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Local Politics and International Military Intervention: Figurations of Uncertainty

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Abstract

The paper deals with the civil war and the international "humanitarian" military intervention in Ituri (DR Congo). The relationships between non-state armed groups and the United Nations' mission (Monuc) in Ituri were marked by the lack of a particular knowledge, a knowledge that is constructed through established patterns of interaction. Power balances were not defined, and this led to continual conflict. In this paper, it is asked how actors dealt with the uncertainty this figuration provided, and finally took decisions. It is argued that uncertainty causes difficult problems for the involved actors in post-conflict intervention spaces, but may also be used as a tactical tool.

Introduction

In late 2005, when the United Nations Security Council issued sanctions against former Congolese militia leader Jérôme Kakwavu, he immediately left his lodgings at the five star Grand Hotel in the capital Kinshasa, and moved to an unknown location in a remote area of the city. Kakwavu was accused of arms trafficking in violation of an embargo enacted by the Security Council. For Kakwavu, who was now prevented from travelling and doing business abroad, and whose financial assets were set to be frozen, the sanctions apparently came as a surprise.[1] After all, his militia had ceased to exist months before, the majority of his fighters had taken part in a demobilisation programme, and contrary to the behaviour of many other militias, Kakwavu's FAPC[2] had even handed over its heavy weapons to Monuc[3]. As a spokesman for Kakwavu confirmed a few days thereafter, Kakwavu felt he had complied with all United Nations demands. The sanctions, from his point of view, were unjust and incomprehensible.[4]

Jérôme Kakwavu had left his power base in the eastern district of Ituri some months before, and moved to the capital Kinshasa, as the transitional government had appointed him to the rank of general in the new national army.[5] However, his new reputation as army general had, so far, only permitted him the luxury of accommodation in the five-star Grand Hotel in the capital. An assigned command over soldiers, though, had failed to materialize. Beginning as a powerful militia leader, Kakwavu next became an army general without troops. Now he felt that his position had become too precarious. When the Security Council passed sanctions against him, he feared arrest and incarceration in the infamous "Makala" prison, and thus sought sanctuary at an unknown location.

Kakwavu's fears were not without reason. His former enemies, the leaders of competing militias in the Congolese district of Ituri, had already been placed in prison. One of them, Thomas Lubanga of the UPC[6] has become the first defendant before the International Criminal Court in The Hague. Like other militia leaders, Thomas Lubanga

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[1] UN Security Council Committee: List of Individuals and Entities Subject to the Measures Imposed By Paragraphs 13 And 15 of Security Council Resolution 1596 (2005), 1 November 2005; UN Security Council: Resolution 1493 (2003); Interview with Monuc official (Kinshasa, 9 December 2005).
A note on the sources: Most interview partners I spoke to during field research in 2005 and 2006 remain anonymous, to not endanger their security (mainly Congolese citizens) or their professional careers (UN officials). Likewise, internal UN documents I received cannot be cited in detail for similar reasons.

[2] "Forces Armées Populaires du Congo"

[3] "Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies en République Démocratique du Congo"

[4] Interview with spokesperson of Jérôme Kakwavu (Kinshasa, 11 December 2005).

[5] Human Rights Watch: D.R. Congo: Army Should Not Appoint War Criminals, 14 January 2005.

[6] "Union des Patriotes Congolais".

had believed in his chances to enter the national political arena in Kinshasa, only to be arrested by Monuc soldiers.[7]

Obviously, militia leaders' positions were never secure. Despite promises implicitly and explicitly given them by the United Nations and by the Congolese transitional government, and even as generals of the national army, they could be summarily arrested. For the peace process in the Congo, their situation was of minor importance, since they no longer exercised control of their armed groups. However, in their former region of activity, the district of Ituri, newly emerged militia leaders drew their conclusions. As a result, parts of Ituri remained a region of warfare, as armed groups continued to fight and hesitated to enter or fulfil peace agreements.

The lack of trust between Monuc and militia leaders is not a characteristic of relations between these particular actors. Rather, uncertainty about the future actions and agendas of political actors and agencies in Ituri, be they international, national or local, armed or non-armed, was a matter that affected many political relationships in Ituri. As a result, the political arena in Ituri during the on-going humanitarian military intervention became a "figuration of uncertainty".

Politics (and life) are always a game in which it is difficult to assess the probability of other people's actions and agendas. However in Ituri, the political figuration became exceptionally confusing and unclear for the international and local political actors involved. A framework of knowledge constructed through established patterns of interaction was missing. The power balance between those actors was not yet defined, and this led to continual conflict. But how these conflicts could be resolved or fought out was not yet clear. The image each had of the other was not based on direct interaction, but on hearsay and guess.

