

Hunting Game

North-eastern Central African Republic – a vast space bordering Chad, Darfur, and South Sudan – is a quintessential ‘stateless’ space, where the government has little presence and armed actors operate freely. In this first ethnographic and historical study of Central African raiding, Louisa Lombard investigates practices of forceful acquisition, a distinctive political repertoire in which claims to social status are linked to the ability to take (from wild spaces or from others) and are frequently overturned. People have developed raiding skills to survive and live in a stateless borderland for over 150 years. From the trans-Saharan slave trade and colonial forced labour regimes, to big-game hunting and coercive conservation, and to rebellion, raiding has flourished where people’s status in relation to each other is unclear and where institutional guidance is absent. *Hunting Game* offers rich comparative insights into the vibrant, if not always salutary, role that forceful acquisition plays in the world today.

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Hunting Game

Raiding Politics in the Central African Republic

Louisa Lombard

Yale University



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Acknowledgements

Sovereignty is a term used often by academics but much more rarely by others. Yet it is the answer to the most basic of questions: who gets to decide how people live? I came to north-eastern Central African Republic (CAR) interested in exploring sovereignty as experienced in the world. I saw something different from the vision offered by Thomas Hobbes in *Leviathan*, who wrote of the sovereign as someone whom everyone held in awe. In north-eastern CAR, no sovereign consistently set the terms for social life. Instead, people claimed liberties for themselves while also intermittently lamenting the absence of a sovereign, and wishing for one. But in the sovereign's absence, life in the region was not 'nasty and brutish', as Hobbes predicted, but something different altogether, with political modalities not prophesised by classical theorists.

Here were multiple aspirants to sovereign prerogatives. I went into this project equipped with the personal and disciplinary conviction that Hobbes' account of life outside the sovereign state is more bogeyman than description of actual experience in the world. Anthropologists of old sought to collect accounts from the precolonial past, which they, and their interlocutors, could represent as morally coherent, in contrast to the kinds of distortions, discontent, and injustice that accompanied colonial regimes. That is no longer defensible. Instead, contradictions and inconsistencies are obvious, and it is necessary to account for the resilience, creativity, and joys of people in these places, and their particular struggles.

While life in a controlling state has its discontents, following rules and norms under the *threat* of force rather than its exercise usually has advantages, including for interpersonal relations and especially in the context of widespread armament. For instance, consider the travails of Marcel, the operational chief at the Ministry of Water and Forests in Ndele, a town beside north-eastern CAR's parklands. I saw one subordinate physically attack Marcel when Marcel tried to tell him how to do his job. Marcel's plight was similar to that of a colonial official in the town some 70 years earlier, who had no officers to carry out his

directives. The hunting inspector ‘lent’ him an ungovernable corporal described as ‘incapable of doing anything good’ (Lignier 1936b). Then as now, officials complained about their inability to address their associates’ armed mischief. Marcel appreciated having someone to listen to him. He said with understatement, ‘It’s a little bit difficult when you recruit someone [for arms-carrying work] without knowing if he’s got a good moral compass. It’s very difficult.’

Yet it is not right to put all the onus on individuals. They participate in social situations, and in those situations moral precepts can be expressed, re-made, or brought into conflict. There are particular kinds of social situations when one lives in a place such as north-eastern CAR, where there are few people and little institutional and material infrastructure, and where the surrounding region has seen pervasive violent conflict. In this book I describe the contested sovereignty of CAR while avoiding both the demonising stereotypes about stateless spaces and the rosy ones put forth by anarchists and their supporters. Each new version of the manuscript that became this book has been a process of discovery.

My register of debts is long. First are the Central Africans – by nationality or by attachment – who shared time and knowledge with me. Among them: Faouzi Kilembe, Martine Kessy-Ekomo, Sylvain Batianga-Kinzi, Patrick Bonazoui, Boris-Harding Ndovou, Charlotte Mararv, Aziza Kassara, Habiba Mohammed, al-Habib Sanusi, Aminata Gaye, Moussa Fofana, Louis Bainilago, Guy-Florent Ankogui, Florent Zowoya, Gisèle Willybiro, Hippolyte Donossio, Fortune Kinguelewa, Jean-Baptiste Mamang-Kanga, Magloire Kolisso, Sylvain Yakara, Soumaine Ndodeba, Joseph Zoundeiko, Damane Zakaria, Pierre-Armand Roulet, Aleksandra Cimpric, Pierre-Marie David, Philippe Bouché, Stephane Gregoire, Wendy Rice, John Hanson, David Tchouinou, and Meike van Ginneken.

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I first landed in CAR 16 years ago due to some combination of luck, ignorance, and hubris. I had completed my undergraduate studies about three weeks earlier and served as a research assistant to Eric Berman, then working on a study of small arms and light weapons in CAR for the Small Arms Survey. My ignorance was deep, but so was my curiosity. Each time I go to CAR, and in many of my remote conversations with Central African friends, I am confronted with the knowledge of how much I don't know, and how impossible it is to know a people or a place comprehensively.

But nor am I wholly in the dark. I have come to see patterns in the dilemmas and opportunities people in Central Africa – whether born there or more recently arrived – face and how they deal with them. These patterns are only a few among many others in the lives of Central Africans, and they are not even necessarily the most prevalent (only a subset of people are directly involved in raiding, those most directly almost all men), but they show both something important about what life here has been like and something about the human condition.

I have tried to convey some of the simultaneous freedom and constraint that marks the processes through which people in a hunting zone strive to acquire some measure of status, liberty, and the ability to make their lives as they desire. I look forward to Central Africans, and others, discussing with me in what ways mine has been a worthwhile endeavour, and what remains to be done.

Abbreviations and acronyms

AEF	Afrique Équatoriale Française/French Equatorial Africa
ARRC	Africa Rainforest and River Conservation
AT	<i>assistant technique</i> /technical assistant
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CAMPFIRE	Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources
CAR	Central African Republic
CFA	Central African franc
DDR	disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
ECOFAC	Ecosystèmes Forestiers d’Afrique Centrale/Forest Ecosystems in Central Africa
ECOFAUNE	Ecosystèmes Fauni du nord RCA et du Sud-est de la RCA ques/ Faunal Ecosystems of North and Southeast CAR
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FPRC	Front Populaire pour la Renaissance de la Centrafrique/Popular Front for the Renaissance of the Central African Republic
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
LAB	<i>lutte anti-braconnage</i> /fight against poaching
MINUSCA	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders
NGO	non-governmental organisation
PDRN	Programme pour le Développement de la Région Nord/Programme for the Development of the Northern Region

xii	Abbreviations and acronyms
PDZCV	Programme pour le Développement des Zones Cynégétiques Villageoises/Programme for the Development of Community Hunting Zones
RFI	Radio France Internationale/French International Radio
RPRC	Rassemblement Patriotique pour le Renouveau de la Centrafrique/Union for the Patriotic Renewal of the Central African Republic
UFDR	Union des Forces Démocratiques pour le Rassemblement/Union of Democratic Forces for Unity
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
UPC	Union pour la paix en Centrafrique/Union for Peace in the CAR
ZCV	zone cynégétique villageoise/community hunting zone
ZIC	zone d’intérêt cynégétique/zone of hunting interest



Figure 0.1 Map of the Central African Republic

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