

Intrepid *Enfantes* —

The emergence of child soldiers in
the Democratic Republic of Congo

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Tiivistelmä – Referat – Abstract

This is a study on the emergence of child soldiers during the wars in Democratic Republic of Congo. The study challenges the common notions that children cannot end up in armed forces out of their own will, or that they are incapable of understanding properly their situation when they are making those decisions. Acknowledging their will and action is required in order to understand the processes and developments occurring in Congo, and the tactics and manoeuvres that they engage in. The appearance of thousands of child soldiers among the numerous militias and in the national army of Congo happened against the backdrop long-lasting decline in the economic and political sphere that in turn weakened the social cohesion in the Congolese families and communities. The choices of the informants in the study come to be explained through the developments in their lives, families, communities, as well as those in the society at large. In order to do that, theoretical concepts of vital conjunctures and social horizons in a moving social environment are utilized to track the developments, socially informed viewpoints, and actions taken by the child soldiers in the study. The material for the thesis comes from interviews of former child soldiers in North Kivu of DRC, and from written sources. While the informants in the study did face challenges prior and during their involvement in arms, the material shows that they did engage in positive action in order to improve their immediate and to-come prospects in a situation where the prospects for youth generally are bleak. The results also demonstrate the impact that the social and political developments during the last two decades in North Kivu had on those prospects of the informants, in part paving their way to join the militias. Those developments have also had an impact on family dynamics, causing drift between the generations and sexes in Congo. The roles and responsibilities that children have taken up as armed combatants have not been the only repercussions of the changes facing the Congolese families and communities. Child soldiers have challenged the notions of traditional generational dynamics as well, therefore underlining the similarities of the two phenomenon is presented in this study as well. This research indicates that despite the marginality and challenges facing up many young Congolese, they are still able to prospect towards future, and more importantly seek ways to reach those prospects on their way from youth to adulthood, even if that would mean challenging the old existing social and political order.

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Children, Congo, Soldiering, Marginality, Youth, Horizons, Navigation, Adulthood.

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1. Introduction

Child soldiers are an oxymoron. They are children, yet they participate in wars which are thought to be adults' domains. We want to see children as innocent and pure, yet child soldiers commit actions that are harmful and dark. Even after such actions, we do not want to place culpability on the children responsible for the offences, because to us children are not capable of such actions on their own free will. When faced with a child soldier, we acknowledge their misery and poor status before, during, and after the war, but we do not acknowledge their own true will shaping up their destinies. It is rather adults and societies at large that are responsible for the failings that lead to the use of children as combatants in wars, and their actions in them. Adults and societies have failed the children, thereby forcing them, in one way or another, to take part. With this gross negligence in mind and on display, we garner money, attention, and sympathy to instances, organizations, and legislative procedures that are trying to save the children from the ones who have failed them. While crusading on this just mission on a high horse, we are incapable of seeing the myriad individual life stories, different societal and historical contexts, and differing personal motivations and restraints that lead young people in and out of wars as agents in their own right.

The subject of this master's thesis are child soldiers in the Democratic Republic of Congo's two wars. At its' height, there were tens of thousands child soldiers fighting among the many different factions in Congo. Is the appearance of *kadogos*, a term in Swahili to denote something small or insignificant and used in Congo to refer to child soldiers, just a consequence of the failures of development in Congo? If the Congolese child soldiers are the visible manifestations of the problems in the society and in the families, where does it leave the tens of millions Congolese children who did not drift into armed forces? What about the other nations with similar problems, who have not experienced the phenomenon of child soldiering? If we are able to conclude that children do plan ahead and carry out actions according to their plans, what was the development leading child soldiers to those plans and actions, and what was the context of that action? Did the child soldiers share common characteristics and family circumstances? Is there something in the Congolese culture and society that makes possible the usage of children in armed forces to the extent that it has happened? What is the role of masculine

ideals of a man and a soldier in Congo in the enrollment of children into armed forces? In hindsight, what were the repercussions and realities that the life in armed forces brought along to the child soldiers? What is their position now in the Congolese society, and what that position says about children and Congo?

To ask these questions is important in order to gain an understanding of a problem that is widespread and multifaceted, affecting the lives of not just the participant children, but also other children, adults, and the society at large. Without an understanding how and why children end up in armed forces in places like Congo, it is not possible to come up with the sort of changes that would make child soldiering less of an option. The ready-made, one-size-fits-all solutions that the humanitarian community are trying to implement on the issue are problematic, because the universal definitions bypass the particularities of places like Congo and children's own lives, both of which play important roles in the emergence of child soldiering. To reach that understanding requires listening children's own accounts of their involvement, and taking their words and agency seriously. Additionally, the micro and the macro level developments in the Congolese families, communities, economics, and society needs to be accounted to reach understanding of the mechanisms, routes, and escapes that are leading young Congolese into armed groups. Anthropology can and should play a vital role in this process due to its' nature of consideration for the particularities, and because of the anthropological toolbox for understanding the connections and dynamics between personal and public, symbolic and material, and family and society.

Anthropologist Jason Hart (Hart 2006) has described the onset of the international child saving mission, and the first anthropological study of children outside the western confines, happening at the same time in the mid-1920s. US anthropologist Margaret Mead went to Samoa in 1925 not only to study children, but also to catch on from them. British Eglantyne Jebb on the other hand outlined a declaration concerning the rights of children that was ratified by the League of Nations in late 1924. Jebb had established Save the Children Fund in 1919. Unlike Mead, Jebb's interest laid in saving children. Hart then emphasizes the vastly different legacies of the two predecessors. While Mead's pioneer contribution to the anthropological study of children is acknowledged, anthropology as a discipline left children to inhabit that seemingly separated world of theirs for decades without many interruptions from researches. Jebb's influence is vastly bigger; that ratification later became the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), and Save the Children is today one of the

most powerful NGOs, advocating a specific notion of children and their lives. In spite of the recent interest from anthropologists towards the issue like Hart notes, more anthropological research is needed so that issues like child soldiering would not become understood just as failures of the nations and the adults, thereby calling forth an intervention from the powerful western countries and institutions. A more vigorous anthropological interest could also help in children being recognized as having positions and aspirations outside their families in the public realm, despite their young age. At any given moment, there are always several forces, relations, developments, and motivations influencing children's horizons and actions and the surroundings where these horizons emerge and actions take place. It is the impact of these forces, the horizons that they influence, and the actions where they lead to that will be used in this thesis to underline and to understand the phenomenon of child soldiering in Congo. In this way, personal aspirations, developments, and actions in particular social setting come to be acknowledged when addressing issues like children and their rights, or youth and emerging adulthood. Combining personal and local with public and global is needed not just in anthropological study, but also outside the discipline.

