Abstract

As Mbembé stated, the mere presence of social organisations does not mean that civil society exists. Taking the case of solidarity networks and grassroots organisations in different urban and rural settings in Eastern Congo, the paper argues that these networks are not the representatives of an incipient civil society but rather a permanent and latent layer of resistance to the conduct of statebuilding. The real counter power is seen in what James Scott called everyday resistance, where daily solidarity actions whether at a personal or organised level placate the effects of domination from war, poverty and statebuilding itself. Everyday forms of resistance provide popular classes with the ability to remain in control of what goes on the ground and provide counter-discourses that are in themselves powerful political alternatives. Whereas state-builders and democracy-promoters portray these organisations either as possible roots of civil society, thus as an engine, or otherwise as a spoiler of the statebuilding process, these networks illustrate that with their capacity to sustain armed groups, to be a geopolitical actor in the region and to provide social and political fabric of the many ungoverned spaces, they provide a sort of third position, maintaining the state at arm’s length.

The experience of war and statebuilding for subordinate classes in Congo has created a context of continuous disempowerment, violence and poverty, not necessarily conducive to the kind of ethical order promised by either the war-wagers or the state-builders. Despite the fact that the war put an end to thirty-two years of a dictatorial kleptocratic regime and that the statebuilding strategies brought the first free democratic elections ever since the Mobutu era, and have managed to stabilise many
areas of the country, subordinate classes keep bearing the worst effects of war and statebuilding: the continuation of armed conflict in many areas of the country whose main target is the population, lack of resources, increasing poverty and no lessening in mortality.\(^2\) Whereas statebuilding strategies are justified on the basis that they can construct the *proper* state that in the long-term will deliver peace and prosperity to the population, on the ground, statebuilding is a military repressive and extractive strategy, generative of multiple local and transborder conflict and human rights abuses, uncommitted to the needs of its population. Civil society’s role in this situation is not straightforward one of a partner but rather more of an antagonist.

Of course, the existence of civil society in a context of war as well as in the case of Congo in particular is contentious.\(^3\) As Mbembé’s argued the mere presence of social organisations does not mean that civil society exists. Indeed it is in their actions and in their component that it will be established that the “civil society” is more a layer of individual and collective solidarity networks as well as grassroots organisations that if at times they might fulfil a role as civil society proper, they are better seen as the permanent and latent layer of resistance to the conduct of statebuilding.\(^4\) As such, the real counter power is seen in what James Scott called everyday resistance, where daily individual and collective actions placate the effects of domination from war,

\(^2\) The World Bank estimates that 71% of Congolese population are at or under the national poverty line (World Bank 2009). Further, it notes that ‘Despite progress over the past five years in political and economic reforms, many communities live in deteriorated conditions, with little access to markets for purchasing supplies or for selling their produce, and poor access to public services. The United Nations estimates some 2.3 million displaced persons and refugees inside the country, as well as some 323,000 Congolese living in refugee camps outside the country. A humanitarian emergency persists in many of the more unstable parts of DRC, and the impact of conflict on the population includes high rates of sexual violence. The country’s per capita income and human development indicators remain among the lowest in Africa.’ (World Bank 2010, para. 3) A survey in 2006/2007 estimated that around 3.9 million had died due to conflict-related issues (Coghlan et al. 2007). Oxfam has recently estimated that the figure is now up to 5.4 million (Oxfam International 2010). A shocking attack by a coalition of local and international armed groups recently left the toll of over 300 rapes in areas of the Walikale province (UN News Centre 2010).

\(^3\) It is not the purpose of this paper to delve on the already extended debate on the existence and meaning of civil society in Africa (Harbeson 1994; Burnell 2008; Keane 1998).

\(^4\) For similar cases see ‘Indigenous Civil Society’ in Pouligny 2006, pp.67 - 87.
poverty and statebuilding itself. Everyday forms of resistance provide popular classes with the ability to remain in control of what goes on the ground and provide counter-discourses that are in themselves powerful political alternatives. The research is focused on grassroots organisations (with little or no funding from international or national organisms), solidarity networks (based on kin, religious or ethnic links), and individual actions that fit the kind of patterned actions established following the theoretical framework. The paper sees these organisations as representatives of subordinate classes and thus a vehicle of subordinate classes’ resistance put toward the mitigation or denial of elites’ claims.5

This mitigation is seen in deployment of counter-discourses, the alliance with armed groups, in remaining armed and in the capacity of providing for one’s self via survival strategies. It is argued that more than directly confronting statebuilding and more than rejecting it outright (although it happens) subordinate classes are successful in ‘keeping the state at arm’s length’ (Scott 2009, p.45). Here Scott’s framework of The Art of Not Being Governed also comes in to observe more concretely the actions of people in the relative absence of a state (2009). That is, the idea of remaining in control and ungoverned needs to be seen in the context that the state in Congo has been relatively absent for very long and the statebuilding mission is not 100% committed to a project of social transformation. So while resistance denies and mitigates elites’ claims, it also maintains a constant reticence and distance to something that it is not clearly seen as a benefit towards subordinate classes’ own agenda.

5 The term ‘subordinate classes’ is used in the same sense as Scott refers to all the spectrum of actors out of the official channels of the decision making processes, particularly pertaining to the politico-economic power of the state, and, in general, those representing the lower strata of society with little or no property and difficult or no access to education (Scott 1985, p.xvi; Scott 1990, p.21). This term is used interchangeably with other terms such as: ‘non-elites’ or ‘populations’. The term ‘elites’ will be used to mean the national-international elite composite of those in the decision-making processes, as well as those with the capacity to enter the official politico-economic power of the state and its reconstruction. Because talking about “classes” in Congo is problematic, the term “non-elites” might more accurate. However, the preference is given to ‘subordinate classes’ in keeping in line with the Scottian framework.
Civil society has been seen as resistance before (Mbembé 2001; Boyd 2004; Keane 1998b). This has been much debated, as civil society has become to mean exactly the opposite. Civil society’s most defining feature seems to be its civility, the capacity to provide an autonomous political space for countering power but that falls within the limits power allows (Mbembé 2001, p.37). That is why some commentators have started using the concept of ‘uncivil society’ to argue that civil society can also be violence and resistance (Keane 1998b, pp.114 - 156). This concept is helpful to a certain extent.\(^6\) If the key defining feature of civil society is that it legitimises power, providing a counter-power within the limits of allowable behaviour, then what we have in Congo is uncivil society, where many of the actions undertaken by these solidarity and grassroots organisation networks do much the opposite. They question political process and take up arms, amongst other. However, although at certain points they may play this role because claiming to be civil society provides funding and thus a form of survival, arguably, more than a partner of the statebuilding mission and more than uncivil, they are a form of resistance to it.

The paper starts with an overview of the framework used to analyse resistance in the work of James Scott. The following three sections are empirical developments of that framework analysing the deployment of counter-discourses, the alliances with or the forming of armed groups and the production of the social and political fabric on the ground, based on findings from field research carried out in the summers of 2009 and 2010 in Kinshasa, and most territories of the North and South Kivu provinces. These three key activities of “civil society” illustrate an important feature of contemporary statebuilding and political agency within it.

