had over the regional leaders. These leaders were not necessarily traditional leaders but they attributed such characteristics to themselves (Sambanis 2004). Rather warlords are manipulative of not only those whose services they utilize, such as the youth, unemployed men and peasant farmers, but also of NGOs and external stakeholders. Warlords seek out stakeholders who are able to finance their interests, and therefore their ideological interests change in accordance with their sponsors. Therefore a state with weak or failed institutions provides these individuals with access to weaponry and funding with the opportunity to become warlords.

In order to gain attention from the international sponsors and donors, warlords make agricultural activity difficult by chasing farmers off the land or by recruiting them into militias. Warlords require two levels of civilians within their territory (Fearon and Laitin 2003). On one level they require supporters who are recipients of the warlord's largesse who are relatives and/or clients and the second level are the impoverished civilians. By undermining the agricultural processes in their area, the warlord through violent means moves the population within his area and through the lack of resources to sustain the amassed group who fled areas of violence and lost many of their assets. These areas draw the attention of donors who are quick to negotiate with warlords to alleviate the refugee problem (Fearon and Laitin 2010). Warlords can thus gain significantly from these negotiations by creating social instability and manipulating the donors and NGOs.

Warlords are thus able to play various contributors and gain from various stakeholders that include the state, external investors and donors. The persistent state instability through weak governance and inept bureaucratic institutions allows the warlords to gain popularity in their areas. Civilians are led to believe that the warlord has assisted them and many men within camps then established by the donors join the militias to assist the warlord.

Warlords are not uniform in character; their ideology, beliefs and political intentions vary, depending on the relationship to the existing government along with their ability to resource funding to accumulate and maintain power (Reno 1998). The devolution of power at the center results in warlords claiming authority, although illegitimate, due to the lack of state security in rural areas (Hills 1997). Perceptions of traditional authority allow these individuals to validate their presence and their claims to authority, which allows them to recruit individuals for their own limited interests.

Individuals are recruited into militias which are universally defined as armed groups operating under the instruction of a 'leader', although it is argued that in

Africa, unlike militias located on other continents, there is a distinct lack of political will (Hills 1997). This suggests that there are variations of militias which may either be clan, private or freelance aligned. A central factor is that militias extort cash, often to supplement their stipend from the warlords, or as a new breakaway group claiming to protect particular areas.

African political leadership is fraught with individuals who serve in political institutions but are also involved as strongmen and eventual warlords (Mehler 2011). Mehler further asserts that violence is an established mode of competition. Often these individuals recognize that they will not succeed in elections and opt for violent confrontation instead. Utilizing their rural social linkages they offer resources to impoverished villagers to participate in violence. Using the path of legitimacy, political parties, particularly in states such as the CAR, receive less attention from the media and external stakeholders. However, former bureaucrats, and many strongmen are within the government structure, utilize militias in order to receive media coverage, sympathy from citizens and supporters living abroad, and support from external stakeholders. Mehler (2011) suggests that legitimate political parties are marginalized by international mediators in terms of conflict and therefore lose out in the negotiations in peace processes. Therefore any attempt to create democratic governance is marginalized by warlord transition.

In many African countries elections and political leadership are done along ethnic and regional cleavages. Due to the clientelist relationship that exists within African societies and the lack of will to operate and maintain strong state institutions it is easier to secure political longevity through patronage to strongmen in the regions (Marten 2012). Marten asserts that declining revenues from state institutions and the increasing financial assistance from foreign interests, usually in the natural resources, allow rural-based strongmen the option to detach from a dependent relationship with government leadership to assert their own cantons and establish their own unidirectional client relations. This process allows them to assert social and security dominance in their regions by arming the youth and other impoverished individuals. As Mehler (2011) argues, exerting violence garnered international attention particularly when civilians were targeted rather than government forces and opposing militias.

This external support creates state weakness and instability, whether the support originates from NGOs or investors in economic extraction. It is further problematized in that many African governments do not exercise control or authority over many regions, particularly the rural areas (Marten 2012). Weak states create opportunities for warlords to arise. This is not to suggest that all warlords seek national authority, rather warlords and strongmen are most effective in smaller locations where they can exercise control, and manage and monitor the population.