Anthropologists have studied children, marginality and war in Congo. Filip de Boeck (2010) has researched street children and witchcraft in the capital Kinshasa, and also Aleksandra Cimpric (2010) has studied the child witch phenomenon. Katrien Pype (2011) has published research on ideals of masculinity in Kinshasa. Anne-Maria Makhulu and Beth Buggenhagen (2010) and Janet MacGaffey (1991, 2000) have shed light on the second economy and the art of survival. Luca Jourdan (2011) and Axel Poullard (2002) has contributed to the understanding of the appearance of Mai-Mais, and Mats Utas (2008) has shed light on female soldiers in Congo. The aforementioned studies have offered valuable contribution to this thesis, especially in the light of the problematic fieldwork. Yet, I have not come across research done in Congo that would have directly dealt with the questions asked in this thesis, therefore validating the angle and questions presented here.

In order to merge the local with the global, personal with the political, and children's worlds with the adult's world in the Congolese context of child soldiers, I will be using the concepts of vital conjunctures and social navigation. Jennifer Johnson-Hanks (2002) has described vital conjunctures as possibilities and escapes that open up during a particular transition in one's life. The actions that are taken during vital conjunctures are motivated and constrained by the horizons that are informing the individuals of their possibilities and adversities. To gain an understanding of those particular actions,

Henrik Vigh's (2006) concept of social navigation will be used. Social navigation refers to action taken in a moving social environment, acknowledging your own motion in it, while also realizing the movement of the terrain that moves you to new positions and therefore to new horizons. Social horizons are guiding youth to make those decisions at vital junctures, in their efforts to navigate immediate and forthcoming materially and socially, while moving through the chaotic environment. The actions taken by the informants of this study as armed combatants become understandable not just in light of personal survival, but also as a possible route to social maturity and independence. That aspired independence and a more powerful position was compromised by the command structure of the armed forces and child soldiers subordinate position in it, leading the disappointed informants to discover new social horizons that eventually escorted them out of the arms. Their eagerness to defend the country against the outside aggressors will be addressed as well in light of masculinity and ideal of a soldier in Congo, and their disappointment in discovering the true nature of the enemy and warring will be dealt as well.

The fieldwork for this study was done in northeastern Congo, in the town of Beni that is situated in the province of North Kivu in 2007, and lasted for three months. Interviews were conducted with 11 former child soldiers who had been civilians already for some time, giving them chance to reflect back on their participation in the wars. The fact that the fieldwork was compromised by the interview-like encounters, small amount of informants, and because of the usage of a translator, the limitations of the material is acknowledged, and other written material on the subject will be used extensively. Despite the limitations of the acquired material, valuable information of the developments in the lives of the informants prior and during their involvement in arms was gathered that helps to understand the horizons informing their decisions and actions. That understanding is combined with written material on the Congolese society and on North Kivu province in particular, in order to paint a picture of the changing social environment, and the informants' own movement in it.

After this introduction comes the second chapter that is dealing with the nature and problems in the fieldwork and data that was gathered, and how it is possible to draw information from the material, while at the same time being aware of the challenges stemming from the nature of the fieldwork. Methodological issues relating to the usage of interview-type material and a translator will be addressed in the second chapter as well. The second chapter ends with introducing the informants with brief personal descriptions.

Theoretical framework of this study forms the third chapter. In the beginning of the chapter, theories of social horizons, vital conjunctures, and social navigation, by Johnson-Hanks and Vigh respectively, are presented to the reader. Following is a description of the differences between tactics and strategies, and how they can be used when assessing children's actions in wartime situations. Third part of the theory chapter informs the reader of the changes in the family dynamics in the Congolese context, and how the new emerging dynamics and relations between generations have altered the notions of in the communities and in the society at large. Fourth section in the chapter deals with Congolese concepts of masculinity and soldiering. Where they originate from, and what are the possibilities of living up to the standards in real life in modern Congo.

The fourth chapter sheds light into the development of Congo since independence in 1960. First comes a narration of Congolese development from independence to the start of the first war, followed by a description of the educational system and of the condition it is in today. Then comes a section dealing with the grey area of Congolese art of survival, where resourcefulness and new dynamic relations are the keys for coping with the daily life, even if those measures might take you into the uncharted territories of second economy and unlawful acquisition. Next in line are sections introducing the two wars in Congo, the common assumptions for the warring, and the occurrence of child soldiers and female soldiers in those wars, together with the reasons that are seen to explain their participation in those conflicts.

This thesis has three results chapters. The first one deals with the conundrum of being young, which is commonly thought to be the time of your life, but in the context of countries like Congo, can end up being a prison of sorts. With no access to many of the resources and possibilities enabling the enjoyment of the period, or facilitating the transition from dependable youth to an independent adult, many young Congolese are frustrated and stuck at the category of youth. The second results chapter, paints a picture of the developments in the two Kivu provinces in Congo, and of the emergent Mai-Mai militias in the region. The particularities of the development in the provinces help to explain the appearance of the Mai-Mai militias and children's involvement in them to some extent. The prevalence of child soldiers was especially high in the Kivus and among the Mai-Mais, thereby compelling a closer look at the developments in the region and how they impacted the horizons of the informants. The phenomenon of children accused of witchcraft is the topic of the third results chapter. During the last two decades, many Congolese children have ended up living on the streets, being accused of

witchcraft. The chapter focuses on the common characteristics between child soldiers and witch children, and what they tell about the transformations in the Congolese families and society.

The eighth chapter is the discussion chapter, discussing of the findings of this study in the light of the limitations that the fieldwork posed. The ninth chapter draws conclusions based on the findings.

2. Fieldwork, material, and methods

This chapter introduces the fieldwork done in Congo, the material gathered over there, and the problems that the nature of the fieldwork and the material poses from methodological angle. This chapter ends with a brief introduction of the eleven informants of the study.

2.1 The Fieldwork

The fieldwork was conducted in northeastern Democratic Republic of Congo in late 2007. There are two Congo's in Africa, Republic of Congo, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, formerly known as Zaire. From now on, I will refer to the Democratic Republic of Congo with just the word Congo. There were no concrete plans prior reaching the country where in Congo to do the fieldwork, or how to get in contact with former child soldiers. Initially, the plan was to be independent and not to rely on any humanitarian organizations working with child soldiers when it comes to getting in contact with former child soldiers. The reason was that doing research under the umbrella of an organization might compromise the freedom and the room for movement that a researcher can have on the field. In the end though, the independence became compromised by the security constraints and by the fact that my French skills were not good enough, which meant relying on an interpreter for the fieldwork.

The fieldwork that lasted for three months, was carried out in Beni, which is situated in the province of North Kivu of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Beni is a three-hour drive from the Ugandan border, and the first town on the Congolese side when travelling on the road from Uganda to eastern Congo. Therefore, Beni is a customs stopping point for trucks on their way bringing goods to the eastern Congo from Uganda and other East African countries. Population estimates for the city vary from 50 000 to 100 000 inhabitants, although it felt like a smaller town. The city lies at an altitude of over 1200 meters above the sea level close to the Rwenzori Mountains, making the surrounding areas densely populated as a result of suitable climate for humans, livestock, and crops alike.

