CONFLICT RESEARCH PROGRAMME

WORLD PEACE FOUNDATION

OCCASIONAL PAPER #30 December 2021

INCENTIVES, VIOLENCE, AND POLITICAL SKILL:

THE POLITICAL MARKETPLACE IN THE DRC AND THE CRISIS IN KASAI

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Practitioners and policymakers within the humanitarian community are, by now, intimately familiar with the relationship between armed conflict and humanitarian crisis. Conflict destroys markets, causes mass displacement, and separates civilian populations from their support structures and livelihoods. In recent history, the so-called "four famines" in South Sudan, the Lake Chad Basin, Somalia, and Yemen were all caused in large part by ongoing armed conflicts (Curtis 2017).

The political marketplace framework is instructive in illustrating the incentives for conflict systems to arise and perpetuate themselves over time. In particular, it emphasizes the choices and calculations of individuals with power or influence in a conflict system. In addition to incentive structures, however, the maturity of a violent political marketplace – including the past prevalence of violence in that market, and the skills of individual politicians to navigate and manipulate violence in their favor – may bear on the severity of a crisis. Highly skilled political operators may be able to manage crises to their benefit with a minimum of collateral damage, while less-skilled players may make clumsy moves that result in greater chaos and human suffering. In addition, "young" violent marketplaces often lack a pre-existing humanitarian presence that could minimize the impact of a crisis. States characterized by political marketplace dynamics are likely to have weak social services infrastructures that could meet humanitarian need, and may actively impede and co-opt external humanitarian responses. The combination of these factors suggests that "young" violent marketplaces may be especially vulnerable to humanitarian crisis. The example of the 2016 Kasai crisis – in which a previously-peaceful region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo disintegrated into armed violence and a massive humanitarian crisis – serves to illustrate this hypothesis.

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With that in mind, this paper will begin by laying out a high-level summary of the evolution of the Congolese political market, beginning in the colonial era and continuing through the eras of Mobutu, Kabila, and the two Congo Wars. In particular, the paper will focus on critical junctures – key shifts in the underlying structure of the political marketplace that create the incentive structures to which individual actors must respond. To demonstrate the link between the political marketplace and unnecessary violence due to the inexperience of market players, the paper will then examine example of the Kasai region of southern Congo, which in 2016 shifted rapidly from a peaceful, mostly-overlooked backwater to the epicenter of a massive humanitarian crisis.

The birth and evolution of the Congolese political market: Key phases and critical junctures

Five key "critical junctures" – key stages or inflection points – characterize the development of the structures and patterns of market dynamics in the Congolese political marketplace. Those critical junctures are: 1) the conquest of lands in the Kongo River Basin by the Belgian King Leopold II, who ruled the Congo as his personal colony before passing "ownership" of the Congo to the Belgian government; 2) the shift from Belgian colonization to independence; 3) the social and political developments under Mobutu Sese Seko, who embedded corruption and kleptocracy at all levels of government and drastically weakened the institutions of the state; 4) the fall of Mobutu and the shift to rule by Joseph Kabila during the Congo Wars of the late 1990s and early 2000s; and, 5) the 2018 presidential election which resulted in the presidency of Felix Tshisekedi.

The vast area that would become the Congo was never, prior to the arrival of European colonizers, a single political unit, but rather a collection of kingdoms and chiefdoms (Vansina 1998). The birth of the Congo/Zaire[1] political marketplace as a discrete entity would not occur until after Congolese independence in 1960. However, King Leopold II's conquest of lands in the Kongo River Basin and the subsequent colonization of those lands by the Belgian state set the conditions and structures that the newly-formed Congolese state would inherit.[2]

It is thus worth examining. Although Leopold's publicly-stated reasons for the conquest of the Congo were couched in religious and humanitarian terms, the primary goal of the structures enforced under the Belgian colonial regime was the forcible extraction of wealth, backed by brutal violence, for the benefit of an elite (Hochschild 1999, Morel 1906, 1904).[3]

A few features of the Belgian colonial state are pertinent. First was the practice of co-optation of Congolese customary authorities as enforcers of Belgian rule. Chiefs and other authorities were given political power under the Belgian administration in exchange for their loyalty (Van Bockhaven 2020). Second was the practice of what would be termed *enclavement*, in which wealth-producing areas of the colony were physically and economically isolated from any development or commerce unrelated to wealth extraction. Wealth generated by those areas was funneled away by the Belgian administration and rarely re-invested locally (Pourtier 2008). And third was the clear structuring of the political economy of the colony such that a relatively miniscule number of colonial authorities were responsible for collecting the wealth generated by millions of colonial subjects (Dougherty 2005, Morel 1904). This political economy was upheld in part by a system of forced labor and heavy taxation. Congo-

1 During the time period in question, the area that would eventually become the Democratic Republic of the Congo went through a variety of name changes. It was referred to as the Congo Free State under Leopold II; as the Belgian Congo once under administration by the Belgian state; as the Republic of Zaire under much of Mobutu's rule; and finally, as the Democratic Republic of the Congo once Mobutu was deposed. For clarity, this paper will simply refer to it as the Congo.

