Civil Wars

IN THE

Democratic Republic of Congo

1960–2010

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Acknowledgments

Contents

Illustrations

Tables

Figures

Maps

1

The Context of
Congo's Internal Wars

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC or Congo)[1] is a leading laboratory of civil wars. Since it became independent on 30 June 1960, secessions, insurrections, rebellions, mutinies, invasions (by Congolese with sanctuary in Angola), revolts, and ethnic wars have been part of the political landscape of the DRC. As used in this book, a civil war, or internal war, is any domestic armed conflict between at least two groups or "political organizations" (Levy and Thompson 2010, p. 5), one of which is perceived to be linked to the state, and during which the violence kills more than 1,000 people and internally displaces more than 2,000 persons in the first three months of the conflict.[2] This definition includes internally displaced persons who, unlike refugees, represent another major human dimension of civil war. The duration of civil war captures the length of intense violence from its initiation until one party is defeated or agrees to a peace settlement that lasts at least three months. As Table 1.1 records, and given these definitions, Congo has had seventeen civil wars from July 1960 to December 2010, ranging in duration from twenty-three days (Shaba war II) to 2,204 days (Hema-Lendu war). The average of Congo's internal wars is 538 days, or almost eighteen months. More than four million people have been killed in Congo wars.

Why have so many civil wars erupted in the DRC? What theoretical approach best captures both the micro- and the macro-processes of Congo's wars and their duration? Was there any effort to manage these conflicts? These are the questions that I attempt to answer in this book.

Scholars and practitioners have long been preoccupied with the question of why civil wars occur. Zartman (2005, p. 256) summarizes the literature in terms of greed or resources, grievance or basic needs, and creed or identity. However, I depart from the extant literature in several ways by contending that the politics of exclusion is a major trigger of most civil wars in Congo rather than tensions over resources, basic needs, or identity.[3] The common greed, grievance, and creed approaches have highlighted a number of problems, which are also apparent in the history of Congo. As Lemarchand (2006, p. 29) has pointed out,

Table 1.1 Internal Wars in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Conflict	Beginning	Ending	Number of Deaths (IDPs)[a]	Days Duration
Katanga secession (South Katanga)	11 July 1960	14 Jan. 1963	65,000–92,000 (15,000–30,000)	917
South Kasai secession	8 Aug. 1960	2 Feb. 1962	2,500–6,500 (350,000)	543
North Katanga insurrection	5 Sept. 1960	19 Dec. 1961	65,000–80,000 (6,000–10,000)	470
Northwestern South Kasai insurrection	1 Oct. 1962	15 Apr. 1964	2,500–4,800 (6,000–12,000)	561
Kwilu rebellion	6 Jan. 1964	31 Dec. 1965	3,000–6,500 (7,000–15,000)	725
Eastern rebellion	15 Apr. 1964	1 July 1966	45,000–75,000 (150,000–200,000)	807
Mutiny of Baka Regiment	24 July 1966	25 Sept. 1966	1,100–4,200 (5,000–10,000)	63
Mercenaries' mutiny	5 July 1967	5 Nov. 1967	2,000–6,000 (7,000–18,000)	123
Shaba war I	8 Mar. 1977	27 May 1977	1,000–1,500 (5,000–9,000)	80
Shaba war II	11 May 1978	3 June 1978	1,600–3,500 (8,000–12,000)	23
Kivu ethnic war I	20 Mar. 1993	31 Aug. 1993	7,000–16,000 (200,000)	164
Kivu ethnic war II	17 July 1995	21 Dec. 1995	1,500–3,000 (150,000)	156
Kivu ethnic war III	17 Apr. 1996	12 Oct. 1996	25,000–30,000 (220,000)	178
Anti-Mobutu revolt	17 Oct. 1996	17 May 1997	236,000–237,000[b] (100,000)	211
Mai Mai insurrection	5 Sept. 1997	26 July 1998	4,500–8,800 (15,000–25,000)	324
Anti-Kabila revolt	2 Aug. 1998	17 Dec. 2002	3,200,000–4,200,000 (1,457,000)	1,598
Hema-Lendu war	19 June 1999	1 July 2005	65,000–75,000 (42,000)	2,204

Notes: a. IDPs: internally displaced persons. b. This number also includes some 233,000 Hutu refugees who were killed by the Rwandan troops between October 1996 and May 1997 (see Kisangani 2000a, p. 179; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees cited in Human Rights Watch 1999).

frequent reference to confrontations among warring factions as "resource wars" points to a misconception. Although resources may sustain an internal war, rebel leaders are rarely political outcasts. Rather, they are often former members of the government or other elites excluded from power who are trying to (re)insert themselves into the state apparatus.