After the first social encounters between Monuc personnel and militia members, difficulties remained for either to anticipate the actions of the other, as both groups undertook surprising manoeuvres. In their quest for a favourable position, the players were able to hide their means, to deceive and to trick. The post-conflict space soon resembled a card-game, in which every player held different cards, and played according to different rules.[8]

A second aspect of the particular uncertainty in Ituri was the use of violence as a political instrument. Neither side hesitated to take advantage of military options, often

[7] Irin: DRC: Another key Ituri leader arrested, 22 March 2005; International Criminal Court: Pre-Trial Chamber I commits Thomas Lubanga Dyilo for trial, 29 January 2007; Interview with UN official (Kinshasa, 9 December 2005).

[8] I borrow this metaphor from Sardan (2005: 185-6).

in unexpected situations. This violence significantly increased the range of possibilities and raised the stakes for most actors involved.

In the first part of this paper, I try to shed light on these different aspects of uncertainties faced by the main actors involved. Emphasis is placed on analyses of the primary actors' relationships, as proposed in the concept of a "sociology of figurations" by Norbert Elias. Two characteristic phases of the social encounters between Monuc and Ituri's armed groups are presented: First, the deployment of the Blue Helmet mission in its initial months in 2003 and secondly, the disarmament and demobilisation programme from late 2004 to mid-2005.

In the second part, answers are sought concerning which practices actors employed despite the uncertainties they were facing. To describe these practices, Michel de Certeau's definitions of "strategies and tactics" are employed. Strategies for de Certeau are the patterns of action thought suitable by the strong, while by tactics he describes the art of constant improvisation developed by those in possession of fewer conventional resources.

In contrast to members of figurations, who by necessity have to anticipate the course of their contemporary affairs, social scientists need not speculate about the present, but can take a look back and try to understand what has happened in the past. This occurred to me in the midst of a confounding field research situation in which I had the feeling that the more I learned about the relationships between Monuc, Ituri's armed groups, and the many other local, national and international actors involved, the more questions emerged. This, I concluded, must have been the same experience for everyone else in Ituri. As I had the opportunity to speak to Monuc officials, militia leaders and many other interviewees, it appeared to me that most of the time I took part in an unfinished process of interpretation of the respective other. The question then was less concerning the information available to me, but how the individuals and their institutions interpreted the information they had at hand, dealt with the uncertainty the figuration provided, and ultimately made their decisions.

The argument here is that uncertainty is a problem for actors, but may also serve as a tactical tool. The non-state armed groups in Ituri had little possibility of anticipating the moves of the international mission, the actions of their enemies in competing militias, or their own organisational stability. These groups accordingly tried to play safe and wait for an opportune time to pursue their respective agendas.

For Monuc, uncertainty or knowledge about their counterparts was ultimately of limited importance. The international mission postulated a structure for political inclusion which the armed groups should adhere to. Difficulties arose, but the mission

successfully issued an ultimatum for observance. By delimiting the timeframe, tactical shifts were successfully confined.

Monuc's arrival: Imposing new power relations

The peculiar situation produced by an international intervention into a civil war may be regarded as a figuration. Norbert Elias, who coined the term in the social sciences, defines figurations as "patterns which interdependent human beings, as groups or as individuals, form with each other."[9] Figurations are networks of individuals who are mutually dependent, and thus oriented towards each other. Central to the notion of figurations is thus their character as social relationships.[10] Through the focus on the practices that define the power balances between actors, the concept allows description of the dynamic process that was created by the intervention in Ituri.
Another thought of Elias regarding general features of uncertainty is of use here. As he writes, the interweaving of multiple actors or groups of actors in figurations often results in a loss of overview and control, and leads to unintended consequences of intended actions. The intertwining of many people's actions then takes a direction that nobody "has planned, determined or anticipated."[11]

The first months of international military intervention in the Iturian civil war demonstrate this quite clearly. Before international meddling with local affairs began in 2003, Ituri had already experienced five years of excessive violence and inter-ethnic war. When Monuc deployed armed personnel into the district's capital, Ituri's armed groups anticipated a militarily weak mission seeking to peacefully mediate their conflicts. However, within a few weeks, these groups had to come to terms with a superior international army prepared to use violence to enforce its will. The surprising turn, however, had little to do with the actions of Ituri's militias, but rather with events far from the Iturian landscape. This had important consequences for local political actors, who after years of largely uninterrupted local and regional politics suddenly found themselves confronted by powerful new foreign actors called the "International Community".[12]
The district of Ituri is situated in the northeast of the country and shares border with Uganda. Since 1998, in the shadow of the wars in the Democratic Republic of Congo, a „war in the war" developed in Ituri, largely unnoticed by the International Community,