Congo is home to many different ethnic identities, the most prevalent one in the Beni region being Kinande. Out of the over 200 indigenous languages spoken in Congo, only four have the status of lingua franca: Kikongo, Lingala, Tshiluba, and Kiswahili, which is the lingua franca in North Kivu. French is the official language due to Congo being Belgium's colony in the past. Informants of this study used Kiswahili, although they were fluent in French as well.

Upon arrival to the country, I first went to the Virunga National Park, which was a two-hour drive northeast from Beni. My interest in Congo initially started out as an interest towards the nature, and the many natural parks in the country. Upon reading about the parks and about the state of the nature in Congo, I encountered names of militia groups like Mai-Mai, RCD-Goma, and Interahamwe, who were residing in the parks. That kindled my interest in the developments in the eastern Congo, and eventually led me to the research questions that I have at my hands with this thesis. So, visiting Virunga National Park seemed like a natural thing to do, as the plans for the actual fieldwork were very much in the open at the time. While at the park, I was introduced to an Argentinian woman who was working for an environmental NGO in the park. She recommended an interpreter from Beni that had proved to be trustworthy. She helped to arrange a meeting with the interpreter, who had studied hotel management in Tanzania, and therefore had a very good grasp of the English language. The interpreter was working as a consultant for local hotels at the time, and was willing to work as a translator for the fieldwork. Therefore, hiring the translator meant that the location for the fieldwork would be Beni, even though I did not know much about the town at that time.

Both Beni and the translator turned out to be good decisions. The interpreter had many connections that ended up being useful throughout the course of the fieldwork, and Beni turned out to be a town that was home to many former young soldiers. One reason for the occurrence of many former child soldiers living in Beni was the size of the town. Being the only bigger town in the area, Beni lured in idle young men who were looking for escapes and chances from the dire situation that characterizes the lives of many young people in post war Congo. Another reason for the concentration of former young combatants in Beni was that Save the Children had a disarmament and reintegration center for former child soldiers in Beni. A third contributing factor to the relatively high number of disarmed child soldiers in Beni was that Conader (Commission Nationale de la Demobilization et Reinsertion), the state's official organization dealing with former combatants' return to civilian life, had an office in town.

The interpreter was friends with a local radio journalist, who had interviewed a child soldier to one of his programs in the past. It was with the help from the radio journalist that made it possible to arrange the first interview for the fieldwork with a former child soldier, who had been interviewed by the journalist earlier. As the first interview went well, the word spread among former child soldiers in Beni about a westerner who's interested in talking with former child soldiers. Many of the former child

soldiers in Beni were keeping in touch with each other, thanks to the bonds that they had created while being in arms and while participating in the DDR (disarmament-, demobilization-, and reintegration-) programs. Consequently, the second interviewee came through the first one, the third after the second, and so on. The journalist was involved in the process of getting in touch with the former child soldiers, as he was known and trusted by them.

2.2 The Material

The fieldwork data for the study was gathered in 11 meetings of former child soldiers throughout the three months that the fieldwork lasted. The encounters with them were interview-type situations, which took place in the conference room of the hotel where I stayed in. All 11 meetings were one-off situations for two reasons. Firstly, the lack of French skills prevented me from spending longer periods with them, because getting everything translated would have been impossible in a real life situation with all the noises from other people, traffic, and so on. All this meant that the conversations needed to happen in a space where the outside interference could be kept to a minimum. Secondly, the informants wanted to keep their background as former soldiers as a secret from their neighbors, coworkers, and passersby.

The reason for the secrecy is that former soldiers often have to carry the sins of all the soldiers' actions in wars, sometimes even long after giving up on arms and returning to civilian life. Former soldiers are easy scapegoats whenever a crime happens in a neighborhood. This happens sometimes for a reason, but at other times former soldiers act just as scapegoats for people who want to lash out on someone for their own misery. Even when no crimes have occurred, people are still often apprehensive towards former combatants, because they are thought to possess a different mind and temper than that of the civilians. All this meant that if I would have spent time with the informants on the streets, at their workplaces, and in their neighborhoods, passersby would have stopped to see and hear, why a white man is hanging out with youth on the streets all day long. That would have compromised their personal safety and their wish to keep their background as former soldiers to themselves. Consequently, these two reasons restricted the encounters to one-off meetings at the hotel, without letting anyone, apart from the interpreter and the radio journalist, to know what's going on. Therefore, the fieldwork situation was far from perfect, but I acquired useful information from the discussions with the informants, be it may, that they were only one-off encounters translated by an interpreter. I visited also Conader's office in town, whose' task is to facilitate the disarmament and reintegration of soldiers

returning to civilian life, and got information about the DDR-programs. A visit to Save the Children's house that had former child soldiers was also agreed upon, but a mutiny in the house made the organization cancel my permission to visit the house, fearing that my presence and questions might agitate the youth in the house. Like noted earlier, I will be using written material as well. Child soldiers is a subject that has gotten enormous attention over the last decades, both from humanitarian organizations and from researchers. The relative shallowness of the material gathered during the fieldwork, and the method of acquiring that material, poses problems and raises some concerns, but acknowledgement of these issues, coupled with extensive usage of written matter on the subject makes it possible to come up with relevant questions and possibly meaningful answers.

2.3 The Methods

One of the concerns with the fieldwork in this study relates to the context where the interviews happened, and the possible implications that it might have caused to the material. For the informants, a one-off encounter at a hotel conference room with a white man they have never met before, talking about issues that are not only sensitive, but also something that they have wished to leave behind, might have been a recipe for a timid encounter. And that was the case in the beginning with some of the informants, whereas some others were relaxed from the get-go. Due to the nature of the encounters, and not having chances to spend considerable time with the informants meant that the issue of violence that the informants might have partaken in during the wars was ruled out as a topic of inquiry. I felt that I have no right to probe into the subject of child soldiers as perpetrators of violence, because doing that would have required earning trust of the informants, something that I did not have the means nor chance to accomplish in the context of my fieldwork. Dropping violence off the agenda had an impact on the material received, but for the questions asked in this thesis, the impact was not drastic.