With regard to the grievance approach, it is also incorrect to characterize excluded elites as an impoverished or an uneducated grieved group. On the contrary, these elites not only tend to be among the best-educated members of society but almost by definition they have enough resources to challenge the incumbent regime. Once in power, they are likely to continue the same system of predation as their predecessors, setting an unending cycle of predation and conflict. Furthermore, excluded elites in many multiethnic societies may not care about their identities. More often than not, they will create coalitions of individuals from a variety of different cultural backgrounds in their quest to oust the government. Political violence provides these coalitions with a rationale for fighting, but their ambitions may not be to sustain societal welfare, to improve governance, or to foster national identity.

Of course, stating that the politics of exclusion triggered Congo's internal wars still leaves a number of questions unanswered and a number of details to be explained. One of the most important details in this book is understanding why the masses or ethno-political constituencies follow excluded elites marching in or initiating civil war in Congo's multiethnic society. Three broad perspectives on ethnicity have attempted to answer this question. First is the primordialist perspective that takes ethnic identity as given (Smith 1986). As a consequence, conflict that emerges from ethnic differences does not necessarily need an explanation. The main criticism of this approach is its failure to account for the emergence of new identities or the transformation of existing identities as well as variations in the level of conflict over time and space (Lake and Rothchild 1998, p. 4).

The second is the instrumentalist approach that views ethnicity as a tool or a political instrument used by the elites for material goals (Brass 1985). Critics of this approach contend that ethnicity is not like any other social or political affiliation, which can be decided by individuals at will but can only be understood within a "relational framework" (Easman 1994, p. 13). As proponents of the third perspective, or constructivists, argue, ethnicity is not an individual attribute but a social phenomenon and the product of human actions and choices (Anderson 1983; Young 1993). Conflict emerges from pathological social systems that individuals cannot control. By itself, ethnicity is not a cause of violent conflict because most ethnic groups, most of the time, pursue their interests peacefully through established political channels (Lake and Rothchild 1998, p. 7). However, opponents of this approach contend that constructivists cannot elucidate how particular ethnic groups endure and why people are usually willing to die for their nations (Smith 1993). Furthermore, constructivists failed to account for the masses' motivations to follow the elites and for mechanisms that account for such following (Fearon and Laitin 2000).

This book takes a different perspective and argues that the masses are likely to follow excluded elites not because of primordial ethnic bonds or because of the social context in which such elites operate. Rather, they will follow such elites only if they believe the conflict is legitimate. As the remaining chapters

will show, however, one tragedy in Congo's history lies in the fact that the mobilized masses often organize to support what they believe are wars of legitimacy only to discover later that their leaders are seeking nothing more than state spoils and are thus waging wars of replacement or convenience.

Because civil wars are not a cohesive class of events, the book refers to "a civil war of legitimacy" (Sobek and Payne 2010) as an attempt by political entrepreneurs to fundamentally alter the relationship between the state and society. A civil war of legitimacy is thus different from a war of replacement and a war of convenience. In a war of replacement, rebel leaders seek to remove the incumbent regime but intend to keep the state relatively unchanged. A war of convenience aims to suffocate or weaken the incumbent regime without replacing or altering it. The advantage of this categorization is that critical historical factors that help excluded elites to mobilize the masses for collective action may differ across civil wars even though the politics of exclusion remains the common trigger. Therefore, the duration of civil wars should also differ, and the expectation is that a civil war of legitimacy should be shorter than the other two because of its popular support to fundamentally transform the relationship between the state and society. Empirically, this book refers to any war that lasts more than the mean of 538 days as a long war, while a short war lasts less than the average. The advantage of this operational definition is to take the context into account rather than to rely on quantitative large N analysis that either considers a seven-year mean (Collier, Hoeffler, and Söderbom 2004) or a twelve-year mean (Fearon 2004).