1. Resistance through civil society

Rather than looking at politically organised or ideologically-motivated movements, the paper is inspired by the work of James Scott in an attempt to unmask the

\(^6\) For a critique of the concept see (Rumford 2001).
everyday individual and collective actions of anonymous people in shaping the future of their communities (Scott 1985; 1990). Scott argued that subordinate classes carry on a permanent latent struggle against power/ domination. He also argued that these classes are more radical in their ideas than in their actions, and that the limited capacity for contesting power/domination pushed them both to act as if they consented to power as well as to construct their demands in conservative and modest ways. This model fits quite neatly the spectrum of actions of Congolese subordinate classes in regards to their war-like environment. Generally, they are not organised or when they are it is in a localised way, following networks of proximity and kin. They are not ideologically driven (if anything they construct their ideas in terms of religious believes), and they are far more likely to use covert strategies than open confrontation. However, because of the war environment and the flow of weapons into the region, there is a mixture of what could be called ‘weapons of the weak’ (E.g. gossip, character assassination and foot dragging) together with guerrilla warfare by armed groups.

Scott stands out for facilitating and theorising this framework and this section aims to provide an overview of his theory and to justify its usefulness for study of resistance in the DRC. There is growing body of literature that is theorising the everyday as an arena of rich insights for the study of international relations broadly (Davies & Niemann 2009; Tickner 2005; Hobson & Seabrooke 2007). Oliver Richmond has already applied the notion of ‘the everyday’ for the study of resistance in the context of the interventions in East Timor and the Solomon Islands (2010a; 2010b). Richmond has conceptualised and theorised the ‘everyday’ as a site of resistance and emancipatory activity towards a more contextualised peace, closer to real people and their needs, than to the needs of geo-strategic interests, international agendas and international liberalism (2010b). He argues that even without state-builders realising, people on the ground are changing the strategies to adapt them to better fit their reality. Richmond usefully highlights the conditions of hybridity in statebuilding contexts due to the capacity of “locals” to influence the outcome of the statebuilding project. He also makes a very useful case about how “local” agency re-politicises the everyday environment of statebuilding. However, the underlying assumption about
how political agendas are so demarcated between the liberal and the “everyday” is problematic. As shown here, the everyday of “civil society”, for instance, can be seen as playing an ambiguous role both as resistance as well as a liberal partner of state reconstruction. Further, the emphasis on hybridity as the result of the resistance opposed by local actors to international liberal statebuilding is a good example of how the peace and conflict studies literature takes as novel what would otherwise be a well-known factor in historical state-formation studies.  

*Weapons of the Weak* is a detailed study of the strategies followed by subordinate classes to placate the effects of domination and to strive for what they consider just conditions. Scott focuses on the everyday class relations in a small village in Malaysia. He finds that rather than open confrontation, this struggle is more of the type of nocturnal low key guerrilla style, following quiet strategies and placing modest demands. Scott finds that subordinate classes tend to be more radical at the level of ideas than at the level of action. Symbolic resistance operates within the confines of hegemony but it sets how much subordinate classes are prepared to cope with. Thus he challenges the notion of hegemony as consent and inevitable and presents the continuous challenge that ‘everyday forms of resistance’ put to the dominant ideology. Scott challenges the traditional notions of resistance as elitist and partial, arguing that to see resistance only as a collective enterprise with a revolutionary end in mind is to subject millions of actions to the obscure records of history (1985, p. xvi - xvii). Rather, he argues, we shall see in the modest, conservative, individual actions of subordinate classes a permanent layer on which struggle against domination takes place and on which class consciousness and even revolutions may take root.

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7 Hybridity and the capacity to change ‘elite projects’ have been widely studied. See, for instance: (Weber 1978; Tilly 1990; Migdal 1994). See also (Berger 2006) for an analysis of the connections between nation-building and statebuilding and for similarities between statebuilding and ‘state formation’ and the challenges brought by it in the contemporary era see (Bayart 2009; Badie 1992; Mbembé 2001; Mbembé 1988)

8 Hegemony in a Gramscian sense. *Weapons of the Weak* is in many ways a response to that body of Gramscian literature (Gramsci, Poulantzas, Althusser, for example) that argued that power rested on coercion and consent and that subordinate classes internalised their condition. See specially Scott 1985, chapter 8.
For Scott, resistance is

*any* act(s) by member(s) of a subordinate class that is or are intended either to mitigate or deny claims (for example, rents, taxes, prestige) made on that class by superordinate classes (for example, landlords, large farmers, the state) or to advance its own claims (for example, work, land, charity, respect) vis-à-vis those superordinate classes (1985, p.290).

From this definition, resistance defining elements are better seen as three moments: a first igniting moment with the claims made by elites on subordinate classes; a second resistance moment, which are the acts by which subordinate classes ‘mitigate’ or ‘deny’ those claims; a third and final moment, when subordinate classes advance their own agenda. These moments are not a sequence that resistance necessarily follows, mainly because it would be hard to put a start and an end point to each of them. However these elements/moments allow us to observe the nature and the processes of resistance. From here it is possible to observe the statebuilding mission as a factor of domination, imposing on the populations certain conditions of life, demanding from them obedience, taxes, money, labour, food, land or sex to name only a few. Non-elites then respond by denying or mitigating these claims, for instance, by enacting creative survival strategies, ridiculing or bad-mouthing the mission. These will be explored in the following sections.

What the definition does not emphasise enough, besides the intention of mitigating or denying the claims made by the elites, is what makes ‘any acts’ resistance and what not. So although an important advantage of the definition is the recognition that resistance can be both individual and collective and does not need to be organised or politically minded, it still needs to state clearly what these individual non-political acts make resistance actually a politico-social act. Otherwise it could be hard to

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9 For Scott, ‘everyday forms of peasant resistance [are] the prosaic but constant struggle between the peasantry and those who seek to extract labor, food, taxes, rents, and interest from them. Most forms of this struggle stop well short of outright collective defiance. Here I have in mind the ordinary weapons of relatively powerless groups: foot dragging, dissimulation, desertion, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage, and so on.’ (1985, p. xvi)
differentiate acts of resistance, for instance pilfering, from a mere egotistic act. Scott noted that:

To ignore the self-interested element in peasant resistance is to ignore the determinate context not only of peasant politics, but of most lower-class politics... When a peasant hides part of his crop to avoid paying taxes, he is both filling his stomach and depriving the state of grain... When such acts are rare and isolated, they are of little interest; but when they become a consistent pattern (even though uncoordinated, let alone organized) we are dealing with resistance (1985, p. 295 – 296, emphasis added).

This selfish element that is consistently targeted at satisfying one self through challenging a symbol of power is part of analysing what the everyday acts of resistance are, but also a way of confronting that resistance has to be organised and politically minded to be resistance. However, then the defining element is not just the act but that this act is a pattern and a constant element in relations of domination. In Congo there is not a political movement but there is a consistent pattern of acts, sometimes individual, sometimes collective, that challenge the statebuilding mission. The role of solidarity networks and grassroots organisations are fundamental in the facilitation of such mitigation and denial activities.