In the African context conflict begins at a higher level and trickles down into the population. Fear within a political environment leads individuals to seek methods to maintain and gain access to political power. Through this process of incorporating armed groups the conflict is transferred from the political sphere to the social civilian environment and (re)interpreted into identity concerns (Francis 2005). When governments promote and are eventually dominated by a single ethnic group it may

purposely exclude other groups from accessing state institutions. The perception created is that prosperity is linked to ethnic identity. Those currently accessing the material benefits associated with the state groups in turn support the political identity of the government to the exclusion of others. In such countries where economies are state monopolies and access to employment and economic opportunities are limited, usurping control of the state becomes a goal, or 'the' goal (Mann 2005). The result is an increase in the formation of militias and therefore an increase in violence against state institutions particularly state employees and eventually against civilians.

Repetitive Agreements, Continuing Violence and Identity Salience in the Central African Republic

The CAR descended into violence soon after independence (Vinck and Pham 2010). To maintain relative regime and government stability, political authority mutated into an institution of personal power rather than institutional leadership. As leaders use ethnic and religious affiliations, in the form of client relationships, to maintain political power, this process has undermined the potential for nation-building and patriotism. It is a fragile state like numerous other states in Africa where internal and external influences resulted in a series of governments unable (or unwilling) to protect its citizens. Instead there has been a retreat to using and manipulating identities to maintain positions of power.

The CAR has experienced four violent changes in political leadership, often the result of coups. Ange-Félix Patasse was elected democratically in 1993 but the election came about as a result of an earlier coup in 1981 by General André-Dieudonné Kolingba, against the first president of the CAR, David Dacko. Patasse was then ousted by François Bozizé in 2003. Bozizé in turn was ousted by Michel Djotodia who claimed the presidency in 2013. Only Catherine Samba-Panza, a non-partisan who was appointed interim president, had no known links to militias or defense units. Therefore, since 2000, and within little over a decade, CAR has witnessed violent coups from within, either by the military or militias. During this period an increasing number of militias were observed in the various prefectures, initiated by government and non-government forces, and either in partnership or in conflict with government forces, other militias or civilians.

The conflict in the CAR was and continues to be portrayed as a simplistic bifurcated war between Muslims and Christians. It is simplistically stated that this particular conflict began in December 2012 with the attempt of the Seleka coalition to overthrow President Bozizé's government (Isaacs-Martin 2016). Ignoring the complex political developments and the proliferation, and sustainability, of militias in the CAR, the narrative created of the conflict ignores the competition for political, national and regional control. The country lacks visible policing or effective institutions and this facilitates violence and attacks by the militias, encouraging those

seeking access to political power and resources to use violence without negative repercussions for themselves (Isaacs-Martin 2015). Porous borders add to the complexity of upholding peace agreements and DDR programs (Ferreira 2014). When peace programs recommend investigations into violence against civilians such initiatives are undermined as they receive little if any funding. Also the efforts are biased, and serious crimes such as extrajudicial killing, torture and rape are overlooked.

An established pattern of conflict is the movement of people, often other/competing ethnic identities, into agricultural areas particularly for grazing. One such example is a claim made by villagers in relation to the Mbarara community, part of the Peuhl cultural group from Chad, that includes other communities of tension such as the Mbororo and the Fulata (Vinck and Pham 2010; Dunn and Tian 2014). A common trend in competing for arable land is that civilian groups attack each other not under the auspices of identity but rather to access resources such as water and space for animals. Later the identity aspect is manipulated by interest groups and individuals seeking political traction (Scherrer 2003). The tension is heightened when bandits steal cattle and kidnap individuals, then communities attempt to arm themselves. This has led to an alignment with militias such as the coalition Seleka and the continued ethnic tensions that may initially not have been violent but tense and which gradually took on confrontational overtones.