Legitimacy alone is not sufficient to mobilize the masses, however. An opportunity must provide players with the expectation to gain from violence. This opportunity emerges only in a weak state as citizens interact strategically while competing for scarce resources. A weak state refers to a polity that lacks the capacity to penetrate society, to provide order, to protect groups, to arbitrate groups' issues, and to produce social goods. It thus supplies ample opportunities for civil war because it creates a fear of the future that excluded elites can bank on to mobilize the masses through violence in order to re(insert) themselves into the political system. In a sense, the nationalist discourse by political elites only provides the ideological legitimation of their strategy (Englebert and Hummel 2005). They often have no true desire to transform the state apparatus. Rather, political elites view government institutions as means to access or control the country's resources and tools that can be used to thwart political rivals. Political competition is perceived here as competition for power to control access to scarce resources by excluding potential contenders.

The book uses a process-tracing strategy to illustrate the utility of an approach focusing on the politics of exclusion for understanding Congo's many civil wars. This comparative historical method highlights the uniqueness and the commonality among Congo's internal wars. Because the process-tracing technique used in this book is relatively intricate, it must be outlined in detail. Gold-

stone (1991) refers to process-tracing as a critical mechanism that can illumi-nate the issue of confounding variables because many causes can have their own causes. Such "causes of causes" are what methodologists have in mind when they warn about infinite regress (every cause has a cause in its own right). To identify the process by which some causes are critical in explaining the out-come, or civil war, "researchers must perform the difficult cognitive feat of fig-uring out which aspects of the initial conditions observed in conjunction with *which simple principles* of the many that may be at work, would have *combined* to generate the observed sequence of events" (Goldstone 1991, p. 57, empha-sis in the original). A detailed narrative or a story presented in the form of a chronicle provides the best way to understand the outcome of interest because it throws light on how an event came about. In essence, too little attention to his-tory can hinder causal explanation of a social phenomenon.

The process-tracing approach used here links critical junctures to critical antecedents to explain the outcome of interest—civil wars. Critical juncture refers to a period "in history when the presence or absence of a specified causal force pushes multiple cases onto divergent long-term pathways, or pushes a sin-gle case onto a new political trajectory that diverges significantly from the old" (Slater and Simmons 2010, p. 888). As this book demonstrates, most critical junctures in Congolese history were episodes when the politics of exclusion came into particularly sharp focus.

Critical antecedents, on the other hand, are factors or conditions preceding a critical juncture that combine with causal forces during a critical juncture to produce a long-term divergence in outcomes.[4] Critical antecedents thus combine with causal forces operative at a critical juncture in at least two ways (Slater and Simmons 2010, pp. 890–891). In one scenario, critical antecedents are succes-sive causes and exhibit a direct effect on the causal force that emerges during the critical juncture. According to John Stuart Mill, a useful rule of thumb is to truncate historical analysis at the point when causes can be understood without being expressed (cited in Rigby 1995, p. 236). The issue is to limit oneself to nontrivial causes to avoid infinite regress. Moreover, the kind of successive causes that lead to infinite regress are usually background similarities, not crit-ical antecedents. In another scenario, critical antecedents are conditioning causes that vary before a critical juncture and predispose (but do not predestine) cases to diverge as they ultimately do (Slater and Simmons 2010, p. 891). They usually help to determine the differential causal effect of the independent vari-able across cases when the critical juncture exogenously comes about (Slater and Simmons 2010). In sum, critical antecedents condition a critical juncture to explain the outcome of interest.

Having indentified the politics of exclusion as a critical juncture that ex-plains Congo's internal wars begs the question of what constitutes critical an-tecedents in the context of Congo. The book refers to critical antecedents as elements of continuity, or the colonial legacy, and elements of change, or the

postcolonial setting. As developed in more detail later in this chapter, elements of continuity include the state itself with its artificial colonial boundaries, the integration of Congo into the world economy as a supplier of raw materials, urbanization as a modernization process, and the coexistence of unwritten communal land tenure and colonial private land system. Elements of change are a weak army or a deinstitutionalized military and the institutionalization of a patronage system.

Figure 1.1 illustrates the theoretical model of the argument. The book thus focuses on specific aspects of social life in the DRC since colonial times to capture both continuity and change, including events, actions, symbols, rituals, and words that dramatize sociocultural and economic phenomena. It also examines the motives, reasons, and justifications for citizens' behavior in civil wars by concentrating on actions and sequences as well as by looking at time and process as essentials because people construct social reality through actions that occur over time. This procedure requires a sensitive analysis of the ever-present tension between agency and structure. The former describes the changing social reality, while the latter describes the fixed regularities and patterns that shape social actions or perceptions. Not only do people create and change social reality, but social reality also imposes restrictions on human choices.