Scott’s definition has several advantages that relate to the recognition of both material and ideological elements in class relations, to the identification of how subordinate classes advance their own agenda, and to its focus on intentions rather than consequences, recognizing that many acts of resistance may fail to achieve their intended result. Further, the definition could be applied to all contexts of domination and not necessarily class relations. In Domination and the Art of Resistance Scott argued that ‘similar structures of domination, other things being equal, tend to provoke responses and forms of resistance that also bear a family resemblance to one another’ (1990, p.21). This is particularly useful in our case because class relations are

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10 Scott himself noted some of these advantages (1985, p. 290 – 291).
complicated by the armed conflict itself, and the existence of ‘classes’ in general in Africa has been much debated.\textsuperscript{11}

Scott’s framework is thus established in order to observe the “uncivilised” actions of networks of individuals and grassroots organisations that can be read as a form of resistance to the statebuilding mission. As shown below, it is through these networks and organisation that subordinate classes transform and reduce the effects and claims of domination while pushing their own agenda. What it is claimed is that these actions are a pattern within the relations of domination that the statebuilding mission imposes and it is this element that make them a form of resistance. The actions as explored below are justified by the construction of an idea of justice, counter-posing the experienced reality of how things are (unjust) against an ideal creation of how things should be (a sort of contextualised idea of justice). So although actually a particularly important site of resistance takes place on the symbolic and discursive ground, as it will be shown, this resistance is also observed in the patterns of alliances with armed groups, in the general reticence towards state authorities via the self-management of multiple affairs when not directly establishing one’s own political representation.

2. Alternative discourses, political alternatives.

One of the implications of the resistance framework outlined above is that subordinate classes attempt to mitigate the effects of the processes of war and statebuilding, contending the material living conditions imposed by these as well as the models they portray. The new rhetoric of the statebuilding mission creates new expectations and therefore new platforms on which to hold power to account.\textsuperscript{12}

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{11} See for instance (Nzongola-Ntalaja 1970; Schatzberg 1980)
\textsuperscript{12} In 1996, Kabila-father brought new hopes for Congo both to the Congolese, some neighbours and some international powers. The promises of a new Congo granted him resources, support and popular clamour. While the tensions within his government and lack of fulfilment of some of his promises and expectations brought a second and even more disastrous war to Congo in February 1998, the interesting thing to note is that ever since then, both national and international elites have justified their power on a particular
\end{footnotesize}
Hence, one of the most significant sites and tools of resistance is the symbolic ground on which counter-discourses are able to both challenge the rhetoric of the mission and articulate political alternatives.

Not only that, this symbolic ground illustrates both patterns of ideological insubordination and the ideological/symbolic patterns on which power operates. The ideological tools of power could be seen in what Moore called the moral authority of suffering (1978, chap. 2). For Moore authority implied obedience to the social arrangements even if these arrangements were unfair, degrading or violent for some, generally those at the bottom of the social hierarchy (1978, p.17). The moral authority deployed by both elites and non-elites justifies this order in a way that ‘pain and suffering [become] to a degree morally desirable... unavoidable or even inevitable’ (Moore 1978, p.80). In Congo, this moral authority justifies the suffering of the population on the basis that elites can provide, even if not right now, the good state, based on a particular kind of peace, democracy and development.

Trefon (2009) has argued that after almost ten years of the international mission and multiple conflict-resolution and reconstruction initiatives the Congolese are no less poor and no more secured from violence. However, national and international agents keep claiming their capacity to deliver the promise of statebuilding, democracy, peace and development. This is not only a justification for power, but also the justification for a morality of power. This particular morality used in the deployment of authority has not been unique to the mission in Congo but relates more generally to contemporary statebuilding that many have come to call the ‘liberal peace’. The connection between a liberal-democratic state, development and international security has become stronger and formulated a guiding principle in peace missions.

normative agenda that has created new and more powerful expectations on subordinate classes.

13 For Scott these patterns of ideological insubordination were not only the patterns in which subordinate classes advanced their own agenda or actions of resistance in the form of ideology but also evidence that they were not taken in entirely by the dominant ideology. (Scott 1985, chap. 5; Scott 1990, chap. 4)

14 For the latest developments of critiques and elaborations on what the ‘liberal peace’ means see: (Chandler 2009; Paris 2010)
Former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan in his landmark report ‘In Larger Freedom’ stated that,

Our guiding light must be the needs and hopes of peoples everywhere... the United Nations, while it is an organization of sovereign States, exists for and must ultimately serve those needs. To do so, we must aim... to perfect the triangle of development, freedom and peace (Annan 2005, para. 12).

Although a few years earlier from this statement, MONUC was set up to address the ‘the well-being and security of the population’ as well as the ‘adverse impact of the conflict on the human rights situation’ (UN Security Council 1999, p.2). In 2006, the UN, the EU and several diplomatic missions promoted national elections ‘for the longer term restoration of peace and stability, national reconciliation and establishment of the rule of law in the Democratic Republic of the Congo’ (UN Security Council 2006, p.1). Although the benefits of these policies may not be seen in the short term, so the claim goes, populations need to wait because these are the right steps towards the ideal state in which peace, democracy and development are realised. Populations have to trust that one day the promise of this ideal will be realised.

In the meantime, populations need to keep providing for themselves to the extent that statebuilding strategies still do not provide for them. Moreover, the population in Congo is asked to respect, obey and acknowledge the authority of the government and the international intervention; to pay taxes; to feed the army, the armed groups and the politicians; to provide forced sexual services to all of them, including MONUC officials; to deal with violent reprisals of the army; to accept the negative consequences of the peace strategies; to put up with a situation of extreme poverty.

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15 See section 4, also a good reference is (Trefon 2004).
16 For the army living off the population and rape by different actors (army, armed groups and MONUC) see UN Secretary General (2009).
17 (UN Secretary General 2009 para. 9; Global Witness 2010; Human Rights Watch 2009).
18 This is illustrated in a recent UN report: ‘Despite the enhanced and innovative measures taken by MONUC to protect civilians, the operations also took a heavy toll on civilians, who were displaced and subjected to reprisal attacks by retreating armed groups. Furthermore, the
in many areas of the country; accept that others get the benefit of their rich soil;\(^1\) and to get by without access to education, health and clean water.\(^2\)

Denouncing these kinds of violations meets with repression and with a lack of a judicial system. The killing of human rights advocate Chebeya was evidence of the climate of repression where making complaints vocal is still highly dangerous (Radio Okapi 2010a). Another shocking case was the charge with ‘rebellion and defamation’ made against a human rights advocate for a ‘communiqué written condemning inhumane working conditions in a company in Bas-Congo’.\(^3\) This adds to a trend of continuing imprisonments of human rights advocates and prosecution of journalists.

Still, the role designed for “civil society” is not one where they can freely express their concerns. The statement made by a MONUC official in an interview is revealing,

The role of civil society is to check the government... In Sun City they were given seats. These have been the main constraints for civil society to stay away from politics ... some political advocacy is ok, but not exclusive! We got to the stage where civil society was doing 90% of political activity: questioning processes, questioning things and advocating for appointments! They were not doing such things as demanding services or rights, but actually questioning processes, that is, typical things that should be done by political opposition (Interview with UN Officer I 2009).