While it is paramount to try to assess the effect a researcher has as an outsider for the material conducted during fieldwork, like Trenholm, Olsson, Blomqvist, and Ahlberg have argued (Trenholm, Olsson et al. 2013, 209), the actual dynamics at play in a given fieldwork situation are hard to pinpoint down to any specific impact on to any specific issue. It was made clear that I am not part of any humanitarian organization working on the issue but a researcher, in the hope to avoid the pitfalls of informants talking what they might think the NGOs would want them to say. Swedish anthropologist Mats Utas, in the context of Liberian civil war, has used a term 'victimcy' that comprises the words victim and agency, to describe the agency that child soldiers have sometimes adopted in narratives of

their involvement in the war (Utas 2003, 49). While it may come across as cynical from a researcher to come up with a term like victimcy in the context children's involvement in fighting forces, the connotations Utas' attaches to it are not cynical at all. Utas (2003) states that:

Victimcy is a tactical manipulation aiming, in part, at maintaining a moral facade in line with cultural ideals. However, victimcy can also be seen as a political response to security realities on the ground, as well as an economic tactic, adhered to mainly in relation to foreign aid projects. As a framed response in the presence of humanitarian aid and international non-governmental organizations, victimcy is an obstacle to research and it is essential to find alternative modes of data collection...The production of different stories for different audiences is a method of survival in the face of great danger. (Utas 2003, 50, 80)

Keeping in line with Utas' definition of victimcy, the informants in this study were close to the definition when they expressed their views on children's rights, and what should be done to the child soldiers who are still in the fighting forces. Much of what they expressed on these matters were aligning with the humanitarian discourse on the subject, using expressions and sentences that most likely were learned from NGOs in the processes of demobilization and reintegration. Victimcy need not be a problem if it is acknowledged and detoured by the researcher. After all, we all talk in different terms and with differing agencies, depending on the context and on the audience listening. Victimcy can be seen as a one way of securing a better future for yourself.

According to development researcher Theo Hollander, recollections that are reminisced when formulating accounts of the past can alter due to giving weight to one thing while disregarding others, due to new readings of the situation, due to shared remembrances, or because sometimes they can be forged, be it knowingly or unknowingly (Frerks, Ypeij et al. 2014, 22). Ethnographer Ruth Soenen has argued that the way informants create values and definitions relating to their own social existence needs to be accounted and in that process questions of truthfulness are irrelevant (Walford 2002, 80). All the informants had already given up on arms at the time of the interviews. One was still in the process of reintegrating back into the society, but all the others had been civilians already some years. The meanings that the informants gave for their participation was then coming from young men, who had had some years of time to assess their involvement and the reasons behind it. Had the interviews taken place when they were still in arms, or immediately after giving up on them, the context and the

values given would have undoubtedly resulted in different material to some degree. Franziska Vogt, who has studied children and their learning processes, has brought up how happenings and actions are valued variously over time, therefore calling into question the inclusion of many perspectives that an informant has over the course of time (Walford 2002, 28-29). Due to the nature of the fieldwork in this study, the only instance where a multitude of perspectives might have been accomplished, was when the informants were reminiscing their reasons for joining the armed groups versus what were their feelings on that issue at the time of the interviews.

Another concern in the conducted fieldwork was the interview-type context of the encounters with the informants. Initially, the dialogues were formal and restricted to question-answer formula, but most of the informants relaxed after a while, and started talking on their own at considerable length on issues in question. The translator translated the red thread, or what he deemed to be the red thread, of what the informants were saying along the way, so that there was a chance of stopping and asking more about some particular issue, but the bulk of the translation was done after the interview was over. The conversations were recorded with a machine, and translated from Kiswahili to English by the translator, with me accompanying the process all the time, writing down the translated version of the material in an effort to minimize to impact of translation, translator, and the written narrative of the text to the actual words of the informants. With that being said, some distortion to the actual words and meanings of the informants is bound to happen in a chain that involves three people and two languages. What was that impact of the process is hard to assess exactly. Like Cathrine Melhuus has argued, being on the field does not automatically grant a voice to the studied that would enter into a dialogue with your own (Walford 2002, 157).

In an interview-like situation, researcher's own agenda and personality also bears a burden on the dynamics of the discussion. I entered the conference room of the hotel with pre-conceived notions and sets of themes and questions that I wanted to probe, leaving many others in the process disregarded. Ruth Soenen has emphasized the importance of acknowledging that the researcher is part of the dialogue, not outside of it. Consequently, the researcher's own subjectivity ought to be recovered and made visible (Walford 2002, 75). Vogt has argued that interview situation grants the informants more chances for being in control of how to present one self, but misses the issues of multiple voices over a period of time in the course of presenting oneself. She has therefore stressed the importance of having material collected by various means, analyzing that material in relation with the other material

gathered, and to illustrate the methods how the material was gathered, and what was the setting like, where the material was conceived. To Vogt, inconsistencies should be dealt with by contrasting the material with other, rather than coming up with an account freed from inconsistencies (Walford 2002, 30). As the fieldwork situation did not allow for multiple voices to be heard over a course of time, written material on the subject will be used in an effort to assess the meanings the informants have given over time for their involvement in arms.

Additional concern of the material gathered is the value given for the informants' accounts in a context where both the stage of their own personal development, and the armed forces they were part of, were much influenced by masculinity. Traditionally, masculinity has left little room representing oneself as the victim, because masculine identity calls for action of a strong determined agency. This being the case especially during wars. Frerks, König, and Ypeij have observed how conflicts demand symbolic patterns that are structured after gender in order to preserve the balance of power and inspire the participants to carry on (Frerks, Ypeij et al. 2014, 8). While the reasons given for joining armed groups were no doubt partly influenced by the ethos of masculine men fighting to stop the foreign intruders, the thoughts that the informants were expressing with some years of hindsight were often a far-cry from any macho-ethos of superior soldiers fighting a just war. On the contrary, most of the informants were disillusioned by their own involvement in the conflict, and how the armed forces and their commanders performed during it. Obviously, some more than others, but generally speaking the only instances when I felt that they might be projecting views that might not come deep inside, were when they were talking about issues of children's rights. The masculinity of the context in North Kivu will be taken into consideration in the theory chapter, but methodologically speaking, I don't see any masculine veil that would need to be penetrated in order to find out the informants' true motivations and actions. Their accounts reflect agency and victimhood, action and drifting, and quests and disappointments in differing measures, but the accounts are versatile, devoid of one-dimensional storylines. Another reason to concentrate on their own words is just that, the importance of their own words. Like was mentioned earlier in this chapter, the way the informants give meanings to their own existence is important as well, even if in that process of attaching a meaning, 'the truth' would slip away.