2 A political marketplace involves buying and selling of power and violence in accordance with the laws of supply and demand. Colonialism in the Congo was motivated by economics and stripped immense amounts of wealth from the area, but political power was never traded according to a price function, so the colonial administration cannot be considered a true "marketplace."

3 To be precise, the colonial period included two distinct parts: first, the era of the Congo Free State, the name given to the vast areas of central Africa that Leopold II conquered and ruled by Leopold as a corporate state, without intermediation from other Belgian officials; and second, the period between Leopold's death and Congolese independence, in which the Belgian government took control of the Congo as a Belgian colony.

lese colonial subjects could be compelled to work for up to 60 days per year with no compensation (Hochschild 1999, Fernández Soriano 2017). The Belgians levied heavy taxes on Congolese colonial subjects, and taxes had to be paid in cash -- essentially forcing people to work on government-owned plantations and mines to be able to make their tax payments.

The second critical juncture in Congolese history – which led ultimately to its emergence as a political market – occurred at independence. The Congo gained independence quite suddenly in 1960, and the new class of Congolese ruling elite inherited much of the legal and political structures left by colonization. The first five years of the independent Congolese state were turbulent. Two regions, Kasai and Katanga, attempted to secede – and their rebellions were brutally put down (Lemarchand 1962). The first Congolese Prime Minister, Patrice Lumumba, was assassinated through a conspiracy carried out by his Congolese political rivals and the American and Belgian governments (Weissman 2012). Lumumba's assassination was facilitated by Mobutu Sese Seko, a colonel in the Congolese army who eventually rose to become president of the entire country (Weissman 2014). Despite the upheavals of this period, the base structure of the colonial political economy remained intact. Mobutu thus inherited a system in which he had access to the wealth flows of the entire country, and the first years of independence saw many of the features of the extractive colonial political economy become cemented as fixtures of Congolese governance. The key shifts were that the central players became Congolese politicians, not Belgian colonizers, and that political power was more easily contested and traded among those central players.

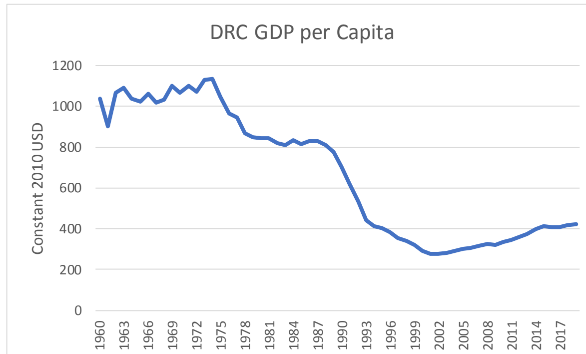
A third shift in the political economy occurred over time under Mobutu, as he lent his particular personal tendencies to the character of the overall system. Under Mobutu, the Congo truly developed into a political marketplace as he entrenched the practice of bartering money and violent force for political power in the nation's power structures (Matti 2010). Mobutu imparted a certain informality to the structure of the political economy, as he preferred to exert power through personal patron-client relationships with other elites instead of through formal institutions and government bodies (Englebert and Mungongo 2016, Vlassenroot and Raeymaekers 2008). This parallel shadow system left the formal institutions in place, though they became increasingly hollow and ineffective (Tull 2005, Vlassenroot and Raeymaekers 2008). Second, Mobutu both implicitly and explicitly authorized corruption and competition at all levels of the Congolese political economy, as summed up in his famous directive *"debrouillez-vous"* – best translated as "take care of things yourself" (Tull 2005). Informalizing (and, therefore, concealing) the real political structures of the country let Mobutu manage them more efficiently so long as he could maintain his position at their center. His authorization of subordinates to enrich themselves through corruption relieved the pressure on Mobutu to provide for them while also incentivizing subordinates to compete for personal gain, rather than to collaborate against him (Vlassenroot and Raeymaekers 2008). The structural effects on the Congolese system were to introduce a two-tiered political economy; at the top, Mobutu's privileged position in the web of governance relationships reinforced a centralized (if highly informalized) kleptocracy; the lower echelons of government (and, indeed, the rest of Congolese society) became much more fractious and competitive (Englebert 2002).