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actions of undisciplined and recently integrated FARDC elements seeking to settle old ethnic scores resulted in serious violations of international humanitarian law, including killings of civilians (UN Secretary General 2009 para. 2).

\(^1\) Ex-armed and armed groups either keep control or have actually gained further control once incorporated in the national army (Global Witness 2010, p.26; UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon 2009).

\(^2\) For Human Development Indicators see World Bank (2009).

\(^3\) Robert Ilunga Numbi, chair of the NGO Les Amis de Nelson Mandela (UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon 2009 para. 9). Several interviewees also reported the environment of repression. More generally, for the 2010 World Press Freedom day, several Congolese journalists expressed their situation of insecurity and vulnerability (Radio Okapi 2010b; Le Potenciel 2010).
This statement reflects the civilised role that the UN mission has for civil society, mainly in that it is marking both the appropriate channels to raise concerns as well as the limits to which concerns can be raised. It is also a statement that displays an ideal division of labour that follows class lines. Politicians can question processes, but NGO members can only lobby the government to do their responsibilities, even if they risk jail and death in the process.

Repression plays a big role in generating a kind of low-key resistance. For Scott, patterns of everyday ideological insubordination, generally originated out of the reach of power, ultimately created ‘a critique of power’ (1990, p.xii). While for Scott, this was mainly through gossiping and character assassination, in our case, it is more through mockery, bad-mouthing and the redefinition of terms.

So for instance, when an NGO representative (I 2009) stated: ‘they [the internationals] are here to get our wealth, they can’t even do their responsibility, they do nothing, it is our job to set up democratic institutions’, it is a denial to the political authority of the mission and a way of redefining democracy promotion. Similarly, Tibère Dunia, from the Observatoire Gouvernance et Paix, in stating - ‘peace and development have to come from the grassroots’ (2009) - is critiquing the elite’s version of peace and development as devoid of democratic and participatory content. In this spirit an interviewee from another NGO stated:

We must start from the proposals that are made at the grassroots. What we want and what the international community wants is diametrically opposed. I am from Kinshasa, here in Kinshasa things don’t go, people suffer. Peace has multiple dimensions: social, environmental, economic... We are oppressed, exterminated, our women are raped, the children abducted by the military…

Peace in Congo is a global thing, we need a global approach and not a

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22 The private as an arena out of power has also been recently articulated by other authors. Eric Selbin (2009) has observed the power of stories being created and transmitted at home and close environment as a fruitful sphere on which memory and meaning are given content and prepare the ground on which resistance, rebellions and even revolutions take root. Also Paul Gilroy (2011) has seen in the consumerism of black Americans a culture that subverts an economic order that marginalises them.
sectored approach like the MONUC does. It reforms the justice sector here, it
does democracy promotion there... Peace here is less important than money.
The Congolese context is unique... But you, the internationals, you come here
with laboratory theories, preconceived models and try to impose them on the
Congo. No, that is not peace (Interview with NGO Representative II 2009).

Although objectively this statement could sound exaggerated as, most likely the
‘international community’, as he states, would agree that peace has all of those
dimensions, this participant is, firstly, bad-mouthing the strategies as not being
conducive to address all of those dimensions and having other motivations than
peace; and, secondly, redefining peace as social justice with multiple dimensions.

Elites however, also use bad-mouthing techniques both to justify their
indispensability as well as to mitigate the accusations by subordinate classes. A
MONUC officer affirmed: ‘we are dealing with people who are helpless... The mass
of this country is illiterate... there are no real political parties here, we are trying to
build this country from scratch’ (Interview with UN Officer II 2009). Portraying a
picture of the Congolese as helpless only reifies the authority to intervene. Common
“tags” of corrupt, lazy, opportunistic, selfish or backward used by UN or diplomatic
officials further suggest that it is ultimately the fault of the Congolese, both elites and
non-elites, for being in the situation they are. From here if we were to accept their
complaints and critiques of the Congolese, we would immediately exonerate
international actors of their responsibility, acknowledging that they are doing their
best against all odds.

The image of the selfless “international community” is challenged by the bad-
mouthing on the streets where elites, national or international, are ‘corrupt’, ‘only
interested in material gains for themselves’ and ‘not committed to the real needs of
the people’. By pointing to the hypocrisy of power, to other possible agendas and to
the lack of commitment to power’s own discourse, bad-mouthing is a way of de-
legitimising the claims to power and political authority.
Mockery is also a common way to launch a critique and a form of resistance. Any visitor to the DRC can identify how MONUC is caricatured. For instance, during the peak of violence from renegade soldier Nkunda, a popular saying against MONUC was ‘no Nkunda, no job’. This referred to the common critiques that whether MONUC, as an actual accomplice of the continuation of the conflict, or as a hopeless conflict resolution agent ultimately guaranteed the mission’s continuation. Another common mockery of MONUC - ‘its name says everything, they are just here to observe how we are killed’\textsuperscript{23} – not only exposes what is happening on the ground, but it is also articulating that the mission’s job should be to protect people.

In Kinshasa, the same day that MONUC changed to MONUSCO, with a change of mandate, people renamed the mission ‘MONUSKOL’ (as in the beer Skol, portraying a vision of UN workers as more interested in alcohol and night life than in peace). Very soon also after the government committed to ‘five pledges’ people renamed them the ‘five songs’, portraying the government as not being serious in their realisation.\textsuperscript{24} In Goma, a common joke asks ‘what has changed?’ and people respond, ‘well, BunaZa [Zaire’s beer] is now BunaCo [Congo’s beer] and the market CadeZa now it is called CadeCo’. What they mean is that nothing has changed. Whereas elites keep reassuring populations that they are bringing a ‘new’ state, non-elites keep saying that it is in fact the old state being rebuilt. The popular saying ‘Mobutism without Mobutu’, referring to the indistinguishable politics between the Mobutu era and today, are tools for Congolese popular classes to mock the process of democracy and statebuilding.\textsuperscript{25}

The problem is that this mockery expresses in humour what is otherwise a cruel experience. Programme Amani Leo is a Congolese military peace strategy supported

\textsuperscript{23} This has not only been a form of covert resistance, but the claim for MONUC to change its mandate from one of observation to one of action has been demanded very vocally (Eyenga Sana 2008).

\textsuperscript{24} In French from the ‘cinq chantiers’ to the ‘cinq chansons’. For the programme visit (President’s Office 2009).

\textsuperscript{25} This has actually resounded in the literature that maintains that Congo remains a corrupt neo-patrimonial state, sustained by a ‘dysfunctional international community’ (Hoebek 2010, para. 1).
by MONUC and many international representatives (2010). While this programme has been very effective in demobilising thousands of combatants from different armed groups, it has pushed the consequences of its strategies onto subordinate classes. People in local villages not only have to host and feed soldiers with special powers but also to take care of the daily needs of demobilised soldiers dumped in the villages without resources for their reintegration in civil life. Those combatants that join the army or the national police, as we have seen, are also likely to keep settling ethnic rivalries while living off the population because of lack of salary payment. Further, issues of land, housing and ethnic rivalries brought by the return of refugees and IDPs are left for the populations to deal with. As such, when people on the ground mock the programme ‘Amani Leo’ (Peace now) calling it ‘Amani Kesho’ (Peace tomorrow) it actually vocalises a reality of increased sexual violence, repression and local conflict.