2.4 The informants

Eleven informants were interviewed during the course of the fieldwork. All the informants were men, who at the time of the interviews in 2007, were aged between 17 to 32 years of age. Nine of the informants said to have joined voluntarily, whereas two said that they were kidnapped. The average age for the informants at the time of the conscription was 14 years and 10 months. With the exception of two, everyone was living in the countryside at the time of the recruitment. Apart from one who was originally from Beni, none of the informants were living at their home community at the time of the interviews, and some had not even visited their parents after giving up on arms. Neither one of the eleven informants had finished schooling before, nor after the time spent in armed forces. Some were missing a few years, whereas some others had to drop out from school already during the primary school years. For many, the chance to go to school before the war started was sporadic, depending on their parents' ability to pay school fees at a given time. All of the informants were working before the war started, mostly in helping out their family income after school, couple worked at mines, and a few were having a kiosk business. Four had had a parent die, whereas two came from families where parents had separated before the war started. The time that the informants spent in arms ranged from one to 10 years, average being 6.5 years. Most of the informants belonged to more than one armed group throughout the duration of their involvement in the conflict. Five of the eleven were Mai-Mais at some point during their involvement in the wars. When the interviews were conducted, most of the informants had been in civilian roughly two years, couple of them just a year, two had been civilians for four years, one for seven years, and one was still in the DDR- (disarmament, demobilization, reintegration) process. Four of the informants were married at the time of the interviews, and six of them had children, although in one case the difficult situation prevented the informant from participating in the child care. In what follows is a brief introduction of each informant. I will be referring to the informants with numbers from 1 to 11 throughout this study. In an effort to protect their identities, any specific details that might expose them will be omitted.

Informant 1 was 27 years old at the time of the interview. Originally from a nearby province of Orientale, he was working in Beni to provide for his family. Earning just 20 dollars a month, he wasn't particularly thrilled about his job, but he did not want to return to his home region with empty hands. Informant 1 had found a wife while being in arms, and they had two children together. He had escaped with friends to join an armed group, and carried on with the training even after his friends quit, so he was motivated early on. Informant 1 nevertheless became disillusioned with the moral in the group that he was in after not being taken care of while being sick, and not having money to bribe his way

upwards in the hierarchy in the group, so he left the arms in 2005. He was promised to have a chance to go back to school after giving up on arms, but like so many others, financial and organizational problems at the instance providing the education had prevented that from happening at the time of the interview. Being separated from his parents was hard for him, promising that would never happen again. It's just that the shame of not having big spoils to accompany him was preventing him from reuniting with his parents.

Informant 2, who was 20 years at the time of the interview, was born and raised in Beni. He was kidnapped to NALU (National Liberation Army Uganda) when he was 11 years old, and later on escaped from Nalu and joined Laurent Kabila's APC (Armée Populaire Congolaise) group during the first Congo war. He spent eight years in the armed groups. Informant 2 left the armed group after realizing that without an education he would not have chances for progression in the group. The return to civilian life in 2005 was not easy, as he was the scapegoat for everything bad that happened in his home village, which consequently led him to start an education in Beni. He was one of the two informants that was having a real practical chance of attending school at the time of the interview, and therefore he was not working at all.

Informant 3 was working in a kiosk in Beni that provided him with the livelihood. He had a child while in the arms that had passed away and did not have a wife at the time of the interview. Informant 3 decided to join armed forces after his father had died, and consequently attending school became impossible due to the school fees. Also his friends' example inspired him in the decision making. While being in Kabila's troops during the first Congo war, informant 3 was happy with the salary and conditions that existed, but after joining the rebellion in the second Congo war, both the conditions and treatment from commanders made him want to quit the life in the arms. Informant 3 mentioned several times how the commands in the armed forces made him unhappy and caused some problems. Also he left the armed group in 2005, and was enjoying the freedom and command-free life of a civilian, although not having visited his home region after joining the armed forces was pressing on his mind.

Informant 4, whose job was to sell petrol, also left the arms in 2005 after having spent seven years in armed groups. And like with so many others, promises regarding educational opportunities after giving up on arms were not met. Due to the dire state of affairs, he felt incapable of taking care of the two children that he had with different women. Informant 4 mentioned receiving help from civilians in order to get food, but he stressed not to have resorted to violence in doing that. Informant 4 did not

have any relatives in Beni, as the war had separated him from his family. He considered himself as an outsider in the town. Having eight siblings, informant 4 was the only one among them not married yet, despite being already 27 years old at the time of the interview. Despite the appeals from the family members to marry, he had decided to wait until his situation would enable a better life as a husband. Laurent Kabila's Tutsi-contingent kidnapped him during the first Congolese war when he was 17 years old. Despite being kidnapped to fight, he was happy to help bringing the Mobutu regime down, although the Tutsis in the group were annoying him to say the least. Informant 4 had many friends to die in the armed groups, and he expressed deep concern on the state of the Congolese youth during the interview. He also felt that every house in the east of the country should get arms and fight in order to end the continuing conflict for good.

Informant 5 was 24 years old at the time of the interview. Originally from the town of Bunia, but as a result of his mother's death, he was not interested in returning there. In the DDR-process, he chose to study to become a mechanic, but even after waiting for almost two years, the education had still not started. His job was to transport bananas on a bicycle from a banana plantation to Beni, which normally is considered something that teenage boys are doing after a school day to help their families. Despite the meagre income and to some degree a humiliating job for an adult, he was happy with his situation at the time of the interview, stating that 'she's (the pregnant wife) wearing clothes, like am I, so we are OK', stressing the importance of not having to beg or follow orders from other people. He joined voluntarily in 1999 at the age of 16 together with some friends of him in order to bring order to the region, and to stop the looting soldiers. Informant 5 felt strongly that the enemy has to ask for forgiveness from the Congolese people because of the wrongdoings that were committed during the wars. Despite being in many different groups during the seven years he spent in arms, to informant 5 the objective was clear all along; to fight for the unified nation. He left the arms in 2006.

Informant 6 was already 32 years old moto-taxi driver at the time of the interview. He had become a soldier during Mobutu's rule at the age of 15. Later on he joined a local Mai-Mai group after hearing about the magic that prevents bullets from killing. Only after leaving the arms in 2004 did it dawn on him how much the conditions of living in the armed groups, and having to rob food from civilians, disturbed him. The conditions in his family before joining armed forces were not good either. Parent's death meant an end to schooling, and there was a shortage of food and medicine. Therefore, informant 6 ended up digging gold at a mine before enlisting to the armed forces. The same scarcity haunted him

in the armed forces as well, and coupled with broken promises regarding salaries made him leave the arms behind after spending 13 years in various armed groups.

Informant 7 was 22 years old, studying in Beni to become a carpenter. He was a Mai-Mai throughout the four years that he spent in arms before giving up in 2001. Having escaped with friends from their home village during nighttime in order to join the Mai-Mai group at the age of 12, his return to civilian life after giving up on arms got a rocky start because of the fears that former soldiers spawn. Consequently, his father took him to a reintegration center so that the transition would go smoothly. Life before joining the militia was ok, but after his mother left the family, the father was not able to pay for the education anymore. Unlike sometimes at home, the Mai-Mai group was able to provide food and medicine for him and the other fighters, but becoming disillusioned with the anti-bullet magic that had killed his commander against the belief, and the ever shifting alliances between the different armed groups made him escape from the group and walk to Beni.