While serving Mobutu's interest in the short-term, this system was inherently unsustainable. Mobutu's flow of resources depended on a constant stream of revenue from direct foreign aid and exports of diamonds and copper (Vlassenroot and Raeymaekers 2008). As prices for these materials plummeted and foreign aid finally began to dry up with the end of the cold war, he had fewer resources with which to pay for loyalty (Matti 2010). Chronic lack of reinvestment into the parastatal resource-management companies combined with system-wide patronage and graft made them less productive and less profitable, gradually reducing the proportion of resources within Mobutu's control and fracturing his grasp over the marketplace (Vlassenroot and Raeymaekers 2008).

A fourth critical juncture came during the events of the late 1990s and early 2000s, which saw two nationwide wars (collectively referred to as the Congo Wars), the end of Mobutu's reign, and the eventual rise of Joseph Kabila as the Congo's president with new relationships to the country's formal and informal political structures. This period saw a sharp drop in the ability of the central Congolese government to maintain control and manage wealth extraction from certain peripheries of the country. Most notably, the Congo's eastern provinces came under heavy control by the Rwandan and Ugandan militaries and associated non-state armed actors during this period. Even after the formal end of the Congo Wars in 2002, Rwandan and Ugandan influence persisted (UN Security Council 2013). Ugandan influence took the form of illicit transnational commerce networks (primarily in gold and timber) managed by officers of the Ugandan People's Defense Force; Rwandan influence persisted in financial and military support to a series of armed groups (Council 2001). During this time, control by the central state over the remaining peripheries tightened – especially Kasai and southern Katanga, and their rich deposits of industrial-grade diamonds and copper (Misser 2000). Profits from the mineral trade in Kasai and Katanga were used to barter with other nations for armed support as well as personal enrichment and maintenance of the political marketplace (Lutundula 2006).

Decline of the economy as a result of the marketplace:

Actors in the system during this period manipulated Congolese law to facilitate their accumulation of wealth. Increasingly heavy tax burdens, crumbling infrastructure, and the loss of employment from hollowed out industries combined to impoverish the majority of the population. Expressed in constant 2010 dollars, GDP per capita dropped from $1,134 in 1974 to $386 in 1996.



(Source: World Bank 2019)

The political marketplace structure of this time period fragmented sharply and may best be described as a segmented market. The Kinshasa-based government and much of the country functioned as an oligopoly, though heavily influenced by Zimbabwean and Angolan politicians (Lutundula 2006). The political marketplace in the east, rocked by the war years and the continued interventions of the Ugandan and Rwandan governments, was much more competitive and offered space for a variety of politico-military entrepreneurs to emerge – many of whom wore multiple hats as military leaders, militia warlords, businesspeople, or customary authorities. Elites in Kinshasa were forced to alternately bargain, compete, or collude with these alternative networks. Starting at the end of the Congo Wars in 2002, the central Congolese state began to reassert its control over the entire territory. During the 2010s, there was a slow but steady shift back towards a centralized kleptocracy with President Joseph Kabila at its head, albeit one that saw political power increasingly blended with an impressive array of business interests that the president and his family controlled.

The fifth and final critical juncture for the Congolese political economy came in 2018 in the form of a presidential election. That election had originally been scheduled for 2016; Kabila, constitutionally barred from running again, delayed the election as long as possible (Mbaku 2016). Three major candidates participated in the race: Emmanuel Ramazani Shadary, Kabila's handpicked successor; Martin Fayulu, a former business executive; and Felix Tshisekedi, the son of Congo's long-running opposition figure Etienne Tshisekedi. According to both pre-election polling and the leaked results of the electoral commission, Fayulu should have won the election (Steinhauser 2019). Instead – in what appeared to be a last-minute deal between the Kabila and Tshisekedi camps – the electoral commission's official report named Felix Tshisekedi as the winner.

The implications of this election are varied, and still unfolding. Although Kabila lost the formal powers of the presidency, he retains immense influence within the Congo. His personal networks among the country's elite include leaders of the security services, and he retains control over a range of business interests. The Congo may be headed in the direction of an entrenched duopoly, in which the networks of Tshisekedi and Kabila alternately collude and compete for greater influence over the system (LeClerq 2020).

Throughout the five critical junctures above, the Congo's political marketplace has been primarily fueled by extraction of a variety of natural resources. The eastern provinces of the Kivus have produced timber, oil, and the infamous "conflict minerals" of gold, tantalum, tin, and tungsten. Katanga has produced oil, uranium, and copper for over a half-century. Kasai and Kisangani have been reliable sources of diamonds. Of these, the relative stability in Kasai made it a reliable source of wealth for Kinshasa's elites.