Portraying national and international elites as incapable, greedy, hypocritical and anti-democratic when not ridiculous, even if objectively exaggerated tells us much about powerful implications of these seemingly irrelevant discourses. Firstly, they conform one of the only ways to articulate a political critique of the statebuilding strategies; and secondly, that because it is one of the only ways, actually there is no way to hold state-builders to account. The complaint and the critique, even if in the form of bad-mouthing and mockery, is the only possible way on which to demand such accountability and on which to construct an alternative. More so, without the analysis of this ideological foundation, it is not possible to understand why people would prefer to ally with an armed group than accept official authorities, or why people prefer to remain in control, even if under very harsh conditions, before than embracing the promises of the statebuilding processes.

3. The not so weak weapons of the weak

The fact that an everyday form of resistance is based on the lack of direct confrontation and on the deployment of discourses does not necessarily mean
unarmed or without physical violence. Subordinate classes not only respond with alternative discourses, but with the establishment of political authority of ungoverned spaces; forming alliances with armed groups and remaining armed. As Scott argued the struggle between resistance and domination is not just an argument or a war of words, but a fight (1985, p. 241), which included extended guerrilla-style tactics (1985, p. xvi – xvi i). However, as seen just previously, it is the discourses deployed that provide a ground for justifying different resistance techniques. Accordingly, this section will concentrate on what can be seen as the not so weak ‘weapons of the weak’ to analyse the use of “real” weapons, physical violence and more direct violent confrontation.

The role of “civil society” is here double-edged. While on the one hand many members of these organisations have a dual membership in local armed groups and in grassroots organisations (either simultaneously or they quit one to join the other), for the UN mission and the government, these organisations play a fundamental role in transmitting their message and acting on their behalf in the absence of an official authority. While this role may be accepted, it is always limited and subverted by the kinds of counter-discourses, personal and political agendas that we have seen before. A relevant case is narrated by a UN officer:

In Shabunda, there is not enough policemen or army. So Kinshasa sent in what they call ‘Police d’Intervention Rapide’ [Fast Intervention Police]. What happened is that this Police turned on the local population, they were setting up illegal detention centres, we heard cases of child abuse, sexual abuse… so they are causing more trouble than their own local Mai Mai or armed groups. The situation became so ridiculous. We sent in a mission to do a bit of research and speak to the local population and civil society representatives who were

26 The six characteristic features of guerrilla warfare established by Laqueur (harassment of the enemy, reliance on boycott, avoidance of direct confrontation, cutting lines of communication, surprise attacks and mobility and time) are most if not all the catalogue of tactics used by Congolese armed groups both local and international (Laqueur 1976, pp.x-xv; 50-52).
begging for this police to be redeployed, so that they could be left alone with Ria Mutumbuki [local Mai Mai militia]. Of course Ria Mutumbuki is committing exactions and human rights violations, but for the local population is better the devil you know and actually they preferred his group’s human rights violations than those of the Police d’Intervention Rapid. So when one of our officers went in and started talking to the local population about the idea of bringing in some regular tax officers, ministry of interior officers… the response we had was that … well you know we are quite used to Ria Mutumbuki, they’re not very nice, they tax us and they steal our crops, and things like that but we rather stay with what we know … they haven’t seen a regular civil servant for years, communities are living side by side with Mai Mai and a lot of the time these armed groups are the locals, they are the same people, so of course they accept them! (Interview with Civil Affairs Representative I 2010)

What this passage reveals is the reticence of the local populations, and their ‘civil society representatives’ towards national Congolese authorities and even to the UN mission, as well as their preference to self-reliance. This passage also shows the kinds of personal interrelationships that take place on the ground and that make a person prefer the authority of those she or he has some links with than those they do not know about, even if coming with the democratic, official, legitimate stamp on it.

Of course, it is not always the case that populations are happy with the authority of local or international armed groups, neither it is true that local armed groups are always a threat to the populations. In any case, the political agency that subordinate classes display in their autonomous decisions in how to relate to the armed groups is a challenge for both the UN mission as for the government. The double role played by “civil society” intensifies this complexity when at times they agree to facilitate the

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27 This paper, let alone this section, cannot go into detail about the kinds of relationships between local populations and armed groups as it would mean going into the specificities of each armed group and almost each local area. For more in depth case studies see (Morvan 2005; UPDI & LPI 2009)
task of *de-solidarising* populations from the armed groups, while remaining at the service of those armed groups.

A de-solidarisation attempt is clearly exemplified by the ‘awareness-raising workshop’ organised by MONUC Civil Affairs in Fizi and Baraka (South Kivu), to ease the very sour relationships between civil society (population) and the military. The purpose of this workshop is best described in the words of the Civil Affairs officer when doing the opening speech: ‘there needs to be collaboration and cohesion between society and power in order to render results towards peace and stability’ (Civil Affairs Officer 2010).

The territory of Fizi (where the towns of Baraka and Fizi itself belong to) has long been a Mai Mai stronghold. It was the sparking centre of the Muleliste rebellion in the 1960s; it has granted refuge and logistical base for many rebellions including Laurent Kabila’s one and it is now thought of as being the support and engine of many other Mai Mai groups throughout Eastern Congo. This is an important factor in the relations between the population, the military, the authorities and the statebuilding strategies. Another important factor is that the enmity between the two main ethnic groups in the territory (Banyamulengues (Tutsis) and Babembes), each one with their own local armed group, bypasses national borders. Rwanda and Burundi support the Tutsi population (as Nilotics) and the Babembes receive support (as Bantu people) from the diaspora and FDLR (Hutu) elements. Further, the 23 march agreement, by which CNDP elements have integrated the army and been spread throughout the Eastern provinces, include many who only speak Kinyarwanda, feeding the conspiracy theories by which Rwanda would be attempting to annex at least part of

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28 This is raised in many interviews (Interview with ex-Mai Mai Combatant I 2010; Interview with Civil Affairs Representative III 2009; Interview with Civil Affairs Representative II 2010; Interview with Mai Mai Combatant 2010).
29 Democratic Liberation Forces of Rwanda (Forces Democratiques de Liberation du Rwanda)
30 National Congress for the Defence of the People (Congrès National pour la Défense du Peuple).
31 Kinyarwanda is a Rwandese language. Some of these elements reintegrated in the army do not speak the official languages of the provinces (Swahili and French), let alone the local languages.
the Kivus. Further, the military strategy of scattering an utterly under-resourced army throughout the territory, forcing it to live together with the population, where the populations have to provide them with accommodation, food, housing, sex and information, and the exactions committed by the military have created a real low intensity war between the population and the military.

As such, this so-called ‘awareness-raising workshop’ illustrated that the military is perceived as a real enemy by the populations, and that the military and state authorities needed “civil society” in order to establish their/state order. The military were complaining that people would side more with the Mai Mai militias than with them, that people would not give them information, that the population was hostile to them and that they did not respect authority (Participant Observation I 2010). People were complaining that the military were doing human rights abuses, not speaking their language and were treating them like criminals, because of the populations’ support to their own local militias (Participant Observation I 2010). One of the UN officers moderating the sessions at one point explained what role each was supposed to play: ‘the army, the police and civil society all have a role to play in society under legality’; for example, he said, ‘the teachers must teach and not take up arms’; ‘the soldiers must protect the populations and not steal from them’(Civil Affairs Officer 2010).