[9] Elias (1987: 85).
[10] Elias (1978: 15-16).
[11] Elias (1978: 94-95).
[12] For a summary of events from late 2002 to May 2003, see International Crisis Group (ICG 2003).

and of minor importance to the main actors in the Congolese power struggle. In Ituri, roughly a dozen non-state armed groups emerged over the years, most of which were ethnically defined. These groups developed agendas, among them the physical and material safeguard of their ethnic constituencies, but also a stake in the local and national political arena, as well as the individual interests of leaders, staff and combatants.[13]

When in April 2003 Monuc finally stationed Blue Helmet soldiers in the district, the battle for these stakes erupted again. The international troops were immediately confronted with escalating violence between the armed groups on the one hand and of those groups towards civilians on the other hand. Having been small in number and overwhelmed by the firepower of the local armed groups, the Blue Helmets opted to avoid becoming casualties by essentially withdrawing from the violence around them. If the armed groups intended to test the will and the means of the International Community to impose itself on Ituri's political figuration, Monuc initially failed that test. This was somewhat predictable, as Monuc, while it had been absent from Ituri so far, had operated in the country since 1999. During those years, the UN mission often hesitated to intervene in local violent conflict, and instead tried to bring combatant parties to the negotiating table.[14]

Monuc's arrival was only one reason for the escalating power struggles between the armed groups. Monuc replaced the Ugandan army that had been present in the district since 1998. Now the armed groups rushed to overtake areas the Ugandans had controlled. At the same time, a transitional central Congolese government was established in internationally brokered negotiations. However, Ituri's armed groups had so far been excluded from those negotiations, and now sought to fight their way in.

What did Ituri's armed groups expect from Monuc's arrival? Their perspective combined two aspects: First, Monuc could play a role in modifying local power relations between the fighting groups. Given Monuc's military weakness, this was to be a largely peaceful way of mediation. Even before the Blue Helmet's arrival, Monuc sponsored an "Interim Administration" comprising political and military players in the district that, however, proved unstable. Establishing military facts was considered an advantage for further internationally brokered deliberations.

Secondly, Monuc was the key agency in regard to the composition of the national transitional government. It was the "International Community" that sponsored and supervised that government, mixing rebel groups from elsewhere in the country and the government of President Joseph Kabila, but excluding Ituri's armed groups. For most of

[13] See Vlassenroot & Raeymakers (2004) for a detailed account of Ituri's civil war until 2003.
[14] See Autesserre (2006) for a discussion of Monuc's approach towards local armed conflicts.

the members of the new government, military power resources and control over territory had been the ticket into government. Ituri's armed groups drew the conclusion that military action was the best way to convince national and international actors of the need to include them into the national power-sharing formula.[15]

However, this approach never produced the intended results. This did not have very much to do with the actions of Ituri's militias. While neither Monuc nor the transitional government were keen to include Ituri's groups into the already fragile power-sharing agreement in the capital Kinshasa, the most important developments occurred in the capitals of Europe, the United States, and in the UN Security Council. In early 2003, the "International Community" was in the midst of the debate on the Iraq war. While it is difficult to prove a connection between the debate about the Iraq war and the emerging strategy of the International Community in its dealings with Ituri, the coincidence with the Iraq debate, the sudden prominence of Ituri in Western media, and the exceptional speed and thoroughness of Western actions make this connection very plausible. Ituri's political players had no chance to anticipate these unprecedented developments.

In a matter of weeks, the first military mission under European Union guidance outside of Europe was sent to Ituri's capital Bunia. Code-named "Operation Artemis", 1500 soldiers of the French and other armies were mandated to "enforce peace" under Chapter VII of the UN Charter (while Monuc, under Chapter VI, had been given a much weaker "peace keeping" mandate). The task of this "Interim Emergency Force" was to secure Bunia until Monuc could organise reinforcements. Besides the extraordinarily rapid logistical effort, the intervention also involved British and US pressure on the governments of Rwanda and Uganda which considered Ituri as part of their zones of influence.[16]

As a result, France and the European Union showed a sense of responsibility for peace and security and military capabilities in a difficult environment, the government of Britain mediated between Europe and the USA, and the United Nations was saved from another missions' failure. For the tense "International Community", the deployment of Artemis was a win-win situation. In Ituri, the armed groups were subsequently threatened and coerced into accepting the International Community's will: To withdraw their fighters from Bunia, to cease fighting, and to halt the public display of weapons.