The elites sitting atop the Congo's politico-military hierarchy have been the primary beneficiaries of this wealth – whether Belgian colonists, or loyalists of Mobutu and Kabila. The state apparatus is designed for the primary purpose of extracting wealth from the country's peripheries and funneling it towards the center. The center's control over these peripheries is maintained, in large part, either through payoffs to key local elites or through "licenses" (whether formal or informal) that allow those elites to extract a cut from the funds they funnel back to the center. Both local actors and the central state may employ armed violence – whether through official security services or informal militias – to improve their ability to extract wealth from the system. And efforts to break up or weaken the political marketplace have largely failed; the resiliency of the market has resulted in little real change.[4]

Kasai: the history of *enclavement*

Kasai, a region in southern DRC, has for more than a century been home to an immensely profitable diamond mining industry and little else. Diamond mining began here in the early 1900s, under the rule of Leopold II. The company managing these mines since Leopold's time took the name Société Minière de Bakwanga (MIBA), at independence. MIBA had long assumed the role of the state for the Kasaien population, providing health care, a water system, access to manufactured goods, and transportation infrastructure as well as the only formal employment (Derksen 1983). Under a strategy of *enclavement*, only bare-bones infrastructure – an unpaved highway and a few small airports – connected Kasai's main cities to the rest of the country (Kabamba 2018).

Initially, MIBA's pseudo-governance of Kasai worked well enough; an informal political bargain, in which MIBA provided a minimum level of welfare for Kasaiens in exchange for labor for the diamond mines, kept the peace in the region. Kinshasa's elites profited from the arrangement, for little investment. However, MIBA's presence also effectively prevented the development of any real economy beyond the diamond mines and subsistence agriculture. It also set the precedent that the central state had no responsibility for Kasai, while MIBA controlled all aspects of the population's daily lives. Accordingly, the Kasaien population felt little allegiance to the central state, and Kasai gradually became a stronghold of political opposition.

As a part of a nationwide movement in the mid-1970s to staunch the flow of wealth out of the country through foreign-owned enterprises, Mobutu's government nationalized MIBA (Lutundula 2006). Once formally integrated into the government as a parastatal agency, MIBA's commercial viability declined as a series of politically-appointed directors used its coffers to advance their own careers or to line their own pockets. (Lutundula 2006). Kasai's economy, dependent on MIBA as its sole lynchpin, declined as well.

Enclavement continued under Kabila's presidency (Kabamba 2018). To enforce his control over the region, the Kabila government blocked Kasai's access to the Inga Dam power station and allowed supporters in Katanga to waylay materials being shipped to Kasai (Misser 2000). At the same time, Kabila used MIBA's diamond wealth for the benefit of himself and his cronies. He also co-opted diamond wealth to pay off foreign allies – both by diverting funds from MIBA and then by granting lucrative diamond concessions to the Zimbabwean and Chinese governments (Lutundula 2006). These changes had the effect of undercutting MIBA's long-term profitability and, with it, the province's general economy. With the decline of MIBA, artisanal mining – regulated informally, but

4 For example, the 2006 constitution – negotiated at the end of the Congo Wars – included provisions for the decentralization of finances. Under this decentralization scheme, provincial governments should have gained control over tax funds; 40% of taxes would go to provincial governments, while 60% would pass to the center in Kinshasa. However, the system was never fully implemented and payments to the provinces never totaled more than 10%. Provincial governments used the lack of payment as an excuse to levy their own taxes; the average Congolese citizen wound up paying more taxes for no more benefits (Englebert and Mungongo 2016).

decisively, by local customary chiefs – grew in importance as a source of livelihoods.

In other words, across the regimes of Mobutu and Kabila, Kasai held a place of importance in the *political economy* of the Congo, generating financial flows that Kinshasa's elites put to use in buying and selling power and influence. The region of Kasai was, however, largely prevented from becoming a feature in the national-level *political marketplace*; because of the successful efforts of Mobutu and Kabila to marginalize the region, it had little political agency of its own. This extractive legacy – of treating Kasai as a source of wealth and power and nothing more – would come to shape the crisis that erupted in 2016, as well as the humanitarian response.

The 2016 Kasai crisis: a series of stumbles?

For all its intrigue, Kasai had remained remarkably peaceful for most of Congo's history. Unlike the Kivus and Katanga, the combination of resource wealth and political volatility had not given rise to armed violence. In 2016, however, a succession struggle over a customary chieftainship sparked a wave of violence that ignited an enormous humanitarian disaster.