This workshop demonstrated at least two interesting factors. One was that the civil society component, made out of local NGOs, religious representatives, local producers’ cooperatives, by default had links to the Mai Mai militias. Two days after the workshop, members of this “civil society”, in an attempt to show good will passed information on to the commander of the area to notify of an incoming attack to one of their battalions. Similarly, another factor was that despite the imbalance of power, people retained a substantial amount of control of what goes on the ground. As one UN officer in Kinshasa stated: ‘the restoration of state authority depends in grand part on the local population’ (Interview with Political Affairs Representative 2010). While there was a lot to win by the army and the state administrators to get rid

32 Rape, arbitrary arrests, extortions, pillage, and abuse of authority.
of the armed group and concrete compromises from the populations could be obtained: pass information, stop making donations, stop giving food and shelter to the militias; there were not similar commitments on the part of the military and the state part: stop exactions, rape, robbery and abuse of authority and illegal collection of taxes. Still the frustration of militaries and administrators is that without the help of the populations they could not get rid of the armed groups nor they would be able to deploy the officially elected authorities (Interview with Military Officer 2010).

This is further illustrated by the incapacity of the state or the international community to disarm the population, and to prevent the re-engagement of members into armed groups after demobilisation. Through observation, formal and informal interviews I was able to verify that in all places where I undertook fieldwork, the population was armed.\(^{33}\) Of course, this might be the holding of a rifle at home and as such, this is not generally enough to combat an undesired armed group\(^{34}\) but it provided a form of self-defence and a potential threat to the scattered army throughout the territory in case populations were to get organised as an armed group.

An interviewee related how they organised to defend themselves against the armed groups and the army. Several members of his family, including his mum and two sisters, had been raped and killed in the years after the peace agreements were signed and the MONUC deployed. He related that, in light of a lack of protection from both the government and the international community, people in his village started to train themselves, specially the women, to use the tools and machetes they used to cultivate the land and cut the branches for their own defence (Interview with NGO Representative III 2009).

Similarly, in South Kivu, most of the participants in a focus group of the youth in the village, stated that they could not understand why the FDLR could be at 4 km. of the village without the UN doing nothing, a situation that has already been like that for

\(^{33}\) For more extended research see also (Marriage 2009)

\(^{34}\) For instance, in an Interview with manioc producers in Bunyakiri, they complained that for several months they had not been able to cultivate their lands as they were occupied or near FDLR occupations, and that their arms were not enough to confront them. (Interview with Representatives of Association Manioc Producers 2010)
approximately 15 years. ‘Today’ – one of them said – ‘we cannot go to Bukavu as we used to without feeling threatened; our parents long ago stopped cultivating their lands because they have been occupied by the Interahamwe’ (Focus Group I 2010). As such, they said, ‘this situation has made the population furious and as a result, some have taken the machetes, others the fusils, in order to constitute themselves as militias of popular defence’ (Focus Group Young I 2010).

Significant funding has been put towards a programme of disarmament by which for every weapon, the government pays $100 in Kinshasa and $50 everywhere else. However, in verification, populations stated how easy it was to buy a Kalashnikov for $30. The same is true of the programmes of demobilisation, finding it very difficult to persuade combatants to leave the armed groups, even with substantial economic benefits.

In conversation with a demobilisation officer (2010), he stated that the fact that the programmes could not provide reinsertion to a life with enough means of living and a motivating job, it was difficult to persuade combatants to return to civil life. However, as Marriage and Hoffman show, it is not just the lack of motivating elements to return to civil life, but the ideological commitments to the armed groups that demobilising strategies do not take into account (Marriage 2009; Hoffmann 2007).

An ex-Mai Mai militia man (I) (2010), currently involved simultaneously in an organisation of for street children as well as in the re-organisation of the Mai Mai movement in the Kivus, narrated how they make use of solidarity kin/religious-based networks to get those weapons that fly in and out the hands of villagers, as well as the open trafficking in convention weapons in Congo, but also to gather bamboo to fabricate their own guns (Interview with ex-Mai Mai Combatant II 2010; Interview with Mai Mai Combatant 2010).

However, this DIY security goes much further than securing the town or recuperate land from other militias or defending themselves from the army. As a representative of a Mai Mai group states: ‘we are starting to make alliances with the FDLR because
we think the best strategy is to help them getting rid of Kagame, that is the only way we can see that these people can go back home’ (Interview with ex-Mai Mai Combatant I 2010). For them, therefore, if the UN and the government cannot get rid of the FDLR, they will do it themselves.

This DIY reflects many popular militias’ feeling of betrayal towards the government. In 1996, they joined the ADFL with the backing of Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi and a whole international coalition supported by the US, UK, later France, etc. to oust Mobutu. Later in 1998, they continued their alliance with Laurent Kabila to fight Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi, who still counted on the support of US, UK, Belgium, etc. Later when in 2006 J. Kabila came to power they continued their alliance until in 2008 they broke links and started their own strategy. This interaction is also important when analysing resistance because by showing the political agency influencing war and structures of global power, it is also possible to see popular classes’ initiatives to resist war, social and political changes and maintain control of what goes on the ground.35

The use of violence creates a very interesting blur between armed and unarmed resistance on the part of the population and one where “civil society” is present. The thin division between “civil society” and local militias, the personal and collective decisions to accept or confront armed groups and the army allow at the same time people to survive and violence to continue.36 That armed groups generate its own dose of domination is well known. This section has not attempted to suggest that these armed groups are a form of ethical resistance or that they are the symbol of the realisation of justice and peace in Congo. Rather this is to show that the multiple political avenues and the exercise of political agency through “civil society” take also the shape of violent and direct confrontation and forms part of the spectrum of everyday resistance to statebuilding.

35 For a similar analysis of political agency using global and geo-political networks see (Brysk 2000)
4. Providing the social fabric

If there is one place where the actions of “civil society” become more present is in the delivery of social services of all sorts, including health, education, housing, rubbish collection and even the sustaining the national army and the police. The case of Congo is not dissimilar to other countries where the state does not play a social role or indeed to the natural tendency of people to organise for mutual benefit in the absence of an official safety net. The case of Congo also has a history in this regard since the state has been absent in its social and arguably administrative role for many years. The famous claim made by Mobutu in the 1970s of ‘fend for yourselves’ by which he literally meant that the state was not going to take care of the population anymore, keeps operating business as usual. As such, this history, intensified by war, means that through the provision of the social fabric by a multiplicity of collective and individual networks subordinate classes retain substantial control of what goes on the ground. It is actually this control what makes these strategies not only a form of survival but a form of resistance. They create a not-easily penetrable social and political fabric by elites, rendering many areas of the Congo purposely ungoverned and un-governable; allowing for a sort of ‘state-escapism’, where state authorities do not find easy mechanisms to establish their authority. So although many of the