In general, ethnic groups are defined, either within or outside the groups, as sharing a common descent, history, culture, language, religion or territory (Mann 2005). These traits are often internalized and considered natural and ascribed by many within the group identity. This belonging implies an extension of kinship and community linked to a distinct identity with distinct boundaries (Cohen 1985). These boundaries define the characteristics and the sentiment of those within the community. According to prevailing theories, this creates an emotional connection in which certain members are willing to kill those who are outside of the group and even those within the group who are seen to be traitors to the identity structure. Leaders, in particular, use these sentiments to evoke images of unity and blood connections to raise hostilities towards outsiders (Hughey 1998). History demonstrates that it requires little effort for these sentiments to be translated into issues of self-defense, preservation and opportunism (Weber 1998). While ethnic groups remain distinct with underlying tensions, the CAR has not had a lengthy history of ethnic conflict and almost no religious conflict, even as the country has faced continuous economic difficulties, deprivation and marauding bandits in the rural areas. Since 2002 much of the conflicts and violence has been attributed by the population to competing political elites rather than to strife between communities of different ethnic identities.

Using these sentiments and traits of identity, ordinary civilians are capable of murder if such behavior is supported by institutions seen as legitimate (Isaacs-Martin 2016). Often this behavior is interpreted as self-defense and ironically it is often the perpetrators that consider themselves the victims. Alternatively the ethnic tensions are such that perpetrators consider their violence to be a necessary pre-emptive attack as they perceive, or are led to believe through actors, that their lives

are inevitably in danger (Mann 2005). Civilians receive information through government sources or the militias that certain groups are being favored or targeted. As identities are embedded in ethnicity, religion, or tribal allegiances people are easily convinced that their group is exploited, excluded, targeted, or condemned. These sentiments have political and social consequences that in their extreme form can result in cleansing and expulsion (for ethnic cleansing in general, see Mann 2005).

Militias are not homogenous or cohesive in terms of structure or motive. They are comprised of, although not always, a dominant ethnic or religious group and members, particularly rank-and-file, consist of a motley crew of ex-soldiers, mercenaries, unemployed youth with guns and bandits. These groups form and disintegrate quickly after seeking access to material gains, first in the locality in which they often originate where they monopolize violence (Alden et al. 2011; Gerlach 2010). This use of identity allows the militia to claim ideological control over a region to the exclusion of competitor militias such as loyalists and government troops.

Farmers form self-defense units in the rural areas to protect their villages from looting, attacks and assaults by armed groups and bandits. Farmers, as with members of the military, are more traditional in thinking and therefore more ethnically aligned. While there are militias who claim to embrace an ideological standpoint, most exist for the extraction of resources and extortion from the population. An example is the UFDR, claiming to represent the grievances of the Gula ethnic group (Vinck and Pham 2010) but maintained control of the diamond trade in the Haute-Kotto prefecture (Mudge and Le Pennec 2013). Similarly, the CPJP formed in 2008 claiming to represent the Runga ethnic group and yet also gained control of diamond mines in the Haute-Kotto prefecture. These groups eventually merged into the Seleka.

The Seleka became a coalition militia composed primarily of the Convention of Patriots for Justice and Peace (CPJP), the Patriotic Convention for the Salvation of Kodro (CPSK), the Union of Democratic Forces for Unity (UFDR), Union of Republican Forces (UFR) and the Alliance for the Rebirth and Rebuilding (A2R) as well as self-defense units that join the other militias to access weapons, resources and protection (Mudge and Le Pennec 2013).

The Seleka coalition seized control of 15 out of the 16 prefectures, taking control of the capital Bangui and suspending the Constitution where Michel Djotodia, a Muslim, proclaimed himself interim president in 2013. Due to the successful yet violent momentum of Seleka, and the perceived religious element, at best marginally relevant to the participants in government and the militias, became salient once the conflict escalated and incorporated the anti-Balaka forces. However, once Seleka gained control of Bangui they began to attack all the neighborhoods as well as the FACA (Forces Armees Centra Africaines), demonstrating the factionalism within militia structures and the lack of central coalition leadership authority over the fighters (Isaacs-Martin 2016). Seleka became notorious for attacking and razing villages in the rural areas of the CAR and targeting young men. Such behaviors also heightened ethnic and religious tensions between communities as happened with the Mbarara ethnic group (see Mudge and Le Pennec 2013).