The book's process-tracing approach is important and significant for a number of reasons:

- It helps disaggregate a civil war and allows for more detailed analyses of actors' conflict characteristics.
- It provides a way of evaluating how these characteristics influence prospects for settlement, the duration of the conflict, and the likelihood of specific outcomes.
- By using a process-tracing strategy that traces the behavior and interactions of subnational actors in individual conflicts, this microlevel analysis features a broader variety of within-country information sources.
- With a larger set of conflicts, such as in the DRC, the book makes multiple comparisons, and this helps identify the idiosyncrasies of individual conflicts and evaluate whether modal patterns exist across conflicts.
- Process-tracing allows a detailed analysis of aggregate data in historical perspective as well. Thus, a combination of both microlevel and macrolevel analyses provides a way of avoiding what Kalivas calls "reckless extrapolation from the micro to the macro level" (2008, p. 398).
- By highlighting why the politics of exclusion can lead to civil war in some settings (DRC and most of its neighbors) and not in others (Tanzania and Zambia, two other neighbors), process-tracing provides a handy framework that can help analysts develop a better understanding of civil wars in most polities. More than this advantage, process-tracing can also be a useful approach to explain within-country variations.

Figure 1.1   Process-Tracing Model of Civil Wars
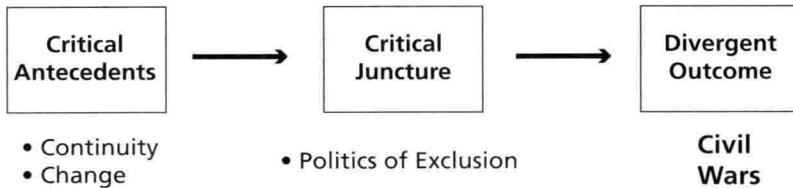
The remainder of this chapter sets the stage for the book's analysis of the politics of exclusion and Congo's civil wars. The next section is a brief literature review and a quantitative analysis of Congo's civil wars in terms of broad trends and limitations of this approach to studying civil wars. The statistical analysis is followed by a brief historical background that highlights both elements of continuity and elements of change in Congo's history. The last section of this chapter provides the goals and a brief outline of the book.

A Brief Literature Review and Statistical Exercise

Three approaches dominate the literature on the causes of internal wars. As outlined earlier, they include greed, grievance, and creed analyses. However, most statistical studies have modeled civil wars in terms of structural, economic, and political approaches rather than in terms of creed, greed, and grievance because they tend to use creed or identity as an explanatory variable.

First, the structural approach considers the nature of the country and society. Correlates of civil wars are geographical features such as a country's size, population characteristics, renewable resources, and degree of cultural affinities (Homer-Dixon 1999). Large and populous countries with young and urbanized populations have an increased probability of experiencing internal wars and even potential separatism. Neo-Malthusians also contend that population pressure on natural renewable resources makes societies prone to conflict (Urdal 2005). Ethnic heterogeneity, as a measure of identity, is also important. The more heterogeneous a state is, the more likely it will experience conflict. Operational definitions of country size and its characteristics include the natural logarithm of population, logarithm of population per square kilometer, percentage of urban population, and the age dependency ratio (the percentage of working-age population). Arable land per capita measures pressures on renewable resources. Data used in the statistical analysis are from the World Bank (2010). The last variable is social fractionalization that measures societal heterogeneity (see following greed model).

Second, economic analyses of civil wars rely mostly on the idea of greed. Rebels resemble organized criminal groups rather than freedom fighters struggling against injustice. Because a civil war is a rational decision, it is determined by the financial viability of the organization and the opportunities that arise for high expected returns. Collier and Hoeffler (1998, 2002) have popularized this greed approach in a series of quantitative analyses. Their model focuses on opportunities rather than motivations as the driving factor of civil war.

