

“The Phoenix State”: The Congolese State Facing War, between Resilience and Local Declensions.

Mehdi Belaid¹

¹ Université Paris 1, Political science, Paris, France

mehdi.belaid@laposte.net

Contrary to a widely held view, situations of internal wars in Africa don't give inevitably rise to a State collapse or to its calling into question. *A contrario*, illegal armed groups – often considered, in the common sense, as centrifugal forces – partake of a construction, indeed reconstruction process of the State. The political violence question has always been in the heart of the historical sociology of the State. In Africa, the State is taking shape – and replicates – often by violence. War is the driving force of all the political machinery of the State. During the different conflicts which occurred in the Democratic Republic of Congo, this process was materialized in two ways at least, according to the action of the considered armed groups. Besides the fact that this process is a part of the general dynamic whose aim is to consolidate the armed movements' monopoly, on specific population and area, this process may be linked to a devolution phenomenon of the authority from the center to the periphery. It may also reveal a capturing of the authority by the local sphere: in a context of the country fragmentation into *de facto* autonomous regions, rebel movements tend to fill the administrative gap which is inherent to this configuration, by imposing their own conception of order and legality.

Through the study of the different forms of governance set up during the war by several Congolese armed movements (MLC, RCD, mai-mai), as well as an analysis of the perception of the State in the *imaginaire* of ex-combatants, we will attempt to show how the particular conceptions of the contemporary Congolese State lead the different strategies of the actors of the conflicts that occurred in the Country. Capturing the power at the center can be the struggle purpose, the conflict can also contribute to a reproduction of the post-colonial State according to local declensions.

Beyond the struggle to catch the power at the center – a purpose shared by the main Congolese armed movements – these latter are characterized by their reformist nature. Their legitimacy is often indexed to the degree of acknowledgement by the central State. The way their action takes shape in the area under control refers, by mimetism, to the reproduction of the post-colonial State, they sometimes fought. Indeed, the “proto-State form” seems to be the social configuration to which the different actors of the political-military field converge, even if this particular shape of Statehood is essentially materialized by a constraint concentration. Governance in the areas under the control of the armed groups depends on the resources – unequal – every armed group has at his disposal. Generally, besides the integration of the violence oligopolies in the field of the possible alternatives to the State Building, for many members of armed groups, the State can be distinguished by its capacity of resilience, remaining, ultimately, the supreme organ of social and political life regulation.