ANALYSIS: This lack of violence in the pre-crisis Kasai may indicate that elite figures – including Evariste Boshab, Alex Kande, and Kasaien customary authorities – had no desire for armed conflict. Or, phrased differently, the players in the political marketplace preferred the use of political machinations, over and above armed violence, to advance their own agendas.

Customary chieftainships are typically hereditary and patrilinear, passing from an elder male to a younger male within the same family group. Because they are hybrid traditional/state positions, representing the nexus of formal state power and customary authority, they must be officially recognized by state bureaucracies (Van Laer 2017). In return, chiefs are entitled to collect certain fees and distribute land under specific circumstances (Van Laer 2017). In Kasai, customary authorities hold de facto local authority, and representatives of the formal state are highly mistrusted. As a means of co-opting customary power, state officials allied with Joseph Kabila (including Evariste Boshab, a native Kasaien and the Minister of the Interior during the Kasai crisis) had evolved a practice known as *dedoublement*, in which state recognition of customary chieftainships was denied to those chiefs who were loyal to the political opposition (CRG 2018). State officials would instead grant official recognition to competing candidates who proclaimed loyalty to the Kabila government (Kabamba 2018).

In 2013, Jean-Pierre Mpandi, a Kasaien diamond dealer of Luba ethnicity (and associated with the Congolese political opposition) was poised to inherit a high-level customary chieftainship that would allow him to influence the flow of artisanal diamond mining throughout a large area in Kasai (CRG 2018). Between 2013 and 2016, however, his claim went unrecognized by the Kasai governor Alex Kande, who backed a rival claimant to the same chieftainship (HRW 2017). Friction between the two steadily escalated for a period of several years. Mpandi's local popularity grew steadily as he made public speeches criticizing the state, and Congolese officials accused him of plotting an armed uprising (Kabamba 2018)(RFI).

The conflict around Mpandi's succession stayed peaceful until April of 2016, when state security forces raided his home. In the course of the raid, soldiers assaulted Mpandi's wife and mishandled sacred objects associated with his chieftain status. Mpandi, who was absent from Kasai when his home was raided, returned to his home village where he began to raise a small militia and erect roadblocks (RFI 2017).

For several months, it appeared as though the escalating conflict could have been settled through diplomacy. President Kabila visited the region in July to inaugurate a solar power station, but took the opportunity to make quiet inquiries about Mpandi's case (RFI 2017). At around the same time, a provincial politician reached out to Mpandi in an effort to mediate, and Mpandi had seemed open to de-escalation (RFI 2017, Radio Okapi 2017).

In August 2016, Mpandi's militia, who called themselves Kamuina Nsapu after the title of the chieftainship, car-

ANALYSIS: This period of the Kasai crisis matches the pattern of the "rent-seeking rebellion" of the political marketplace, in which a lower-level politico-military figure revolts against a central authority with the end goal of a negotiated settlement. Mpandi's actions – symbolic attacks against state offices while simultaneously negotiating with state authorities – suggest that his end goal may have been a negotiated settlement in which he was awarded the Kamuina Nsapu chieftainship in exchange for a cessation of violence.

In this specific instance, Mpandi underestimated the resolve of the central state to respond with overwhelming force; the penalty for this miscalculation was his eventual death at the hands of the Congolese army.

ried out an attack on government sites in the city of Tshimbulu. Nine people – including three Kamuina Nsapu members and five police officers – were killed in the attack. The militia also burned down several buildings, including the police station, the mayor's residence, and the offices of the state electoral commission (RFI 2017, Radio Okapi 2017). These targets were carefully chosen; by attacking state targets, Mpandi was likely attempting to send a message to Governor Kande and underline the consequences of denying him his chieftainship.

In response, the Congolese army (the *Forces Armées de la République Democratique du Congo*, or FARDC) attacked multiple villages under Kamuina Nsapu's control, raping women and carrying out summary executions. Several skirmishes ensued between the army and the militia, with soldiers killing more than 100 non-militia civilians (US Department of State 2018).

After a series of escalating attacks, the Congolese state forces issued a final ultimatum to Mpandi: surrender, or be killed. Mpandi, fearing for his safety if he surrendered, invited state representatives to visit him in his home village to continue negotiations (RFI 2017). Instead, the Congolese army attacked his village and killed Jean-Pierre Mpandi on the spot (CRG 2018).

