1 | *The Peacebuilding World*

In mid-2007, in a beautiful garden overlooking Lake Kivu, I listened to an old man named Georges recall the turmoil of the mid-1990s in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Before that time, he and his small circle of friends, all people of European descent but born and raised in the Congo, had been the only white people around, with the exception of the occasional development worker. This situation suddenly changed in the mid-1990s, when the Rwandan genocide sent 2 million refugees pouring into the eastern Congo. Two large-scale wars started in the massacre's wake, the first in 1996 and the second in 1998. Contingents of nongovernmental organization staff members and United Nations (UN) officials arrived, and eventually diplomats followed. The old white Congolese found them all quite amusing. "We called them 'the humanoids,'" Georges said. "It fits them very well, because they are people full of ideals, of vigor … but they come from another planet. They are completely disoriented." I could not help but think that, in a few sentences, Georges had just encapsulated my six years of research on the international intervention in the Congo. International peacebuilders have their own world, with its own rituals, its own customs, its own beliefs, its own roles, its own stars, its own villains, its own rules, its own taboos, its own meeting places – in brief, its own culture. This peacebuilding culture shaped the intervention strategy in the Congo. And, tragically, as the Congo progressed through a transition from war to peace and democracy (2003 to 2006), the intervention failed.

An interview that I conducted in Nyunzu, a village in the jungle of the eastern province of Katanga, illustrates what this failure meant for the local population. There, I met Isabelle, a woman who had just brought her malnourished toddler to the local nutritional center. A couple of years before, she and other members of her community had fled to the bush to escape the fighting in her village. Local militias soon found her hiding place. "They were coming almost every week,"

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she recalled, "even two to three times a week, to loot our properties, beat us, leave people naked, and make forced love to the women" – "forced love" being the standard euphemism for rape. I asked Isabelle why she did not flee again or try to find a new hiding place, and her answer has remained in my mind ever since. "We were used to it," she said. "We were near our land. We did not want to leave it."

I heard similar stories throughout my interviews with perpetrators and victims of violence. Two themes constantly recurred: the primacy of land and other micro-level issues in causing violence and producing anguish, and the unspeakable horrors perpetrated on the Congolese population. The first theme is crucial. It helps us to understand why violence started, why it became so pervasive, why it continued after the Congo embarked on a transition from war to peace and democracy, and why the efforts of international interveners failed to help the Congo build a sustainable peace.

The second theme should be familiar to anyone who has read or heard about the Congo in the past fifteen years. Scholars and policy makers consider the Congo wars of the 1990s and their aftermath as some of the most complex conflicts of our time. They are also the most terrible. Generating levels of suffering unparalleled in any recent war, they caused, directly and indirectly, the highest death toll of any conflict since World War II. An estimated one thousand civilians die every day, mostly due to malnutrition and diseases that could be easily prevented if the Congo's already weak economic and social structures had not collapsed during the conflict.[1] The wars also traumatized the population of the contested eastern provinces: 81% had to flee their homes, more than half experienced the violent death of family members or friends, more than a third were abducted for at least a week, and 16% were subject to sexual violence, usually repeatedly.[2] The atrocities that armed groups committed against the civilian population were so heinous that the Congo became a symbol of horror, even compared to such places as Darfur and the former Yugoslavia. The wars also involved up to fourteen foreign armies; they destabilized such a large part of the African continent that U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Susan Rice called them the first African World War.

[1] International Rescue Committee 2003, 2005, and 2007.
[2] Vinck, Pham, et al. 2008.

In order to understand how the Congo finally emerged from this disastrous and complicated situation, it is crucial to examine the international intervention conducted in support of the peace process. UN officials as well as African and Western diplomats actively supervised negotiations to end the wars. The resulting agreements produced several cease-fires and allowed for the deployment of a small UN peacekeeping force. Eventually, because of heavy international pressure, the warring parties reached a comprehensive peace settlement in 2003.

International involvement grew uncommonly robust during the three and a half years demarcated as the transitional period from war to peace and democracy, from June 2003 to December 2006 – the period on which this book focuses. The UN mission in the Congo became the largest and most expensive peacekeeping operation in the world. The European Union (EU) sent the first ever European-led peacekeeping force. The International Criminal Court chose the Congo as its historic first case, by prosecuting several militia leaders from the northeastern district of Ituri.

During the transition, diplomats and UN officials also exerted an unusually strong influence on Congolese affairs. For the first time in any conflict, the peace agreement created a specific structure, the International Committee in Support of the Transition, to institutionalize the leading role of international actors in its implementation. Foreign donors contributed more than half of the Congolese national budget. They impelled Congolese warlords through the official reunification of the country, the formation of a unified government, the preparation for democratic elections, and the progressive integration of the different armed groups into a single national army. They closely supervised the legislative, constitutional, and electoral processes. They ensured that the candidate they viewed as most able to maintain stability, President Joseph Kabila, was in the best possible position to win the elections. They made certain that troops from neighboring countries officially remained out of Congolese territory. In many places, the UN peacekeeping mission was the only force protecting the population against the remaining armed militias. During these three and a half years, the international influence was so large that numerous Congolese political leaders, international actors, and journalists equated the Congolese situation to a "protectorate."