After some initial engagements with French troops, they complied, and a precarious form of security returned to Bunia. After the three month guest performance of the European Union, the United Nations' mission in September 2003 took over again. Now also mandated under Chapter VII to enforce peace, Monuc increased its numbers from a

[15] ICG (2003: 7-13); ICG (2004: 12-13).
[16] AFP: France holds talks at UN with potential contributors to international force for Congo, 30 May 2003; UN Security Council: Resolution 1484 (2003).

few hundred lightly armed Blue Helmets to about 4500 troops supported by tanks and helicopter gunships. Monuc then started to gradually spread its presence to other towns and villages in Ituri. For Ituri's militias, both the strength and the determination of the intervention must have come as a surprise.[17]

What was the nature of the relationship between Monuc and the armed groups at this stage? Monuc had inscribed itself into the political figuration in Ituri. On the way to Kinshasa and into the national political arena, Monuc had become the major roadblock for Ituri's armed groups. And this barrier could not be overcome by violent means alone, as had been demonstrated by determined peace enforcement actions.

In the local political figuration, Monuc sought with some success to impose new rules to the game, but its overall influence remained limited. In the few towns where Blue Helmets were present, large scale open violence against civilians, enemy militias and international personnel could be sanctioned with superior military firepower. Room for violent manoeuvre of armed groups had thus shrunk, which especially decreased the power of the militarily strongest militias.

However, in the more remote areas of the district, violence between hostile groups and against civilians continued unabated. The relationship between Monuc and the armed groups was thus spatially and militarily defined. Ituri at this stage resembled a mosaic of militia strongholds, sprinkled by zones of intervention in the strategically most important towns. Not yet clear, however, were the patterns of the emerging political formula in the district, and the power balances between the UN mission and its local opponents. The exact definition of these power balances had to be tried and tested first.

The Disarmament Programme: Fishing in troubled waters

Besides military violence, direct negotiations between Monuc and the armed groups' leaderships were emerging practices of interaction. These negotiations intensified in the coming months. The main difference before and after Operation Artemis lay in the fact that Monuc was no longer a third party in a mediator's role, but had become an armed force to be reckoned with. The second period that shows some of the characteristics of relationships between Monuc and Ituri's militias is the process of the "Disarmament and Community Reinsertion"-programme (DCR), from September 2004 to June 2005.

[17] Several interviews with former militia members (Bunia, October 2005 & May 2006); UN Bunia: Internal Reports on the Security Situation (January – September 2004).

In September 2004, Monuc, in cooperation with the UN Development Programme (UNDP), opened disarmament sites for each of Ituri's militias. In theory, fighters would gather there, hand in their weapons, and choose between returning to a civilian life or duty in the new, unified national army. In negotiations the armed groups' leaders had accepted these conditions, although some later claimed to have been blackmailed into signing by Monuc and the transitional government.[18]

During the first month of the programme, only some few dozen combatants of an estimated 15,000 arrived at the DCR transit sites. Instead, a fury of violence began on the very first day of the official opening of the programme: On the one hand, violent incidents directed against Monuc multiplied. Armoured patrols were attacked, Blue Helmets taken hostage, and two transit sites directly attacked, resulting in the withdrawal of all UNDP civilian personnel.

Local Congolese personnel, having been less protected than the expatriates, were frightened by targeted attacks on their homes in Bunia. Furthermore, the newly arrived battalion of the transitional government's army, the FARDC,[19] was a primary target. Soldiers were threatened, some lured into desertion, others taken hostage. At the same time, fighting between the armed groups escalated. While the ethnic composition of Bunia's neighbourhoods was consolidated by ethnically motivated murders, thousands of civilians in rural areas had to flee to neighbouring Uganda or into camps in Ituri to escape the ethnically targeted massacres and battles for territorial control.[20]

Monuc had expected some problems, but the formidable offensive of the armed groups came as a surprise. Initially, Monuc reacted in two ways: The armed groups' leaders were now offered high ranks in the new national army and the vague prospect of inclusion into the national political arena. After public announcement of appointments into the FARDC, some militias' leaders travelled to Kinshasa and moved into the Grand Hotel. Secondly, Monuc stepped up military action, consisting mainly of so called cordon-and-search operations of militia camps, and dismantled some. During these operations, some militia members were killed. These measures, however, had only limited effects on the DCR-programme. While some transit sites now registered a continual trickling in of combatants, the overall picture of the project was one of failure.[21]

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[18] Interview with Monuc official (Kinshasa, 9 December 2005); Interview UNDP official (Kinshasa, 31 May 2006); Interview with the Spokesperson of Jérôme Kakwavu (Kinshasa, 11 December 2005); Interview Kisembo Bitamara (former leader of the Pusic-militia ("Parti pour l'Unité et la Sauvegarde de l'Intégrité du Congo", at an undisclosed location, 28 September 2005). For a discussion on the DCR-programme see Wolters (2005) and Bouta (2005).