Informant 8 had been driving a moto-taxi for a little bit over one year in Beni. Like informant 1, also informant 8 was happy with his life in Beni, even though he was earning only 20 dollars a month, which is a meagre sum even in the Congolese context. The ten years spent in arms, from 1996 to 2006, gave him a perspective that enabled him to enjoy the civilian life, be it may that the income for a parent of two children was not good. Before joining the armed forces at the age of 15 in order to put an end to the harassment by Mobutu's soldiers, he was working at mines in the adjacent Orientale province. The protection that the ceremonially treated water provided against bullets made him to join a Mai-Mai group. The daily life in the arms was a struggle, and the promises were not kept in regards to opportunities on education after giving up on arms. The biggest disappointment for informant 8 nevertheless seemed to be the fact that Congolese were killing each other.

Informant 9 was 27 years old petrol salesman who had become an orphan after his father died due to an illness. His mother had died already before that. Although originally from the province of Orientale, informant 9 had been living in Beni from 2001 because the conflict between Hema's and Lendu's that erupted during the late 1990s, forced him to relocate to Beni. Selling petrol from a jerry can by the road side provided a small income for him and his family that consisted of wife and two children. Informant 9 had problems in returning to civilian life, because the reception from the civilians was hostile towards former soldier like himself. These problems also made it hard for him to acquire a better job. He joined Kabila's rebel movement voluntarily in order to oust Mobutu. Informant 9 brought up repeatedly the

human rights violations that the Mobutu government and soldiers were committing when reminiscing the times before he enrolled to Kabila's forces. The eight years that he spent in arms before disarming in 2005 did not traumatize him to the extent that he would have been unequivocally happy to be in civilian. The broken promises in the DDR-program were upsetting him at the time of the interview, because he was deprived of chances to pursue education after giving up on arms.

Informant 10 was 19 years old resident of Beni at the time of the interview. Informant 10's job was to work at the meat market in Beni. He did not receive money from the job, but those parts of the cattle that that were unwanted by the meat market buyers. Later during the day, he would then try to sell those parts by the road side in order to generate little cash. Informant 10 had joined a Mai-Mai group at the age of 9 voluntarily according to his own words. His father had died before the decision to escape, and the mother could not pay for the school fees, so he escaped with friends because he felt to be missing out on everything. Informant 10 gave conflicting remarks on life in civilian. On the one hand, he said to prefer suffering in civilian more than suffering in arms, but on the other hand he said that they should not have removed him from arms. Not even the four years that he had spent in civilian at the time of the interview had erased the bitterness of how the process of returning to civilian life had unfolded, because being under-aged at the time of disarmament meant that he did not receive material help to facilitate a new start in civilian life.

Informant 11 was the only one who was still in the reintegration process at the time of the interview. Beni had Save the Children's house where former child soldiers, like informant 11, were reintegrated. 17 years old at the time of the interview, and having spent only one year in the arms as part of a local Mai-Mai group, and only three weeks in the DDR-process at the time of the interview, he seemed pretty nonchalant regarding both. Anxious to get back to his home village and to his pregnant girlfriend, the process did not motivate him much, as he spoke about escaping from the house. He had escaped from his home together with friends in order to join the Mai-Mai group at the age of 16 years. His parents tried to free him, but could not afford the money that Mai-Mais were asking. The parents, perhaps understandably, were worried that if informant 11 would quit the reintegration process, he might be tempted to join armed group again.

3. Theoretical discussion

Theoretical discussion chapter starts with a brief introduction to some of the stances of anthropological study of children and youth, followed by the concepts of vital conjunctures, social horizons, social navigation, and how prolonged crisis effects on those prospects and movement. Next up is a definition of strategies and tactics and their usage in outlining children's agency. Third part in the chapter deals with the changing family dynamics in Congo, and the implications it has on the notions of childhood. Masculinity forms the forth part, dealt in theory and practice.

3.1 Anthropology and Children

Even though nowadays children are studied in anthropology to a large extent, it has not always been the case. I would assume that children's importance as a focus of research has risen while children's status as members of our societies has risen over the decades. In what follows is a brief description of the angles that has been in use on anthropological studies of children.

Charlotte Hardman has written how one strain of anthropological studies on children in the past focused on similarities in behavior comparable with that of the 'primitives', drawing parallels between the two in an effort to prove that the primitives' development stage is at the level of a child (Hardman 2001, 502). Margaret Mead was one of the first researchers to use children as her informants on the field, recognizing children's thought being intriguing in its own right. Claude Levi-Strauss argued that children are more preoccupied by egoism and dreams, because they do not possess the sort of systematized framework of wisdom that would enable them to oppose self-centeredness and the realm of the imagination. Therefore, grown-ups' and children's thought processes are basically similar, and right from the start of a baby's existence all the essential features of communal life are present in the newborn, making it possible to trace one's progress in the social realm to past or towards future (Levi-Strauss 1969, 92). To Levi-Strauss (1969, 92), this lead to the conclusion that

“...it is not because children differ from adults both in their individual psychologist and in their social life that they are of exceptional interest to the psychologists and sociologists, but because, and to the degree that, they resemble them. The child is not an adult, not in our society, nor in any other. In all societies the level of child thought is equally remote from the adult level of thinking, such that the distinction between the two might be said to cut along the same line in all cultures and all forms of organization.”

While Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget, who was known for his studies on children would share Levi-Strauss' take on child's thought process being more centered on ego, he argued that children think differently from adults, developing gradually until reaching the clear headedness of. A child's egoism to Piaget (1959) is "systematic and unconscious illusion, an illusion of perspective." To Piaget, that egoism was psychological and social hindrance in children's thought processes adults (Piaget 1959, 23, 164). Hardman noted how Susanne Isaacs has criticized Piaget's notion, saying that children's and adult's thinking differs because of experience, not because of having different thought structure. Hardman herself has argued for a research that studies children as such, not as repositories of grown-ups tutoring. She maintained that we can learn from children about the social relations, norms, and understandings, and because it is possible to make sense of children by watching them, and hearing what they have to say and them depicting the data (Hardman 2001, 504, 511, 516). While the earlier anthropological studies might have treated children and their significance as a non-issue, it was probably in line with the existing notions of children and of their importance. Even to an anthropologist, it is hard to escape the trappings of the times you're living in, and avoid the connotations it will bring along. As many of the concepts relating to children and growing up are specific to a time and place, Hardman's call for watching and listening children as such, seems valid in my opinion.