Thanks to this heavy international pressure, neighboring countries significantly decreased both assistance to, and manipulation of, Congolese fighters. Many national leaders also progressively switched from the violent pursuit of power to peaceful, political competition. As a result, life conditions dramatically improved for most Congolese. The changes were most striking in the eastern provinces, where the war previously had the largest impact. Families left the bush, where they had fled to escape violence, and returned home. They rebuilt their houses. Whole villages revived. Basic commodities such as salt and oil became available on the local markets again. In 2006, most Congolese enthusiastically voted for the first time in their lives to elect provincial and national representatives. At that time, Congolese and foreign observers hailed the peace process and the international intervention as major successes.

However, the situation in many parts of the eastern Congo, while significantly better, continued to remain highly unstable. Throughout the transition, unremitting clashes between various armed groups and militias, frequent massacres of civilians, massive population displacements, and appalling human rights violations, including widespread sexual violence, persisted in the provinces of North Kivu, South Kivu, North Katanga, and in Oriental Province's Ituri district (see map in Figure 1). This localized violence carried on during the postelection period and, just as during the transition, it threatened national and regional stability. ("Regional" in this book refers to the African Great Lakes region: Burundi, the Congo, Rwanda, and Uganda.) In 2007 and 2008, a conflict previously confined to a small area of North Kivu escalated into large-scale fighting, prompting 500,000 to flee their homes. Only a flurry of diplomatic activity and a forceful interposition by UN peacekeepers prevented the Congo from sliding back into a full-scale national and regional war. At the time of this writing in late 2009, however, the situation has deteriorated further. The eastern part of the Congo, especially the Kivus and Oriental Province, remains the theater of constant combat, which regularly threatens to spread throughout the region. More than 80% of the inhabitants of these places consider their living conditions to be the same as or worse than during the wars.[3] The Congo also remains the largest ongoing

[3] Ibid., p. 24.

humanitarian crisis in the world. An estimated 2 million Congolese
are internally displaced, and more than 360,000 linger as refugees in
neighboring countries.[4]

This book is the first scholarly attempt to understand why all of
the intense international peacebuilding efforts, including the largest
peacekeeping mission in the world, have failed to build a sustainable
peace in the Congo.

The Puzzle of Poor Strategies

The international failure to build lasting peace and security in the
Congo is not unique. Most recent militarized conflicts have been
internal wars, and most of these civil wars ended in negotiated peace
agreements. Nonetheless, about 20% still lapsed back into large-scale
violence within a few years, usually during the phase of peace agree-
ment implementation. Recent research has shown that significant
third-party involvement is critical for peace implementation to be suc-
cessful, but as in the Congo case, 70% of peace processes benefiting
from significant international mediation still fail to build a durable
peace.[5] Why do third-party interventions often fail to secure a sus-
tainable peace?

Understanding the reasons for these failures is more than an aca-
demic exercise. Former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan recently
emphasized the policy implications, noting that many "countries that
emerge from war lapse back into violence after five years." Referring
specifically to the failures of peace agreements in Angola, the Congo,
Haiti, Liberia, and Rwanda, he stated, "The tragic consequences
have been all too evident. ... If peace agreements had been suc-
cessfully implemented from the start in just two of those war-torn

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[4] UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2009; and Office
of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, "Country Operations Profile,"
http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/page?page=49e45c366, accessed in
October 2009.

[5] On internal wars, see Doyle and Sambanis 2006; and Fearon and Laitin 2003.
On peace agreements see Woodward 2006; on their frequency see Fortna
2004a; and on their failure see Licklider 1995; Samset and Surke 2007;
Walter 2002; and Weinstein 2005. On third-party involvement see Stedman,
Rothchild, et al. 2002; and Walter 2002; and on its failures see Doyle and
Sambanis 2006.

countries – Angola and Rwanda – [they] could have prevented millions of deaths."[6]