[19] "Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo"

[20] UN Bunia, Internal reports on the security situation (September – December 2004); Interviews with former militia members (Bunia, October – November 2005).

[21] Irin: DRC: UN troops break up militia camp in Ituri, 10 December 2004; Union des Congolais pour la Démocratie/Forces Armées du Peuple Congolais UCD/FAPC), Jérôme Kakwavu: Camp FAPC/Mahagi attaqué

It took Monuc six months and cost the lives of several Blue Helmet soldiers to adjust its policies to the challenge. At the end of February 2005, nine Bangladeshi peacekeepers were killed and mutilated during a patrol of the shore of Lake Albert, where they provided some limited security for a refugee camp. Although Monuc repeatedly denied any connection, a few days later the militia thought to be responsible for the killing of the Blue Helmet soldiers, was attacked by helicopter gunships. Monuc boasted publicly of the killing of at least fifty militiamen, the biggest number of combatants killed by Monuc to that point. Communal leaders in the affected village however soon complained about civilian victims who had apparently been abused as "human shields" by the rebels.[22]

Shortly thereafter, some of the political leaders of Ituri's militia groups were arrested by Monuc in Kinshasa and Bunia. These leaders had decided to physically enter the political arenas in the local or national capital, and now were trapped. Initially, no charges were filed by the Congolese justice system, so the militia leaders' continued detention was theoretically illegal. Only militia members out of reach of Blue Helmet troops, among them Jérôme Kakwavu, who remained in his stronghold in northern Ituri avoided risk of capture.[23]

Monuc also issued an ultimatum to militia members: lay down their arms or be considered "beyond the law". This ultimatum is today considered by Monuc officials to have been the most important motivation for armed groups' combatants to engage in the DCR-programme. In fact, until June 2005 more than 15,000 combatants handed in weapons at the transit sites and were sent to army barracks outside of Ituri, or returned to civilian communities. The DCR-programme finally seemed to develop into a success, for reasons further discussed below.[24]

The disarmament process held several features of uncertainty for the actors and agencies involved. For Monuc, the process initially seemed to provide another instance of failure. As the process was at the heart of the overall strategy not only in Ituri, but intended to provide a model for the rest of the country, this could have resulted in a severe crisis.

For Monuc officials, the armed groups remained a black box. Their reactions to the proposed process were unpredictable. What value did the negotiated agreements with

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par Monuc. Communiqué de Presse, 9 December 2004; UN Bunia, Internal Reports on the Security Situation, 9 & 31 December 2004.

[22] BBC: Congo ambush kills nine UN troops, 25 February 2005; BBC: UN troops strike back in DR Congo, 2 March 2005.

[23] BBC: DR Congo militia chief arrested, 22 March 2005. On other, less prominent cases of semi-illegal detention under Monuc supervision, see Justice Plus (2004).

[24] Various interviews with UN officials (Bunia & Kinshasa, October – December 2005); Reuters: 15,000 disarm but Ituri militias regrouping -U.N, 23 June 2005.

militia leaders have? Even if these agreements were initially respected, which dynamics would unfold once militia leaders moved away from their groups and into hotel suites in Kinshasa? Once it became clear in the first months of the programme that the armed groups were resisting the programme, these questions had to be modified: Who was now responsible in the groups, the political leaders in Kinshasa or the military staff in the camps? Or was Monuc already witnessing a disintegration of militias into small freelance splinter groups? If not, was the resistance only meant to buy time, or was there simply no will to enter into a post-conflict era? The UN lacked knowledge about the organizations they were dealing with.

If the situation was complicated for Monuc, for the armed groups it was labyrinthine. Militia members had to take into account at least three different groups of agents: Monuc and the transitional government, the other militias in Ituri, and also their fragile internal hierarchies. In the relationship towards Monuc and the transitional government, it remained unclear whether agreements would be honoured. For Ituri's militia leaders, disarmament was presented as a pre-condition to political integration. But would they still be taken serious after the disarming of their troops? If armed groups resisted the demobilisation process, how much violence was Monuc ready and capable to invest? Was it possible to avoid disarmament and still gain entry into the national political arena?

Then there were was the interdependency with hostile armed groups: Disarmament of one group, while another kept its weapons, would present a serious security dilemma for combatants, staff and constituencies alike. Monuc, it was clear, could not guarantee physical security in all of Ituri. On the other hand, uneven disarmament would present good chances in the local military struggles for those groups which succeeded in delaying the handing over of weapons, so that there was all likelihood that no group would risk taking the first steps.