Mpandi's death did little to deter the Kamuina Nsapu militia. Instead, the militia expanded – even as it fractured into a number of armed movements with no clear overall leader or objective. Mpandi's body was taken into custody by state officials, and not granted the burial ceremonies to which customary authorities are typically entitled (RFI 2017). This act of disrespect appeared to fuel the expanding militia movement.

This expansion and fragmentation led to a notable shift in tactics. Under Mpandi's leadership, the Kamuina Nsapu militia had been vicious but relatively disciplined, generally restricting itself to attacks on government personnel and buildings. The sprawling Kamuina Nsapu movement that emerged after his death had no such objective or discipline. And since the Kamuina Nsapu militia was primarily Luba, other ethnic groups, supported by the government armed forces, recruited self-defense militias under the common title of the Bana Mura (US Department of State 2017). Quickly, the fighting coalesced along ethnic cleavages.

The government response to the growing crisis was both heavy-handed and indiscriminate, as army units from the country's eastern provinces – many of whom had previously been accused of human rights abuses – rotated into Kasai (MONUSCO 2016, US Department of State 2017). Government soldiers killed hundreds of Kasaien citizens in the response and seemed not to differentiate between actual militia members and potential supporters or sympathizers. At the same time, both individual politicians and government security services collaborated with, and armed, the Bana Mura

ANALYSIS: If Mpandi's underestimation of the state's appetite for violence was the first political miscalculation of the Kasai crisis, the hyper-militarized response by the FARDC certainly constituted the second such mis-step. The FARDC's clumsy counterinsurgency campaign in the Kasai –heavy-handed and disproportionate even in comparison to the long-running violence in the eastern Congo – appears to have been intended to shock the Kasai residents into compliance with the state. Instead, it backfired, as the crisis metastasized across the region.

militias, despite their brutality towards Luba civilians (US Department of State 2017). However, the government's callousness did not squelch the Kamuina Nsapu rebellion. If anything, it likely convinced more Luba civilians that the Kamuina Nsapu's revolt against state authority was justified.

ANALYSIS: These events suggest that the heavy-handed state response was a miscalculation, rather than a thought-through strategy. In killing Mpandi, the FARDC removed the only person who could have negotiated an end to widespread violence. Not even his immediate family had the authority or the reach to de-escalate the Kasai crisis.

By February of 2017, Congolese state officials had managed to open lines of communication with members of Jean-Pierre Mpandi's family, and by March, the two sides had negotiated a settlement. Mpandi's family was given the right to appoint the next customary chief, and Mpandi's remains were returned to his home village for proper burial (RFI 2017). However, it was too late to quell the wider rebellion; the conflict had become unmanageable, with fighting spilling into neighboring provinces (RFI 2017). It would take a presidential election the following year, in which Kasai native Felix Tshisekedi gained the presidency, for the broader rebellion to subside.

The Humanitarian Fallout

In the years leading up to the Kamuina Nsapu conflict, the region had been stable in comparison to the rest of the country. The UN had pulled out all but a few staff, and only a small number of international NGOs were maintaining small development programs in the region (UN Security Council 2017, 2013). This lack of humanitarian infrastructure – the result of the perception of the Kasai as "peaceful" – combined with national-level political market dynamics to constrain the ability of humanitarian actors to respond decisively to the crisis.

By the end of the conflict, an estimated 1.4 million people had been displaced and between 500 and 1000 people had been killed in conflict (HRW 2017). Indirect deaths from malnutrition and disease after civilians were displaced from their homes and support services numbered far greater. Farming supported some 90% of the population, but by late 2017, hundreds of thousands had missed three successive agricultural seasons due to the conflict and lacked the resources to resume cultivation on a normal scale. The number of food insecure households tripled in the areas with the most fighting, and access to basic services like healthcare plummeted, resulting in massive malnutrition (WFP 2017). And despite the fighting among self-defense militias, reports indicate that the majority of deaths were at the hands of government security forces (Van Laer 2017, Peacekeeping 2017, HRW 2017).

There was little humanitarian or government institutional or physical infrastructure to support a large-scale response and NGOs were slow to become engaged. Chronic government neglect of the region's infrastructure reduced the capacity of local government health institutions to meet the normal needs of the population, much less support a crisis response. Of the 95 health zones in the Kasai region, only 16 had treatment available for severe acute malnutrition (Kasai Regional Nutrition Cluster 2017) . Much of the UN's Humanitarian Response Fund was used for a "logistics platform" to include helicopters and chartered flights, to allow aid to get into this remote region and out to the dispersed displaced populations. Coordination mechanisms among government and humanitarian actors had to be created and lacked qualified staff (OCHA 2017).