Almost all those who claim leadership have utilized violence in the form of militias to secure their positions. It must be noted that prior to the claims of a bifurcated conflict in the CAR there were several militias. Also armies from neighboring countries, most notably Chad, are said to contribute to the instability in the northern prefectures of the CAR (Debos 2008). Chadian soldiers even formed part of the presidential guard under Bozize.

In the course of the conflicts and political turmoil, CAR is a fertile ground for the development of a number of militias and armed groups, and various more or less fragile coalitions among these. These armed groups controlled areas within particular prefectures, and therefore the militia coalition Seleka exercised virtually full control of the northern and eastern prefectures to the exclusion of the government. The fragility of these relationships and the instability of the militias were illustrated by segments of the CPJP militia defecting to support the government troops. These armed groups in the CAR exhibit loose social affiliations and shared ethnic, religious and regional identities. The origins of the anti-Balaka armed group are like those of any militia. It is reported that it was created by Bozizé, but its origins are most likely to have begun in the 1990s as a self-defense group responding both to attacks by bandits from the north of CAR and to the Armée pour la Restauration de la République et al. Démocratie (APRD). The removal of Bozizé in 2013, many ex-government troops and ex-presidential guards joined the anti-Balaka in the hope they could regain their state employment. Like the Séléka, the anti-Balaka became, and remains, a coalition of interest groups. These associations are more about convenience and pursuing a particular aim than acknowledging conscious identity: there does not appear to be an ideology other than material gain and access to political power for the leaders of these groups.

Within such a complex morass of conflict the notion of peace agreements as they currently exist is not an effective solution in returning the country to social, political and economic stability. Peace agreements do not necessarily appeal to all the invited parties; often militia and government leaders do not accept or adhere to agreements. An example of such behavior is that of a CPJP commander, Mohamed Moussa Dhaffane, who rejected the terms of the 2012 peace agreement and created his own rebel group, the CPSK. Although he later merged his militia with the Seleka he was appointed as a minister in the transitional government but was later accused of recruiting mercenaries hence repeating a cycle of violence to gain more power (Mudge and Le Pennec 2013). The proliferation of non-state actors in the country, overwhelmingly led by former bureaucrats and government ministers, has challenged the power and authority of existing government leadership. The reason for this is that many challengers would be unable to secure leadership through a democratic elective process. Political parties in the CAR (Mehler 2011) are often marginalized in conflict and do not receive the support, or resources, that are allocated to warlords, strongmen, militias and governments. Therefore external stakeholders and donors exacerbate the continued use and existence of non-state armed actors through the methods used that benefit the combatants more than civilians.

Ineffectiveness of Peace Agreements in the CAR

The Ariadne thread present in all the peace agreements signed in the CAR is the general amnesty granted to military personnel, combatants and civilians from recognized militias who are present in the negotiations. While for the international stakeholders it suggests the quickest solution to the conflict, it indirectly creates an environment where greed, revenge and power are sought. Militias become a tool used to manipulate populations, stakeholders and donors. The constant changing of allegiances is indicative that smaller groups utilize identity in order to coalesce while the larger groups, which often incorporate other armed actors, are most concerned with resource extraction and financial incentives. This makes lasting peace impossible due to the limited opportunities available to men and women that are indirectly impacted upon by militia behaviors.

Peace agreements dictate that militia troops must be confined to particular regions to undergo DDR programs and that these sites will be determined by mutual agreement between the negotiating parties. This demonstrates a lack of understanding of how militias operate and their fluid associations and allegiances. Promises are also made that various militias, such as with the Birao Agreement the APRD, FDPC and UFDR fighters, will be placed under the protection of the national armed forces, FACA. A common characteristic of militias is that fighters are seeking entry or re-entry into the military because it is seen as an opportunity of secure employment. Yet conflict has arisen, as seen with the Bagui Accords, because the failure to pay soldiers also leads to them deserting the ranks and forming militias (Pouligny 2004).