Militia members also had to deal with their internal structures. The DCR-process provided incentives for all layers of the armed groups: Integration into national politics, into the ranks of the army, and financial packages for the combatants ready to become civilians. Could leaders prevent sudden disintegration? Combatants and mid-level staff, on the other hand, asked themselves if leaders would care for their well-being once they had been nominated to posts in the army or the government. How stable were the hierarchies created during the warfare, particularly as all militias had undergone processes of disintegration before?

The power balances between Monuc and the armed groups at this stage were not clear cut: Monuc was not remotely able to provide for security in Ituri. It even had problems protecting its own personnel. Thus, the success of the disarmament process depended on the armed groups, and these groups remained inscrutable. At the same time, Monuc

had only limited incentives to offer. More than tactical military action, on the other hand, would mean shouldering considerable costs for the mission.

The stakes were considerably higher for the armed groups: For their members, physical security and future life-chances were in limbo. Simply ignoring Monuc's demands was not an option, as military pressure had become too strong and inclusion into political arrangements was supervised by the mission. Yet simply acquiescing would almost certainly result in negative consequences, given the various aspects of uncertainty in Ituri's politico-military figuration.

Uncertainty in Strategies and Tactics

The question remains open how the involved actors made decisions. In the following paragraphs, I want to propose some ideas by referring to Michel de Certeau's definition of "Strategies and Tactics".[25] As mentioned above, for the French philosopher and sociologist, strategies are the patterns of action thought suitable by the strong. Strategy, or "the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships", depends on a proper place "of its own power and will", a place delimited from an "environment".[26] A place need not be a geographical space, but can also be a system, a bureaucratic institution, or a theoretical framework. From this place, the political space can be interpreted and structured, and knowledge about reality can be established.

Certeau argues that the "tactic is an art of the weak", the art of constant improvisation developed by the less powerful.[27] The relationship between strategies and tactics can be described as the "triumph of place over time".[28] Contrary to strategy, tactic has no proper locus, but its space is the space of the powerful other, "a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power". There is no room for withdrawal, foresight or self-collection. Tactic is a method of isolated actions, taking advantage of opportunities, but without a proper place to stockpile "what it wins". Tactic is highly mobile, relying on "a clever utilization of time", seizing the circumstances that allow transforming the given figuration briefly into a favourable situation.[29] Timing and deception are basic means in the use of tactic, sometimes transforming uncertainty into an advantage for the tactical player.

In the following I argue that the UN mission Monuc, relying on its proper place as an institution of the "International Community", postulated a strategy of dealing with the

[25] Many insights into the works of de Certeau I owe to my colleague Daria Isachenko in the "Micropolitcs of Armed Groups"-research project.
[26] Certeau (1988: 35-6).
[27] Certeau (1988: 37). I want to emphasise that the use of terms like "the weak" for non-state armed groups is not implying any normative or moral judgement.
[28] Certeau (1988: 36).
[29] Certeau (1988: 38).

problem Ituri's armed groups embodied. The strategy demanded that these armed groups either dissolve or transform themselves into units acceptable in the International System, that is, as political parties, as members of a recognized government or army. While these terms were principally acceptable to the armed groups, they disagreed on the conditions. Disarmament before integration seemed a choice too uncertain. Thus, they started to act in a tactical manner.

As it became clear, the military presence and violent enforcement were not sufficient to overcome the tactical resistance of the armed groups. Monuc, after some months of hesitation, finally employed a trick or tactical move itself. The ultimatum to either dissolve or become outlaws rendered the aspect of time, on which the militias' tactics relied, into a disadvantage for them.

At the time of Monuc's arrival, Ituri's militias had still been rather confident of their powerful role in the district and the possibility to use it as a platform in national politics. The unexpected arrival of a superior military force in Bunia, Operation Artemis, and the following upgrade of Monuc's military capabilities in other strategic locations in Ituri, forced them to accept a new political dynamic. From then on, they often felt blackmailed and powerless in negotiations, and began to attempt tactical double-play.

The most important aspect of the double-play was to win time, play safe, and wait for the opportunity to seize the moment. On the one hand, armed groups' political leaders showed themselves ready to sign whatever agreement was imposed on them. These agreements at least put them into contact with the transitional government. This offered the possibility of entering alliances with some powerful players in Kinshasa's emerging political arena. That seems to be the reason why some militia leaders left their militias' bases for hotel rooms in Kinshasa. This was a risky move, as it soon turned out. Even if they did not expect to be arrested, the unstable power relations at home always had the potential to lead to loss of control over their respective groups.