By mid-September 2017, the agencies working in nutrition estimated there had been 350,000 cases of severe malnutrition during the year, far exceeding the non-crisis forecast of 106,677 cases for the year. Of the estimated total cases, only 13% had been treated. The nutrition cluster projected they would need 70,000 cartons of Ready to Use Therapeutic Food for the rest of the year, but had only 10,000 on-hand (Kasai Regional Nutrition Cluster 2017).

In addition to the lack of infrastructure, political marketplace dynamics hampered the rollout of the aid response. Never missing an opportunity to profit from crisis, the Congolese government levied a $9 million dollar bill on the UN for "administrative fees" before they could launch the Kasai response. This was dropped only after a meeting

ANALYSIS (a note): This analysis is based on the facts and records that are available; the conclusions about the skills and motivations of the key figures involved are, of course, inferential and somewhat uncertain.

between WFP's Executive Director David Beasley and President Kabila himself (Miles 2017).

Well into 2018, when most of the remaining displaced people returned with empty hands to their empty homes, humanitarian assistance remained feeble. By 2020, the province was still largely neglected by the outside world, with only a very small increase in the level of international humanitarian and development support .

Analysis: The crisis through the PMF lens

The Kasai crisis underlines a few key dynamics of the Congolese political marketplace: First, that despite their physical distance, the politics of peripheries, like Kasai, and those of the capital are deeply intertwined (especially in the context of events in an opposition stronghold during the run-up to a national election); second, that participation in the political market (and, therefore, some level of allegiance to its "rules") is not restricted to high-level elites, but extends to authority figures at very local levels; and third, that political marketplaces may be especially vulnerable to crises prompted by armed conflict when those markets have previously seen a protracted peaceful period. Although political entrepreneurs are rarely motivated by altruism, the skill of marketplace players may have direct impacts on the scale of a humanitarian crisis; and as the humanitarian response illustrates, state actors may be just as likely to attempt to monetize a crisis as to alleviate it.

As previously noted, the Kasai crisis was unique because the region had remained largely peaceful for several decades prior to 2017. When the Kasai did finally erupt into violence, the political players– reacted quite clumsily. In a classic "rent-seeking rebellion" -- which, it would appear, was the strategy that Mpandi pursued – the use of violence is carefully calibrated (De Waal 2015). A politico-military entrepreneur who uses a light touch may be dismissed as unserious or weak. Too much violence, on the other hand, can cause unwanted escalations. Both the mutineer and the government forces are, in the long term, prepared to bargain; the use of force on both sides, while brutal, is part of a carefully calculated negotiation.

ANALYSIS: The outcomes of the key political players strengthen the hypothesis that the crisis in the Kasai resulted, at least in part, from poorly-calculated political moves. Mpandi, of course, was killed early in the crisis. Evariste Boshab lost his position as Interior Minister at the end of 2016 and took up a parliamentary post instead (CRG 2018). Despite his party holding a parliamentary majority, he lost a 2019 bid to become President of the Senate – suggesting that he had fallen out of favor with his political bosses (Radio Okapi 2019). In 2017, Alex Kande was ousted as governor of Kasai-Central amidst charges of embezzlement; he, too attempted to run for parliament but was formally disqualified for corruption. And Boshab, Kande, and several military figures were eventually placed on international sanctions lists as punishment for their roles in the Kasai crisis (HRW 2017, Treasury 2021). Judged by its outcomes for the key players, the crisis seems to have not gone according to plan.

In this case, however, both Mpandi's initial rebellion and the military's response were woefully mis-calibrated. Although he initially seemed able to parlay his rebellion into negotiations with Kasai officials, Mpandi's rebellion, eventually prompted a brutal campaign of retaliation from the Congolese army and led to his death – hardly the hoped-for result for an aspiring political entrepreneur. At the same time, the heavy-handed response by the Congolese military backfired, providing support for Mpandi's crusade against the state. The government's refusal to allow a customary burial for Mpandi's body likewise enflamed local sentiments against them (Radio Okapi 2017). And perhaps most clumsily, in killing Mpandi, the military removed the only figure who could have brought about a negotiated peace. Instead, with no central leader or figurehead, the Kamuina Nsapu militias fragmented and splintered even as they grew, morphing from a vehicle for one man's political aspirations into a distributed network that could not be easily bargained with.

Why these missteps? The key actors, themselves, were hardly sheltered from political realities. Jean-Pierre Mpandi had traveled extensively outside of the Kasai, and the Congolese army units deployed to Kasai had rotated in from the Kivu provinces. The actors had had opportunities to familiarize themselves with the use of violence in a political marketplace. However, because the Kasai political market itself had gone so long without a serious episode of violence, one possible explanation is that these actors simply lacked the experience necessary to fine-tune their deployments of force, and drastically miscalculated as a result.