Recent work in international relations and comparative politics suggests a preliminary explanation for these deadly failures. Local agendas – at the level of the individual, the family, the clan, the municipality, the community, the district, or the ethnic group – at least partly drive the continuation of violence during peace agreement implementation. For example, during the late 1990s and early 2000s, after the end of the apartheid regime in South Africa, recurrent power struggles within local political parties motivated high levels of violence in KwaZulu-Natal. Likewise, in Burundi, disputes around access to land, as well as antagonisms within each ethnic group, constantly jeopardized the fragile transition to peace and democracy from 2001 to 2009. In the Maluku Islands in Indonesia, local economic, political, and ethnic agendas constantly impaired the Jakarta government's efforts to end two years of mass intercommunal violence (1999 to 2000). In Kosovo, locally derived motivations, such as occupying neighbors' apartments or seeking revenge for offenses directed at an individual or at the community, caused frequent incidents, severely affecting the peace settlement governing the province since the 1999 intervention of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Similarly, during the attempted transition to peace and democracy that started in 2002 in Afghanistan and in 2003 in Iraq, even a casual observer could distinguish local, national, and regional tensions, which interacted to produce violence. In Somalia, clan tensions were – and continue to be – widely acknowledged as the main source of violence, and have contributed to the failure of the numerous peace agreements negotiated since 1991.[7]

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[6] Reported in Thalif Deen, "UN Chief Warns of Collapsing Peace Agreements," *United Nations Inter Press Service*, July 20, 2005.

[7] On South Africa: Krämer 2006 and 2007. On Burundi: personal communications from Hammache and Rosen; and BBC news report on Burundi by Robert Walker, broadcasted on December 26, 2005 on *BBC World News*. On Indonesia: International Crisis Group 2000a and personal communication from Youcef Hammache, humanitarian aid worker, December 2005. On Kosovo: personal communication from Philippe Rosen, humanitarian aid worker, September 2005; and author's field observations and interviews, 2000. On Afghanistan: author's interviews and field observations during humanitarian mission in Kabul and Hazarajat in 2002; see also Dennys and Zaman 2009 for an excellent analysis of the linkages

In the Congo as well, local antagonisms have spiraled into broader tensions before, during, and after the transition. The tensions between the Congolese of Rwandan descent (Kinyarwanda-speaking) and the so-called indigenous communities of the Kivus provide the clearest example of this dynamic. Threats against the former partly motivated the two Rwandan invasions in the late 1990s. As detailed in chapter 4, these threats were the result of a longstanding competition between the self-styled indigenous communities of the Kivus and the Congolese population with Rwandan ancestry.

After the Belgian colonizers brought people (mostly Hutu) from overpopulated Rwanda to the lightly populated Kivus in the 1930s, antagonisms over land and local social, economic, and political power emerged between a handful of villagers, with the newly arrived immigrants in opposition to the populations indigenous to the area. This grassroots conflict escalated into a national issue after the Congo's independence in 1960, because each camp recruited allies beyond the province and sent representatives to Kinshasa to advance its local agenda. These tensions caused massive violence long before the generalized wars of the 1990s started, with indigenous groups killing thousands of Kinyarwanda-speaking Congolese in North Kivu in 1963, and again in 1993. The 1994 Rwandan genocide and the subsequent arrival of 2 million Rwandan Hutu refugees in the Kivus added a regional dimension to the crisis. The Congolese of Rwandan descent allied with the new Rwandan government, which intervened in Congo to preserve its national security. Indigenous groups organized themselves into militias called Mai Mai, eventually allying with the defeated Rwandan Hutu rebels and the Congolese government. All of the grassroots fighters originally intended merely to protect their kinsfolk, but they quickly started using their military might to abuse their own communities, seize land and mining sites, or capture political power. For much of the 1990s and early 2000s, local tensions in the Kivus repeatedly prompted outbreaks of violence and fed the national and regional conflicts.

between local, provincial, national, and regional conflicts in various Afghan provinces. On Iraq: review of newspaper articles. On Somalia: Farah and Lewis 1997 and review of newspaper articles (among many others, see for example Rakiya Omaar, "Somaliland: One Thorn Bush at a Time," *Current History*, May 1994, pp. 232–236). See also Kalyvas 2003 and 2006; and Sundh 2004 for a general claim.

After the war officially ended in 2003, the same micro-level antagonisms continued to fuel the insurgencies that destabilized the Kivu provinces. In North Kivu, Mai Mai militias remained allied with Congolese President Joseph Kabila, as well as Rwandan Hutu militias, and fought Congolese soldiers of Rwandan descent to consolidate their claims over land, natural resources, and provincial and subprovincial positions of authority. The Congolese of Rwandan descent refused any kind of settlement because they feared revenge killings and worried that they might lose the local economic and political power they had acquired during the previous wars. These conflicts fueled violence against the Kinyarwanda-speaking minority of the Kivus and sustained the presence of Rwandan Hutu rebels in Congolese territory, both of which remained the primary obstacles to national and regional reconciliation from 2003 onward. As became evident with the 2008 upsurge in violence, these grassroots issues also had the potential to reignite the national and regional wars.