Youth is another category that has been studied in anthropology with concepts relating to understandings that have been time and context ridden. Being a vague concept in itself, and very much at the mercy of the context and time it is referring to, it is no wonder that there have been many approaches to it within anthropology. Amit-Talai and Wulff have observed how studies of youth in anthropology in the past often saw youth as going through development that prepares them for ordeals coming later on in life, as opposed to seeing youth as creating something relevant for themselves for the time being (Amit-Talai, Wulff 1995, 3). Lowell has noted how anthropological studies in the past have often seen the movement from the status of a child to that of an adult comprising harrowing and transformative acts (Christiansen, Utas et al. 2006, 231). Christiansen, Utas, and Vigh pointed out that seeing youth as one of the stages of life misses the fact that people do transfer and are being transferred from one age-based status to another, and this movement goes to both directions. Missing from the concept are then the myriad of ways how people try to incorporate themselves into, or depart from the age-based statuses (Ibid., 14). Good examples of the efforts to escape from the age-based statuses in my opinion are children that leave homes to become soldiers, or youth living on the street.

As age-based statuses are very much temporal and contextual, it would be important from a researcher to acknowledge the nature of it, and not to confine people in them. As anthropologist Jennifer Johnson-Hanks has observed, important episodes during life are often disordered, lacking a decisive orientation, or established consequences. All of these render the life-stage approach less useful (Johnson-Hanks 2002, 865). Child soldiers' decisions to join, the time they spent in arms, and the reasons leaving from the arms can all serve as examples of life stages missing clear direction, or desired outcomes. Myra Bluebond-Langer and Jill Korbin have stressed that children are not merely on the receiving end of adults' actions, but also possess agency of their own for enacting and transform in the realms of politics and culture. Anthropology has been the one to note that the aspects of children's agency and vulnerability vary according to time and place. (Bluebond-Langner, Korbin 2007, 241-242). As there undoubtedly is variation even when the time and location of the children are the same, it becomes the duty of the researcher to connect the joint dots where there are any, but at the same time recognize each child's individual pursues and aspirations.

Reaching an understanding on that variation is a tall order for an anthropologist, even when equipped with consideration for it. Amit-Talai and Wulff have observed that maturity and different age groups are universally recognized, but the patterns and distinctions they create varies based on individually, politically, and culturally related contexts (Amit-Talai, Wulff 1995, 6). To Bernardo Bernardi, age did not only outline individuals' chronological maturity, but also changes and separations that are happening in their lives. Consequently, motion and alteration are inherent in the notion of chronologic age. The need for personal sovereignty, provided by growing older, is not only bodily, but also culturally and socially mandatory. Adolescents are being given new statuses in order to make the young adults feel ensured about their independence (Bernardo 1985, 7-9). The process of moving from the status of a child to that of an adult is also motion in relation to status regarding influence, control, and competence in the communal realm. Age-based statuses are closely related with developments in the communal life. Consequently, the chances and restrictions ingrained in a particular context and realizations of age-based statuses needs to be emphasized (Christiansen, Utas et al. 2006, 12-13). When traditional routes for those new statuses are not available for youth, they might start looking for alternative routes that would help them in reaching the desired roles and postures that would enable them to reach those statuses that would make them complete members of a society.

So, although the separation of people into groups based on their respective ages seems natural and is taken for granted, the implications and expressions of those categories are context-ridden, Christiansen, Utas, and Vigh have noted. How youth is comprised depends on the time and location. They have emphasized that being young is not passive existence, but instead active living, seeking to depart and go forward in ways that are relevant to the young. Therefore, it's important to analyze the ways in which young people see themselves, and their standing, and how they are seen by others. They have concluded that youth should be seen as 'social being and becoming: as a position in movement' (Christiansen, Utas et al. 2006, 10-11). Therefore, when doing research about the developments that lead young people in armed forces, the agency and the aspirations of the young, in order for them to leave or escape from their situations in a particular time and place, should be at the forefront of the research. It might not only be escaping from the scarcity of food and safety of that particular time, it can also be escaping from the stagnancy of youth that has no prospects for the future.

Sociologist Karl Mannheim argued that belonging to a generation or some respective age cohort joints participants' stances in social spheres and historical developments, and at the same time restricting them to a particular possibilities of participation, thinking, and agency (Mannheim 1969, 291). Henrik Vigh has used Mannheim's concept of 'generation', allowing to see youth as both a social position and a process that is situated in the interactions between generations and also being informed and brought in sync by experience and discursive perspectives. Although the concept of youth is common throughout the cultures, situated between being a child and being an adult, how and when the shift from one classification to another happens is always determined by social and cultural factors, because it correlates with securing power and means, and with particular assessment and appreciation of age and different age groups. Vigh has noted that where there are fewer opportunities, bigger societal problems, and tighter control from older generations, being young is seen being reliant, inactive, negligible, and marked by limitations. In a crisis situation, the traditional social interplay between generations can be replenished by social apathy according to Vigh (Vigh 2006, 93, 95-97). In order to understand children's actions in the context of wars, the theories of vital conjunctures and social navigation will be introduced next.

3.2 Vital Conjunctures and Social Navigation

Jennifer Johnson-Hanks is an anthropologist whose research has focused on cultural systems and population rates, and the way acts taken by individuals are shaping the relationship between the two. She has concentrated on what part people's motivations performs when assessing their acts, and the way those motivations and acts have been influenced by social and cultural domains. For her, vital life events are considerably influenced by physical and substantial frameworks. Consequently, vital life events are not just results of individual's actions, but also of the frameworks where that action is taking place. Johnson-Hanks has argued that outcomes of major life happenings can be found from the possible destinies that they can be used to legitimate. She has used the term 'vital conjuncture' to describe a socially ordered territory of opportunity that develops during a particular phase of possible change in life. It's a momentary structure of potential transition, a period that is characterized by ambiguity and potency. It's at the same time about prospecting for forthcoming, feeling great ambiguity, and sensing chances about a major change that can bring close spheres of life that in other contexts have been distant.

For Johnson-Hanks then, the term conjuncture means stressing the two sides of the coin; ordered prospects, and unpredictable times to come. The possible scenarios, and the ordered chances, guide and inspire acts. For her, the fancied prospects are 'the horizons of the conjuncture'. Horizons have a temporal nature, and what is seen partly depends on the angle of the viewer, because individuals' insights about a particular scene varies, and so does their reading about the situation. Therefore, when analyzing vital conjunctures, it is necessary to gain a view of the horizons, and of the prospects that are wished and dreaded. The potential prospects that are aspired or trying to be dodged in a conjuncture might not be concrete at that point, but they happen for real and they have repercussions in real life. Consequently, it is important to study different prospects agents have when they are faced with particular tests (Johnson-Hanks 2002, 865, 867, 872).

In the case of child soldiers, war is the period in their lives that has those elements of uncertainty, potential, and offers those expectations for change. When the concept of vital conjunctures is used to analyze children's participation in conflicts, their short-term objectives, fates that they try to avoid, and pay-offs that they might have had, are only one part of the puzzle. The other part are the expectations towards anticipated future, because vital conjunctures has the element of long-term goals too. The long-term prospects of child soldiers are characterized by uncertainty, yet at the same time also by chance for moving towards a better position that would enable the desired long-term goals. Both of these two

prospects mobile children to join armed groups. The personal histories of children who end up getting involved in conflicts, and the contexts where that involvement occurs, influences the way these children see their social environment, and their chances of moving towards those short-term and long-term goals. Conflict situations are often volatile, which means that the environments where people live in, make decisions, and plan for future, changes too. The changing environment can also move child soldiers from one place to another, or from one position to another. In order to accommodate the changing environment, and how it changes the positions of children involved in conflicts, it is necessary to incorporate another theory as well.