The first factor to influence opportunities is the availability of finances. Finances come from extortion of natural resources, donations from diasporas (data unavailable for Congo), and subventions from hostile governments. Collier and Hoeffler used primary commodity exports as a share of gross domestic product (GDP) and a post–Cold War dummy to operationalize the first and third variables. The relationship between primary commodities and civil wars is not linear, however. The second factor to explain opportunity is the cost of rebellion because recruits must be paid, and their cost may be related to the income foregone by enlisting as rebels. The opportunity cost of a civil war tends to be low in states that have low economic growth rates, low income, and a high number of unemployed youth (male secondary school enrollment). Third, opportunity for civil war is likely where supply of military hardware, or conflict capital, is cheap (defined by peace years and previous wars) and in states where governments have difficulties expanding their reach throughout society (defined by population dispersion and forests or mountains as a share of the country's area). Finally, weak social cohesion is an antidote to civil wars, and its operational definition is social fractionalization (see Collier and Hoeffler 2002). Because the sample is small and given the issue of multicollinearity, the variable "peace years" is removed from the analysis. Another variable, mountains as a percentage of total area, is not included because it is constant for the case of Congo. Most data are from the World Bank (2010) and the variable "forests" is from the Food and Agriculture Organization (1965–2008, annual issues).

The third approach deals with the dynamics of the political system and process. It relies on the idea of grievance or motivations. First, intergroup hatreds tend to be stronger in fractionalized societies than in homogeneous societies. Thus, civil war is carried on by political entrepreneurs willing to redress past wrongdoing. The grievance approach uses social fractionalization, political repression (autocracy, from Marshall and Jaggers 2010), ethnic dominance, and economic inequality (Gini coefficient of inequality and land inequality). Grievance may also increase with population size (logged population) to capture conflict-induced grievances. The measure of ethnic dominance is zero in Congo (there is no dominant group), and measures of economic inequality are nonexistent.

Still other scholars in the political science tradition argue that it is the instability of the political system or a political transition that weakens the state and drives states to separatism as ethnic identities are intensified (Laitin 2001). A variant of this argument is Posen's (1993) idea of internal security dilemmas.

From this perspective, the end of the Cold War (post–Cold War dummy) caused superpowers to gradually disengage from costly commitments in faraway places that did not immediately affect their national interest. This withdrawal allowed old ethnic animosities to resurface and old scores to be settled once and for all. Horowitz (1985, pp. 12–13) has also identified riots as forerunners of civil wars, especially secessionist wars. Data on riots are from Banks (2010). The dynamics affecting internal security dilemmas are upheld by living in a "bad neighborhood" (a region prone to conflicts), and external military intervention also affects the dilemma (Weiner 1996). Bad neighborhood is a constant because civil war has been endemic in Central Africa since the early 1960s. Data on military intervention are from Kisangani and Pickering (2008).

The statistical analysis uses data from 1959 to 2009. Most statistical studies on civil war operationalize it as a dummy variable, one coded as presence of civil war and zero otherwise. Because "intrastate war" is a dummy variable, the statistical model used is logit. The last methodological issue relates to the dependent variable and autocorrelated errors. Most studies that employ binary discrete dependent variables tend to assume that residuals are white noise. To deal with autocorrelated residuals, lagged civil war is used, which corrects for the inefficiency caused by autocorrelation. Table 1.2 provides the statistical results in a nonmathematical format to ease interpretation of the findings. *Positive* or *negative* expressions in parentheses below the variables suggest that this variable is likely to increase or lower the chance of civil war onset, holding other variables constant. Statistically significant (SS) means that this variable explains the onset of civil war, while SNS (statistically not significant) implies that the variable has no impact on the onset of civil war. In other words, significance relates to the probability that the given variable actually has no effect on civil wars.

The three models seem to fit the data well as illustrated by statistically significant chi-square statistics. Lagged civil war remained statistically insignificant in all models, and its removal did not affect the results. The structural model shows that only the age dependency ratio is likely to increase the chance of civil war, while population growth is negatively related to civil wars. The second model also highlights two statistically significant variables. The variable "previous wars" has the wrong sign, but geographic dispersion is positively related to civil wars as hypothesized. However, the most critical variable in the greed model—exports of primary commodities as a percentage of GDP—is not related to civil wars. Despite Congo's mineral wealth, the statistical results suggest that the greed model does not help to explain its many civil wars. This finding reinforces a number of studies that have challenged the Collier-Hoeffler model (Fearon 2005; Lujala, Gleditsch, and Gilmore 2005).