In general, during the Congolese transition, while foreign peacebuilders succeeded in imposing settlements at both the regional and national levels, they failed to establish one at the subnational level. Throughout the eastern Congo, bottom-up rivalries played a decisive role in sustaining local, national, and regional violence after the conflict officially ended. These agendas pitted villagers, traditional chiefs, community chiefs, or ethnic leaders against one another over the distribution of land, the exploitation of local mining sites, the appointment to local administrative and traditional positions of authority, the collection of local taxes, and the relative social status of specific groups and individuals. The resulting violence was not coordinated on a large scale but was rather the product of fragmented, micro-level militias, each of which tried to advance its own agenda at the level of the village or district.

Top-down causes also sustained the violence after the generalized conflict officially ended. Congolese and foreign politicians continued to manipulate local leaders and militias to enrich themselves, advance their careers, or rally support for their causes. Thus, national and regional peacebuilding attempts were critical to deescalate some of the ongoing conflicts. Accordingly, diplomats and UN officials organized regional dialogues and conferences to ease the tensions between the Congo and its neighbors. In times of crises, they also put diplomatic pressure on the Rwandan and Ugandan governments to prevent

another invasion. At the national level, international interveners focused on reconstructing a unified and legitimate leadership through elections. They also tried to convince warlords to integrate their soldiers into the national army, supervised the payment of soldiers to prevent the diversion of funds, trained a few integrated brigades, and supported the Congolese authorities in their legislative and constitutional work. All of these actions significantly decreased macro-level tensions and assuaged many top-down causes of local violence.

However, as chapters 4 and 5 demonstrate, because the causes of the ongoing conflict were also distinctively local, they could be properly addressed only by combining action at the grassroots level with the intervention in the higher political spheres. Admittedly, there was tremendous variation among these locally motivated tensions. Certain grassroots conflicts (such as a dispute between two villagers vying for the same piece of land) may have been easier to address than others (such as seizing a gold mine from the hands of a local militia). Likewise, some decentralized antagonisms (such as a competition over local administrative positions) may have been more amenable to top-down interventions than others (such as a rivalry over traditional positions of authority between two clans). However, all of these grassroots conflicts had one point in common: They all required at least some bottom-up conflict-resolution processes in addition to top-down peacebuilding. This point is where the international intervention went awry. Only a few nongovernmental organizations conducted bottom-up peacebuilding in the most divided provinces. Apart from those agencies, there was no attempt to resolve land disputes, to reconstruct grassroots institutions for the peaceful resolution of conflict, or to promote reconciliation within divided villages or communities, even though international and Congolese actors could easily have done so with the resources at hand.

The Congo case is representative of a broader problem with international interventions. International peacebuilders often neglect to address the local causes of violence. As of this writing, none of the UN peacekeeping missions around the world have implemented any comprehensive grassroots conflict-resolution program.[8] No more than a handful of diplomats have tried, without success, to advocate for a

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[8] Personal communications from UN officials, 2005 and 2008.

better approach to local issues by diplomatic groups. Even nongovern-
mental organizations tend to focus on regional and national sources
of tensions, with only a few exceptions. Why do interveners neglect
the micro-level causes of peace process failure, particularly when they
threaten the macro-level settlements?

The neglect of local conflicts is even more perplexing in the case of
the Congo, because we cannot attribute it to callousness, powerless-
ness, or inanity on the part of the foreign interveners. Admittedly, not
all of the international actors present in the Congo were concerned
about the well-being of the Congolese population. A great variety of
countries and corporations took interest in the Congo primarily for its
extraordinary mineral wealth and central strategic position in Africa.
However, these actors were in the minority. Most foreign interven-
ers genuinely tried to end organized violence in the Congo. Far from
being callous, they usually were well-meaning individuals, who had
often devoted their lives to combating injustice, violence, and pov-
erty. The unceasing human rights violations deeply troubled them. Far
from being intellectually limited, they were, on average, intelligent,
well-read, and well-educated people who could have understood the
importance of local conflicts. Far from being powerless, they held tre-
mendous influence during the transition, as explained earlier. Similarly,
far from being financially limited, they spent significant resources on
the Congo (including more than a billion dollars a year on the peace-
keeping mission and $670 million to organize elections). Part of these
resources could have been devoted to local conflict resolution.

This book focuses on these "international peacebuilders," meaning
the many foreign interveners (persons, countries, or organizations)
who strived to build peace in the Congo. It looks at diplomats (in
embassies, as well as in the headquarters of their respective ministries
of foreign affairs), other government officials (such as defense offi-
cers), staff of international organizations, and staff of nongovernmen-
tal organizations, all of whom shared a goal to supervise or support
the Congo in its peacebuilding efforts. Why did almost all of them
ignore the critical micro-level causes of violence?

Main Argument

I argue that a dominant international peacebuilding culture shaped
the intervention in the Congo in a way that precluded action on local