At the same time, the armed groups deceived Monuc about their true intentions. Agreeing, on paper, to the disarmament process, they pressured their fellow combatants with death threats if they left the bush for the transit sites. Attacks on Monuc patrols, civilian personnel and transit sites, and also the ensuing battles between the armed groups and massacres of civilians then served to further delay the demobilisation programme.

The question remains open how Monuc arrived at strategic decisions, despite the fact that the armed groups effectively remained a black box to mission's officials. Uncertainty of knowledge, it seems, only played a minor role in the decision-making process. The argument here is that Monuc did not see the need to understand the armed

groups in their own right. The mission relied on its ability to block the entrance to the political system re-emerging in the Congo: reconstructed, centralised statehood. Monuc demanded that Ituri's armed groups either transform, or not be allowed into the state. This strategy worked mainly because the armed groups wanted to become part of the new state, albeit on more favourable terms. Room for Monuc's strategic neglect of the armed groups' intentions was made by the militias' own preparedness to play a role in the imposed system. Relying on its other proper place, Monuc was able to serve as the gatekeeper to national politics.

If on the national level Monuc could dictate the terms of inclusion, its leverage over local politics remained fragile. Its military presence in strategic places and its preparedness to use violence as means of enforcement was inadequate, given the fact that armed groups could commit large scale murder and massacres without being called to account. In the local space, armed groups held the power balance against Monuc. The institutions established so far - that is, an administration, a police force, some government troops and a minimal judicial system - remained without effect unless and until armed groups transformed and gave up territorial control and violent means.

Monuc then did not completely change the strategy, but introduced a tactical trick: It restricted the timeframe by issuing an ultimatum to the armed groups. This was a gamble, but it worked. The armed groups, which had successfully delayed the progress of the disarmament programme, were now forced into the overall framework formulated by Monuc. This aspect of time was combined with aspects of space: Military attacks on militia camps and the arrest of militia leaders in Kinshasa effectively dislodged the armed groups from their spatial bases. These actions made credible Monuc's threat to drive combatants into the bush, if necessary.

The ultimatum put into motion a process of internal decomposition of Ituri's militias. It is unclear today how much control the political leaders who had moved to Kinshasa at this point wielded over their troops in Ituri. In fact, it seems that military staff took over much of this control. Consequently, no call for the release of their leaders after their arrest by Monuc soldiers was backed by determined militia action. But even some of the military staff itself lost control over the combatants. While some units arrived in the transit sites along with their commanders, hundreds of other militia combatants had to desert their groups individually or in small groups under mortal danger. Most of them were probably lured by the prospect of the 110 US-Dollars which were part of the disarmament package on offer, but many also recalled in interviews of having been fed up with living in bush camps and stealing food from civilians to survive. Another aspect of this process was the withdrawal of public support from the groups: Even community leaders who had before incited ethnic hatred now publicly called for peace.

In retrospect it is difficult to say unequivocally whether Monuc would have carried out the threat to treat members of armed groups as criminals. Monuc officials later stated that there was no plan "B" if the disarmament process had failed. Despite being relatively well equipped, it seems unlikely that Monuc would have risked a full-blown counterinsurgency strategy. Even after the relative success of the DCR-programme, Monuc officials explained that their military capabilities were insufficient to control the rural areas in the district, even though at that point the mission faced only a remaining fringe of non-state fighters.[30]

That having been said, the ultimatum briefly eradicated time as a tactical resource the armed groups had played on for months. The ensuing uncertainty about Monuc's further intentions accelerated the process of disintegration in the armed groups. Now, individuals and factions in the armed groups had to try to anticipate what Monuc would do after the end of the ultimatum, and – even more importantly – how hostile armed groups and factions in their own groups were prepared to react. Many seem to have suspected that most of their partners and enemies were now likely to accept Monuc's incentives, and that those who hesitated might be left out in the cold. This was the time to jump on the moving train of state reconstruction, even without being immediately allowed into the cabins. In the end, tactics got beaten by tactics, and Ituri's armed groups briefly disappeared from the political space. Uncertainty about the development of the figuration, which had long played into the hands of Ituri's armed groups, finally led to their disintegration as political entities.