The statistical analysis of the political model highlights the fact that the democratic transition and external military intervention were critical in initiating civil wars in the DRC. Civil wars may not have been carried out by political entrepreneurs willing to redress past wrongdoing. Although these findings

Table 1.2 Three Models of Civil Wars in Congo, 1959–2009

Structural Approach	Economic Approach	Political Approach
Lagged civil war (negative & SNS)	Lagged civil war (positive & SNS)	Lagged civil war (negative & SNS)
Population (positive & SNS)	Exports/GDP (negative & SNS)	Social fractionalization (positive & SNS)
Population density (negative & SNS)	Exports/GDP^2 (negative & SNS)	Autocracy (positive & SNS)
Age dependency ratio** (positive & SS)	Post–Cold War dummy (positive & SNS)	Democratic transition* (positive & SS)
Arable land per capita (positive & SNS)	Secondary enrollment (positive & SNS)	Post–Cold War (positive & SNS)
Population growth** (negative & SS)	Economic growth (positive & SNS)	Forest (negative & SNS)
Urban population (positive and SNS)	GDP per capita (negative and SNS)	Riots (negative & SNS)
Social fractionalization (negative & SNS)	Economic growth (negative & SNS)	External military intervention** (positive & SS)
	Previous wars* (negative & SS)	
	Forests (negative & SNS)	
	Geographic dispersion* (positive & SS)	
	Social fractionalization (negative & SNS)	
Chi-square = 22.30*** Pseudo-R^2 = 0.39	Chi-square = 25.19*** Pseudo-R^2 = 0.44	Chi-square = 20.19*** Pseudo-R^2 = 0.36

Notes: Constants are omitted.
* = less than 10 percent level of significance (two-tailed test)
** = less than 5 percent level of significance (two-tailed test)
*** = less than 1 percent level of significance (two-tailed test)

counter the role of ethnicity in spurring rebellion, they do not capture how ethnic entrepreneurs exacerbate ethnic tensions to mobilize their kin. These entrepreneurs can only ply their trade in an ethnically polarized society. The critical factor is whether the counterelites can overcome obstacles to recruit partisans, control them, and maintain discipline to achieve the group's goals.

Moreover, the statistical analysis highlights some useful insights to understand civil wars, although it also has limitations. As pointed out later in this chapter, each Congolese civil war reveals a different level of intensity, duration, casualties, internal group unity, and intergroup animosity that defies any generalization conforming to existing quantitative literature on the onset and duration of civil wars. For example, most studies on Congo's wars usually refer to the first secession in 1960 as the Katanga secession and overlook the fact that two-thirds of the Katanga Province was not under the control of the seceded government because northern Katanga citizens refused to recognize it. People of North Katanga challenged both the secession and its legitimacy. What extant literature hardly considers is that wars fought within ethnic groups may have different antecedents than wars fought across ethnic lines. The quantitative literature disregards this possibility because it treats civil war as an aggregate category, implicitly assuming that a typology that distinguishes, for example, a war of legitimacy from a war of convenience or a war of replacement would not be meaningful. Any analysis that treats civil wars as if they were homogenous is likely to lead to faulty inferences about the causal links among variables. Of course, such concern about proper methods is not merely an academic issue. The substantive impact resonates widely. If decisionmakers refer to the growing body of quantitative studies when crafting policy to deal with civil wars, the results could be disastrous. Thus, the next section provides a brief historical background of Congo's internal wars to set the stage for qualitative analysis.

Political and Socioeconomic Context of Congo's Internal Wars

The political history of the DRC started on 1 July 1885, or four months after the signatories of the Berlin Conference recognized King Leopold II of Belgium as the sovereign of the Congo Free State (CFS). The CFS became a Belgian colony on 15 November 1908 and the Republic of Congo on 30 June 1960. After the promulgation of the Luluabourg constitution, it became the DRC on 1 August 1964 and remained so until 27 October 1971 when President Mobutu Sese Seko named it Zaire. On 29 May 1997, President Laurent Kabila changed the name back to the DRC. Although these names indicate that the DRC has undergone many changes in terms of players and goals, change and continuity have coexisted, and both forces have simultaneously exerted their influence on the political landscape of Congo. This section briefly outlines the political history of Congo to provide the context necessary to understand the case chapters that follow.

From Formation to Consolidation of the Colonial State

Before the European scramble for Africa in the 1860s, both acephalous societies and hierarchical polities dominated the Congo basin or present-day DRC (Nday-