The National Reconciliation Pact noted the recurring problems of nepotism, tribalism, political patronage and the misappropriation of funds. Much of the state appointments in CAR happen through a process of clientelism and group familiarity. State institutions serve predatory functions rather than to benefit civilians. Bureaucrats learnt to utilize their positions in order to secure themselves as patrons and thus establish themselves as pseudo leaders in the rural areas. This is often how warlords establish themselves by making claims to traditional leadership. As long as the state institutions that monitor graft are ineffective, this avenue remains open to abuse and the continued cycle of violence. Therefore the state becomes an enemy upon itself and forms the location where non-state actors are initiated.

Peace agreements are limited in their effectiveness due to the limited number of signatories. One such example was the Birao Agreement, a committee comprised of one representative from Gabon, three from the CAR government, three from the militias referred to as politico-military movements, a special representative of the UN secretary-general and a representative of the International Organization of La Francophonie. The militias that are invited to these agreements are often coalitions and although there is a central leadership, they do not have effective control over the organization. Because these coalitions are loosely affiliated, each militia has its own command structure and the fighters are loyal to that particular commander. Also this is linked to patrons that transcend conflict so individuals and communities remain loyal to them even if they join coalition forces.

A consistency in the agreements is strengthening democratic processes and respecting human rights; that differences between parties must be settled by non-violent means (United Nations 2008a, b). The National Reconciliation Pact highlighted that signatories could only use elections to access political power not violence. Mehler (2011) noted that when individuals realize they have little chance of success in using elections as a means to access political power, they resort to violence and the use of armed groups to further their political agenda. This has been a procedure utilized for decades in the CAR and without effective institutions to override this behavior it will persist as an effective method. Another concern is that government itself is a problem in terms of limiting and restricting candidates to run for political office (Reno 1998). By arresting opposition or competitors the government itself limits opportunities for political access and forces former bureaucrats to use violence to access, and eventually control, political institutions.

Noted in the National Reconciliation Pact of 1998 there is an overarching theme of national unity and sovereignty (United Nations 2008c; 2013). The Pact highlights the complexities in the CAR at present, including the persistent socioeconomic crisis, resulting in escalating poverty, declining purchasing power, reduced food production resulting in famine and widespread malnutrition, as well as the breakdown of family and social ties. These social and economic concerns elevate social conflict. The proliferation of weapons, banditry and common criminality led to an upsurge of insecurity in the capital Bangui as well as the interior (United Nations 1998). The Pact has the largest number of signatories including the Armed Forces, the Association of Mayors, 29 political parties, five trade unions and a number of civil society and religious organizations. The 2013 signing of the Libreville Agreement included the Seleka coalition, representatives of other militias and political party representation. This agreement gives a general mention of returning the country to peace and the rule of law. It includes the need for cooperation. The Libreville Accord, as signed on 11 January 2013, incorporated the CAR government, the Seleka (UFDR, CPJP, CPSK, UFR), political parties, civil society groups and other militia groups (United Nations 2015).

While in principle these agreements seem inclusive, the problem is the short-sightedness of those seeking political power. In 2014 it was noted that when the Seleka negotiated it wanted access to portfolios that were resource driven such as mining, lumber extraction and defense. The notion of creating a cohesive society and the creation of a viable inclusive economy seemed to be of little interest to the group. Therefore if the parties to negotiations are not themselves invested in creating national unity but rather enrichment the purpose of the peace agreements is void.

The initial Libreville Peace Agreement of 2008 focuses on the APRD and the need to rehabilitate the civilian population as well as to implement DDR programs. It also speaks of the need to incorporate combatants and provide amnesty to the fighters and civilians involved in the conflict. Because the conflict was concentrated in the north, north-east and center of the country, there were two parties engaged to sign the Agreement, namely, three representatives of the CAR government and three representatives of the APRD (United Nations 2008a). In the Accord signed in June 2008 the signatories were government and three representatives of the various militias.