37 Chabal, for instance, notes how these survival mechanisms and the reliance on informal networks for the sustaining of the economy is a characteristic aspect of many African states where processes of informalisation have become stronger and more reliable thus also weakening the state. (Chabal 2009, pp.127, 130-131)
38 To say that there is a natural way of surviving poverty is to state a fact that is a common strategy of ‘the poor’. As Manfred Max-Neef states ‘if you want to survive in poverty you need to be alert, creative, imaginative and make use of networks of solidarity and mutual aid’. (Max-Neef 1992)
39 In Congo, Belgian colonial authority established a sort of chief-based colonial system by which it rested internal governance in these traditional structures, with a hierarchy serving Brussels (Renton et al. 2007, p.44; Jewstewicki 1986). As Renton, Seddon and Zeiling point out, the informalisation of the economy was wide and across the Congo more so since the crisis of the 1970s and that it has continued to be based on informal networks right until today (2007). It is then no surprise that with the humanitarian crisis of the 1996 war, the economy has once again relied on people’s capacity for survival. And it should be said, with that, an important re-structuring of gender roles in society since they are the women that are fundamentally in charge of the informal economy (Yoka 2009).
40 ‘Débrillez-vous’, also known as Article 15.
41 James Scott explains that people in Zomia, a plateau amongst several countries in South-East Asia, have escaped the state through various means including maintaining an oral culture,
issues pointed out in this section have been rooted in social practices for a long time, some of them are peculiar and changing with the current conflict, for instance the ‘ngoisation’ of the economy and the ties with armed groups.

Of course seeing the actions of civil society in this way is not straightforward. Chabal, for example, argues, firstly, that ‘the state may not be able to do what it is mandated to do but it is still vigorous enough to keep a check on what is being done informally. So, the operation of the informal is only possible if it is sanctioned, unofficially of course, by the officials in supposed charge’ (2009, p.132). As a result, the state is the one that keeps a degree of control on the ground feeding at the same time the process of informalisation that on the one hand weakens the state, but that on the other, maintains informal networks of power to state agents and bureaucrats. Secondly, Chabal argues that making subordinate classes provide all sorts of social services, from security to electricity, hospitals or rubbish management is a sort of extortion by the state. ‘Civil servants’ he argues ‘prey on those who cannot afford to resist them: police harass ordinary people; nurses demand bribes; teachers require payment; the providers of official paperwork (ID cards, passports, market licences, etc.) sell their ‘good offices’” (Chabal 2009, p.151)

Chabal identifies what it has been previously stated, that the capacity of peace strategies to claim success is the capacity of subordinate classes to absorb their negative consequences. Leaving people to ‘fend for themselves’ whether it is rubbish collection, dealing with armed groups or sustaining the national army is definitely an extortion only benefiting those who would otherwise be responsible for dealing with these things. However, the problem with Chabal’s arguments is that they do not afford any type of agency in the political choices subordinate classes make. This is not to say that people opt to be exploited but that to observe just this feature is to ignore the daily escape strategies and strategies of resistance to this form of exploitation, as well as subordinate classes’ capacity to exercise control over their circumstances.

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using traditional agricultural techniques and inventing tactics against state appropriation of labour, taxes and crops. (Scott 2009)

42 Giovannoni et al. (2004) speak of a sort of ngoisation of society by which people attempt to capture national and international funding in order to provide for themselves, their families and neighbourhoods for all sorts of goods and services.
Whereas “predatory” strategies are seen in many state-residual services, self-provision sets the basis for placating poverty, violence and war, but also a substantive success against the extraction of labour and taxes.

So although survival could easily be seen as successful extortion by the state and its successful predatory, extractive machine at work, in response, populations are able to keep the state at a distance. Informal networking and self-reliance is also a form of not relying on the state and authorities to obtain what one needs, but also to demand the authorities the honouring of the exchanges and judge whether those have been met. Let us go through a few examples.

In Mabuku (a small town in the territory of Beni, North Kivu), where no official authority is present, everything is left to the population. There is an established payment for teachers, nurses and doctors; the women of the village have built the maternal wing of the small hospital/health centre by collecting materials around the area and making their own bricks; and justice is provided by a combination of traditional, collective and religious processes (Participant Observation II 2010). In other places, the hospital may had been built by the state with the contribution of international NGOs still the management relied on local Catholic or Protestant churches, which, at the same time, relied on the contributions made by the patients. In Bukavu’s hospital, doctors and nurses do not get a salary and they self-manage the only biggest provincial hospital in South Kivu with the means that patients provide. There are no sheets in the beds, no superfluous decoration, curtains or any religious symbols, but there were disposable syringes, special laboratories and scanning machinery. Families would bring sheets, blankets, food and even chairs for them to sit while taking care of their loved-ones (Participant Observation III 2010).

Two technical staff members from the Ministry of Health said that the state cannot cope with all health population needs. So aside from the doctor per population ratio being 1 doctor per 10000 inhabitants (Ngoma & Luzolo 2010)\(^4\), populations need to

\(^4\) Waldmart also states that 70% of Congolese people do not have access to education (cited in Marriage 2010, p.361) Note that, for example, in the UK the doctor-population
help with the construction of hospitals and health centres. ‘If someone does not have money, they can bring a goat so that it can be eaten by those working on the construction site’ (Ngoma & Luzolo 2010).

Of course, some of these needs are covered by international NGOs, and more so when talking about health. Zoë Marriage has explored the significance of the fact that a substantial amount of aid goes towards health services in Congo (2010). She observes that this aid does not deal with the causes of why there is not health service in the first place. Health is a particular good example because it illustrates something about Congo’s history and current state of affairs. Whereas in the 1970s and 1980s it had one of the best health systems in Africa, since the mid-1990s it simply does not have one. Marriage argues that development aid is part of the Northern Logic of containment by which aid is fundamentally put towards safeguarding Northern countries’ life standards and security, rather than southern states’ development. She concludes that despite substantial amount of aid resources going towards health, the impact on the ground does not reach the point of actually creating a structure on which to sustain a proper health system and, I would add, just relies on the population to provide for their own needs (Marriage 2010).

The same goes for education and other services. Parents pay school teachers’ and university professors’ salary and other contributions so that both schools and universities can function (Profesor Kaningini 2010). In Butembo a new system of community police is replacing the role of the official police. In several conservations, people declared to be tired of calling the police and getting things like ‘sorry we can’t go because we don’t have petrol or money to put petrol in the car’; ‘sorry we don’t have credit on the phone to ask for reinforcements’. As a result people in Butembo have invented several mechanisms to confront crime and insecurity. One of these mechanisms is the Nyumba Kumi, ‘chef of 10 houses’ in Swahili. What this means is that each 10 houses in a neighbourhood, people designate a security leader that will

ration is 2.4 doctors per 1000 people. (Mayor 2008, p.356) The issue with health as with education access is something that comes from the programmes of debt restructuration from the IMF in the 1980s and that forced a privatisation of main state services. (Yoka 2009, p. 249).
be in charge of keeping an eye of who goes in and who goes out of the neighbourhood and reporting to the actual neighbourhood. If there is something suspicious, the ‘chef of the 10 houses’ will assemble other people in order to do whatever they deem necessary to tackle the problem, whether to do routines or checks. Similarly, there is a system to keep robbers away. Now, instead of calling the police, people start screaming, banging pots and pans in order to scare off the robber and make them run away. This not only makes the robber go away but it also puts on alert other houses in the neighbourhood.