To be clear, marketplace actors have little incentive to defuse humanitarian crises. At best, they may feel an obligation to protect those parts of their own constituencies who are affected by a crisis, though even this response often has an escalatory effect. Certainly, none of the marketplace actors in the Kasai crisis seems to have factored in the humanitarian cost of their actions. This apparent lack of regard for humanitarian concerns is not a function of the individual morality of marketplace actors, but a feature of the incentive structure of the political marketplace. From the roots of the marketplace in the colonial era through the administrations of Mobutu and Kabila, few – if any – collective sanctions against self-serving behavior have existed. Spending large amounts of resources to de-escalate a conflict or deliver services to a crisis-affected population is unlikely to result in financial or political gain for a marketplace actor. In an intensely competitive political marketplace defined by bargaining and patronage, it may be likely that those actors who would volunteer money or time with no hope of a reward are weeded out long before they become influential enough to help in a crisis.[5]

With that said, however, a more skillful set of choices on the part of Mpandi and state authorities – more carefully calibrated to an eventual negotiated settlement – could have averted much of the crisis while advancing the interests of the marketplace actors. Certainly, the key players (Mpandi, Boshab, and Kande) saw their fortunes suffer, to varying extents, as a result of their involvement.

In sum, the Kasai's status as a relatively young battlefield – and the political marketplace dynamics that that entailed – may have both enflamed the initial crisis and constrained the ability of humanitarian actors to respond. In imagining a counterfactual scenario in which the players had negotiated more skillfully, one can postulate that the bulk of the crisis – which, again, resulted from the splintering and mushrooming of the Kamuina Nsapu rebellion after Mpandi's death – could have been averted even as the primary players acted in their own interests. Few humanitarian agencies had the on-the-ground presence that would have facilitated a prompt response. The longtime neglect of the Kasai's infrastructure – via the intentional political strategy of *enclavement* – meant that much of the money invested in the humanitarian response went to logistics and infrastructure, instead of to direct aid. And the attempts of Congolese state actors to extract wealth and levy fees on the aid response further constrained and delayed that response.

CONCLUSION

This analysis is not intended to endorse the types of bargaining that characterize the political marketplace; even in the best-case scenario, a protracted "negotiation" between Mpandi and the military would likely have resulted in widespread civilian deaths. Rather, the goal of this analysis is to raise the issue that "young" violent marketplaces

5 This lack of regard for human life in a crisis seems, unfortunately, to be characteristic of the political marketplace. The "rent-seeking rebellion," a classic feature of the political marketplace in which a military commander rebels in the hopes of being paid off to rejoin the state military, is likewise catastrophic for civilian life. Perversely, many actors in the political marketplace tend to treat the infliction of casualties as a form of bargaining, in which killing large numbers of civilians signals both military strength and the personal resolve of the commander. CITE Real Politics of the Horn of Africa

may be susceptible to extreme violence, both because the marketplace tends to hamper and co-opt the humanitarian response, and because market players have little experience in calibrating their use of force and predicting the responses of other players.

The 2016 Kasai crisis occurred as a direct result of competition within the political marketplace. A political entrepreneur hoped to advance his position within the marketplace and marshalled a militia to assist his bid for a lucrative chieftainship. The state responded through overwhelming force, metastasizing the crisis; those actors who had the power and influence to respond used the growing crisis to entrench their own interests or empower their political bases. Violence was a tool used by all actors to leverage and better their positions, not an unintended outcome of the competition. And with the incentives of the political marketplace set as they were, the product of 60 years of entrenched patronage rule preceded by 75 years of systematic colonial looting, this crisis in Kasai may have been inevitable. However, although the marketplace conditions may have made the crisis inevitable, more skilled political players could have reduced the magnitude of the conflict – along with its devastating effects on local populations – while still profiting from the incentive structures of the political marketplace.

Observers of conflict, including foreign governments, national and local NGOs, and the United Nations, have grown accustomed to analyzing resources, economics, and ethnic division as drivers of conflict. Although potentially harder to measure and research, this analysis suggests that understanding the maturity of a violent marketplace – the skill levels of key political and military figures, and the incentive structures within which they operate – may play a valuable role in assessing the likelihood and scale of potential humanitarian disasters. Peacebuilding and humanitarian agencies who hope to act within the political marketplace (as well as the donor agencies who fund them) would be well served to build their institutional awareness both of the incentive structures of the political market and the competencies of decisionmakers to navigate those incentive structures.

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