The 2015 Agreement between the Transitional Government and armed groups was the first document that incorporated the role played by women and children in the conflict. Women are to receive the same treatment and rewards as men. Combatants are provided with the opportunity to be absorbed into the state forces or be reintegrated back into their communities and provided with a 'basic support package' that includes reskilling to provide individuals with alternative opportunities and choices. This package, which is often delayed due to the bureaucratic processes and conditions that external donors seek, complicates the aim of preventing fighters from resorting to arms again.

Common to all the agreements is the notion to respect law and order and particularly the civilian population with the assistance of the international community. In order for the agreement to be realized one of the shared aims is to reduce weapons in the affected country as this contributes to criminality and intimidation but also serves as an avenue to continue violent attacks and warfare.

More than 50% of conflicts that have entered into peace agreements have erupted again in civil wars (Ferreira 2014). This can be attributed to weak governments as well as existing ethnic and religious tensions. Also combatants who are trained by international teams assisting governments also find the fighters defecting to militias which further highlights the fluidity of these armed associations. Peace agreements need to be country specific rather than generic in their character. Without understanding the complexity of a state and particularly the manner in which state and non-state actors behave, these agreements will only serve as platforms for opportunism. While governments and militias use rhetoric to defend their positions and highlight their ideological underpinnings, their actions reveal a lack of interest in creating democratic processes and effective governance. This is most evident in the composition of the motley crew of fighters and, secondly, violence and intimidation seem to be the only purpose of these armed groups.

Conclusion

Persistent conflicts in Africa result in a cyclical proliferation of peace agreements, accords and ceasefires. While these documents attempt in good faith to bring about peace, restore government and manifest democratic processes, they fail more than they actually succeed. This is due to the generic expectations set out in these documents that do not address the socio-political and economic complexities in many of the affected states and regions. Often these documents do not consider that there are external and internal factors that bear directly on the conflict and that negotiations between invited parties do not necessarily quell these hostilities.

This chapter attempted to point out that these documents do not offer targeted solutions but rather overarching solutions that are deemed appropriate to end conflict. These include that the parties to the agreement should cease fighting and violence against each other and the civilian population. Secondly, that once all the parties have agreed to the conditions set out for achieving peace, which is to stop the

violence, then elections can be held, a government of national unity can be established, democratic government institutions can be (re)constituted and the civilian population are granted their human rights. While these generic suggestions can assist with nation building these processes include problematic initiatives as well.

The peace agreements targeted in this chapter recommend that all combatants who are signatories to the negotiations are to be granted amnesty. Thereafter many of the fighters are to be drafted into DDR programs in which they can choose to be reintegrated into their communities or become part of the state armed forces. These are complicated by actors not often considered within these processes such as militia commanders, warlords and strongmen. Often DDR programs are manipulated by signatories along with the networks of militias and ordinary fighters find themselves disadvantaged by programs meant to assist them. However these are very complex processes and they are further complicated by issues of clientelism and ethnic and cultural identities.

Although identities are not considered the primary reason for the conflict, often these issues are located in economic and employment concerns (De Zeeuw 2008). Fighters are often recruited into militias from former self-defense units along with unemployed youth, ex-soldiers, ex-policemen and professional mercenaries (Pouligny 2004). Although a motley crew of combatants their primary concern is financial, although their ultimate motivations vary for example ex-soldiers and farmers do not share the same basic interest in joining militias – ex-soldiers wanting to return to the state forces and farmers seeking financial gain to supplement their limited resources. It is within the structure of these groups that identity becomes a salient feature in terms of the actions of the militias and the civilians that are directly affected by the violence.

In the CAR, as with many other states, the violence takes on secondary identity concerns in which ethnicity and religion become a salient feature. This leads outsiders to believe that the conflict is purely directed at ethnic or religious groups. Yet it is seldom considered that this is a consequence of the conflict and it provides a motivation to participants. It is within this environment that the violence escalates and more civilians become victims to criminality that is disguised as ethnic or religious conflict.

Peace agreements do not take these complexities into account particularly in an environment such as the CAR where ethnicity and now religion always become an issue on which militias justify their actions. Their behavior polarizes the social fabric, allowing for personal interests to take precedent among warlords, bureaucrats and strongmen and making it more difficult for generic agreements and accords to be effective in the long term.

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