Also in Butembo in line with this self-reliance spirit, populations started to create a system by which every 60 or so houses would buy a generator together and would set up its own electricity system. When one sees the system, it is a very orderly, set up with small trunks and pieces of wood. One house hosts the generator and everyone makes contribution to the petrol. Electricity works from 6 to 10 pm. From Butembo it has now expanded to other provinces and this is now seen for instance in Goma too. In Kinshasa people steal electricity although the problem is that the electricity that government provides does not always work. Hence the mockery and the renaming of the state electricity provider to ‘National Society of Darkness.’

But the same goes for other seemingly even more direct issues that would fall under the responsibility of the government, especially in times of conflict, such as peace strategies and refugee flow management. As Moore observed: ‘By and large, it appears that the efforts of subordinate groups to work out their own rules for settling internal disputes represent attempts to maintain some degree of independence in respect to superior authority’ (1978, p. 27).

In the territory of Fizi, the brokering in the conflict between the Banyamulengue and the Babembe in Fizi was taken by the Comité de Coordination d’Actions de Paix (CCAP) years before any other international NGO or UN agency stepped in. In 1996, with the arrival of Rwandese refugees to the territory, the explosion in the availability of weapons and changes in social dynamics raised old wounds that some members of

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44 From Société Nationale d’Electricité is called Société Nationale de l’Obscurité.
the Tutsi community in Congo had for many years and foster the organisation of two local armed groups, each for each community. For the Banyamulengue it was time to rectify injustices in terms of access to land and political representation that they had suffered for many years.

For the CCAP representative that coordinated the first dialogue between Banyamulengue and Babembe stated: ‘the problem was not the capacity of the communities to live together, but the influence of the war, the flow of weapons into the area as well as the political discourses that some governments started to play with’ (Interview with Representative CCAP 2010). The conflict was intensified because the Banyamulengue people had established themselves in some of the highest mountains around the territory of Fizi (3-4000 m. high) and dedicated themselves to agriculture and cattle farming, had now the capacity to mobilise two country’s armies, that of Rwanda and Burundi to attend their calls for protection. The territory of Fizi is rich in gold, agriculture and minerals, highly populated in comparison to the rest of the Congo, but also empty enough to move populations around (Interview with Representative CCAP 2010). Although both of these communities still maintain their own armed groups, this organisation was able to foster a dialogue that ultimately meant years later people from one ethnic group and another could live together is most areas of the territory as they had done before.

In Bunyakiri, the organisation Action pour la Paix et la Concorde (APC) organises and manages the flow of refugees around the territory where the town of Bunyakiri is found. Refugees present a problem in particular to the issue of land. When a family returns, the land may have been taken or given away by the customary chief. This is very important since land is at the heart of the conflict. When people are displaced and they flee the area or the country, upon their return they may find that there are new occupants on their land (Interview with APC Representative 2010). This may be families, politicians, military or police members. As such, this generates multiple conflicts. This is added to the fact that land is a resource for agriculture, cattle farming and mining and therefore a source of conflict. However, when asked about the policy
in regards to all these issues and land to an MP for one of the Eastern territories he stated ‘we do not have a policy’ (Interview with Anonymous Deputy 2010).

By “civil society” remaining in control of the social fabric illustrates a type of extortion of elites on subordinate classes. This further shows that the success of the peace strategies is the capacity of people to precisely deal with the problems on the ground. Conversely, this space left to subordinate classes generates a substantial amount of control on their part. It is in the capacity to retain the state at a distance and seek alternative channels to provide for one’s survival that these strategies are in themselves and very much through civil society a form of resistance.

5. Conclusion

The different means of resistance analysed in this paper amount to different ways of mitigating claims put on subordinate classes by elites and providing a way to read political alternatives being articulated through them. It was argued that in this mitigation, solidarity and grassroots organisations play a fundamental role thus making them more an actor and a factor of resistance than a partner in the statebuilding and democratisation enterprise.

Against this, one might argue that these seemingly not-influential activities are evidence for the political naivety of the Congolese as well as their poor experience of real political movements. If compared with resistance movements in Palestine or Iraq or East Timor, Congolese may seem submissive. However, one needs to measure resistance against the amount of repression and the actual willingness to enact a visible organised resistance. Arguably, the “advantage” of having an absent state is also the capacity, as shown, of remaining in control of what goes on the ground. It is in this context where the lack of more visible, ideological or even revolutionary activity needs to be understood.

Further, the kind of political discourses analysed seen in the critique and mockery but also in the political agency exercised in the alliances with armed groups also
tells us about political agendas. Even if they come in the language of power this should not be interpreted as a lack of political progressiveness or even lack of ideas, but as revealing the constraints that the lack of political space and means imposes on those very ideas to flourish. Thus even if Congolese people do not oppose outright or conceptually the idea of the state or democracy in itself, their forms of resistance articulated through “civil society” present a twofold fundamental challenge. On the one hand, the critiquing of the missions is a way to challenge the moral authority by which people start to question whether their suffering is justified. It could be certainly argued that this is just a misperception on the part of subordinate classes and that statebuilding strategies indeed ‘do something’ or do many things. However, this is exactly the contention. The exaggeration and the critique presents us with a worldview in which a notion of justice and what should be happening confronts what is experienced on the ground. On the other hand, the fact that people do call for democracy and development, using the same language of power, establishes that the meaning of those and the idea of how they should be operationalised are challenged.

Severine Autesserre highlighted the need to understand the local sources of conflict in order to understand the conflict in Congo (2006; 2009). However, arguably, what goes on the ground is a battle over different political projects where local actors have a substantial amount of control. As shown, this control not only entails the capacity to navigate circumstances in the midst of armed groups, geo-political strategies by different governments and multinational corporations, but it also allows popular classes to push their own agendas. These are shown in the counter-discourses deployed, in the redefining of terms like ‘state’, ‘democracy’, ‘development and ‘peace’; in their capacity to ally themselves with foreign troops, different armed groups and even foreign governments to fight enemy combatants or retain control of local political authority and the social fabric.

This reveals that statebuilding strategies are implemented with the authority to continue the suffering on the population. In other words, that those who bear the worst consequences of the war and the slow reconstruction are not the war-mongers
and the state-builders themselves does not seem to be a failure of how war and statebuilding are carried out, but the processes of war and statebuilding themselves.

Ultimately, what the paper has aimed to theorise resistance as seen through the actions of “civil society”, in the form of grassroots organisations and solidarity networks. It has firstly conceived of civil society not as the mainstream partner of government and legitimate actors for raising concern, but as of the one made of spontaneous and historical links individual and collective networks at the grassroots with political agency exercised not towards a foreign imported political project, but towards its own political project and political agendas. Of course, this has consequences in regards to how we think about spoilers and statebuilding processes but more so it has shown a more complicated yet grounded experience of what goes on the ground in the context of Congo. The attempt has not been the highlighting of small acts of defiance to authority, the survival strategies or the local militias as future revolutionaries in Congo, but to identify patterns of resistance to the conduct of statebuilding and the multiple political projects on the ground.

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