However, some militias' high military staff was not deceived by Monuc. This latter group was bound to create more headaches for Monuc in the future. They resurfaced some months later with a new militia, albeit reduced in numbers and prospects.[31] After some months of relative quiet, it became apparent that newly emerging armed formations unifying the remnants of Ituri's militias were capable of severely disrupting the state-reconstruction process. They even managed to re-recruit hundreds of combatants who had before undergone the demobilisation process. This is another example of how Ituri's armed actors – as individuals and as groups – continued to play on tricks and cheats.[32]

Interestingly, Monuc officials now referred to these new groups as "bandits" or non-political actors. Many Iturians, on the other hand, interpreted this new conflict as "a political war", contrary to the "ethnic war" they had experienced before the

[30] Interview with Monuc official (Bunia, 19 April 2006); Interview with Monuc military officer (Bunia, 9 June 2006).
[31] Interview with UN official (Bunia, 7 November 2005). The new armed group was called "Mouvement Revolutionnaire Congolais" (MRC).
[32] Various interviews with former members of armed groups (Bunia, April – June 2006), and general street talk in Bunia.

disarmament process. This suggests a fundamentally different interpretation of the remaining non-state actors in Ituri. Since then, Monuc staged several military offensives, but also took part in new negotiations on integration of these militias into the state system and even re-opened demobilisation sites. These developments illustrate the limited power Monuc actually wields on Congolese politics, and the remaining latitude for tactics that armed actors in Ituri possess.

Conclusion

In this paper, I argued that Ituri during the intervention of an international military mission developed into a figuration, in which the actors involved had major difficulties anticipating their counterparts' actions and plans. The evolving uncertainty was conditioned by a lack of experience, that is knowledge about established patterns of behaviour. In fact, it was difficult to see any patterns at all, and not only erratic actions expressing unstable power balances.

This uncertainty was used by Ituri's armed groups. They successfully tried to deceive the international mission with hidden agendas, played safe on their positions, and sought to use time as a tactical resource in the search for opportunities. While these tactics worked for some time and to some extent, in the end Ituri's militias were defeated by this very uncertainty. The limited timeframe postulated by the international mission set in motion a process of disintegration, as armed groups' members believed in its validity.

For Monuc, uncertainty about their opponents' inner workings and plans was surprisingly of only limited importance. Monuc postulated an agenda for the management of Ituri's armed groups, and rather stubbornly followed it. This was possible because the mission held the key for inclusion into the international system, something the armed groups' leadership aspired to. In the end, a simple gamble setting in motion a process of disintegration – maybe expected by Monuc strategists, maybe not – helped to achieve the immediate aim of large scale disarmament. For once, Monuc succeeded in playing with the militias' uncertainty about its own moves, and briefly transformed it into a tactical resource. However, hundreds of non-state combatants remained a threat to the imperfect monopoly on violence that shall be handed over to a reconstructed Congolese state. It is uncertain, whether Monuc and the state will be capable of pacifying the district of Ituri.

Relations between non-state armed actors and the International Community remain an anomaly. In the international system of states, there is no designated space for non-state armed groups. Communication and interaction between international actors and

local or national rebellions indeed has a history, but the short and dynamic period of military interventions with "humanitarian" aims has not yet established rules, regulations or even fixed patterns of mutual engagement.

Is uncertainty in humanitarian interventions thus responsible for the very mixed outcomes of such endeavours in the last twenty years? For Ituri's armed actors, it was a major reason for their constant double game. Simple acceptance of the International Communities' terms of inclusion into the state posed the biggest risk for actual disappearance as powerful actors. The imperative of connecting local power with a role in the national political arena posed difficult choices they tried to avoid as long as possible. Uncertainty let it seem reasonable to risk being regarded as "peace spoilers".

For an international mission, uncertainty plays only a minor role. The often criticised disregard for local contexts and the underlying reasons for conflict is a build-in contradiction. Although analysis units today feature central in such missions, local figurations cannot simply be understood in their own right. Even if every information would be accessible and organizational frictions overcome, knowledge in missions is still predefined by the mandated question: How can local actors be integrated into a state resembling the Western example?

As state-building is regarded as the ultimate solution for civil wars around the globe, reasons for conflict beyond state-failure are not taken into account. Complicated local figurations can thus be disregarded; what counts is the modification of local figurations and the actors in them according to a pattern designed elsewhere. The importance of uncertainty is then reduced significantly to questions over policy tools regarding armed group's inclusion into or exclusion from the national political arena.

Although the attraction of the national political stage proved strong enough to lure militia leaders into partial acceptance of the UN's formula for national political institutions, the consequences of this policy in the local figuration are less than clear cut. So far, Ituri continues to resemble a mosaic of actors and agencies competing for influence and authority, even when the number of non-state armed actors has been considerably reduced. In the absence of reliable patterns of interaction and notoriously unstable power balances, uncertainty promises to remain a key characteristic of the post-conflict space.

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