The other theoretical framework that will be used to describe child soldier's agency is the concept of social navigation. Social navigation in the context of young soldiers has been brought up by Danish anthropologist Henrik Vigh, who has done research among former combatants in Guinea-Bissau. Influenced Mannheim's notion that all wisdom and schemes are tied up to a specific place, and occurs in a particular social system as a part of particular development, the concept of social navigation offers insight into the processes of youth joining armed conflicts. Vigh has applied the term social navigation to describe young people's actions in the midst of the civil war in Guinea-Bissau. Social navigation to Vigh comprises of assessing motion of the social setting, an individual's personal chances of passing it, and its' consequences on projected and real motion, assessment and practice. With social navigation, Vigh calls into question the practices that youth employ in their efforts to enhance their position in their lives in a situation that is changing and unstable (Vigh 2006, 118).

Also Vigh has focused on hardships and opportunities informing youth's participation in wars, and on interaction of socially informed viewpoints, conduct, and power. Conflict can change the status of youth from being marginal to being central in defending the bloc's networks and resources. Conflicts disrupts and repositions political arrangements, establishing landscapes that offer chances for relocating oneself, as Vigh has observed. Therefore, becoming active creates chances, both immediately and over time, to leave the category of youth behind. Becoming an active agent in a conflict is therefore not just to negotiate oneself through the war, but also the period after the war. Becoming active is influenced by inclinations at the present, as well as those of the time to come (Vigh 2006, 118). Both Vigh and Johnson-Hanks have incorporated into their theories the two qualities of prospecting; the immediate, and the forthcoming that can be desired or feared, but not yet fully known. It is these prospects that inspire, or in some cases force children to take action in order to navigate the present and the future.

Vigh has included one more element to his concept of social navigation that takes into account the changing environment. The social landscapes that we habituate are always in motion, even if the motion can be hard to notice in a situation where everything is seemingly in order. In a crises situation that motion is easier to observe due to the political, social, and economic changes that crises brings about. Vigh (2006, 11) has used a concept of 'terrains and environments' to cover the changing social landscapes. People plan routes, come up with game plans, and maneuver to the direction of a goal far away in the distance, or outside the limits of present perspective, and all this is done while being acknowledged of one's present spot and chances in a particular setting, and in regards to the projected spot and chances of motion towards it. With social navigation, Vigh has brought forth a practice that has the complicated interplay of acting persons, territory, and happenings, including the constant change, and how they impact and are rooted in the acts (Vigh 2006, 11-13). Child soldiers act in a setting that is itself being acted upon. War-time situation is chaotic period that is characterized by change and uncertainty. Social navigation and terrains hence enable to take into consideration this change that is affecting the way child soldier's acts.

The decisions that child soldiers make have both short-term and long-term consequences for the children, and children are aware of both qualities, even though they do not necessarily estimate them correctly at the time of the decision making. With Vigh's concept of social environments that are in motion, it is possible to take into consideration at the same time the actual arrangements of the social landscape, and its presupposed future arrangements. Navigation involves having a capability to plan a path in a social landscape, and also to travel on that planned course. If needed, navigation involves changing the plan along the route. People, children included, do not make decisions and take action in a vacuum where the past and the future would not be acknowledged. On the contrary, both the past and the projected future are influencing those decisions and actions. People also react to changing environments while taking action, and that can sometimes lead them to courses that are different from what they had projected, like when the informants of this study ended up from one armed group to another, or when they opted out from the armed forces because it was not what they had imagined it to be. Vigh has stressed that social navigation is movement in a moving environment that incorporates the agent's actions and the impact of the social setting in motion, shedding light onto the continuity between action and setting, understanding and practice, and one's power and social powers (Vigh 2006, 13-14).

Johnson-Hanks has acknowledged that horizons are momentary in nature, and depend on the angle of the viewer. For Vigh, the socially imagined is the total of a persons' social horizons. One's horizons are informed by four outlooks according to Vigh. Those are "retrospective, introspective, extrospective, and prospective" (Vigh, 2006, 174). They tell to people where they are coming from, what they will become, what is their position in connection with others with the spaces and means they have, and how they can they proceed. Horizons are the results of discourses, manifestations, and customs, including one's social abstracts. Social outlooks also define the horizon one is anticipating, the one that is not yet to live, but nevertheless is being acted in relation to (Vigh 2006, 174). With the concept of social horizons, it is possible to account for the myriad of variables that are at play in a given social situation.

What prospects a child has depends then on the horizons of the child. The horizons depend on the personal history of the child, on the directions for moving forward, on the child's position and relation with others, and on the anticipated futures. All these influence when children act, react, plan, and escape in conflict situations. Vigh has emphasized that every act, be it beneficial or not, is connected to a particular understandings of social landscape, prospects, and chances. In order to understand intentions and activities, it is important to locate the socio-political landscape that actualizes before the informants, and is imagined by them. It is also important to focus on the informants imagined prospects for moving in it. As a result of the motion by the actor or by the shifting social grounds, advanced scopes for adaptation and rooms for chances open in the form of what Vigh has termed 'new horizons' (Vigh 2006, 125). Children who have joined armed groups have been anticipating for future, and their way of moving towards that anticipated future has been soldiering. They could not foresee what the future would exactly bring about, but they had expectations towards it. In the course of moving towards it, as a result of their own motion and due to the moving social terrain, there has been new horizons appearing that they could not see until the movement occurred. An agent's stance in a particular arrangement of political aspects, social aspects, and developments outlines that agent's horizon, and the agent's horizon outlines the agent's social field through marking boundaries (Vigh 2006, 31). As the horizons are different and can change, also the boundaries that the horizons set for agents are different and can change over the course of events.

Social navigation and vital conjunctures offers thus a way of taking all the moving parts of the puzzle into consideration when trying to analyze people's movement in a changing terrain. They allow to notice how social horizons develop, and how those horizons inform the movements by projecting

routes and boundaries. In a conflict situation, where the movement by agents and environments is constant and unpredictable, they enable to notice the new emerging horizons and the way they impact the movement by projecting new routes and boundaries. Social navigation and vital conjunctures summon actions and reactions in a changing environment where children's horizons guide them into and through a conflict, and towards an anticipated future.

Crises are often seen as being temporary in their context, duration and repercussions, and that undoubtedly often is the case in wealthy peaceful societies going through societal, economic or political upheavals. Crises can nevertheless endure for extended periods of time, calling therefore attention onto how people manage in them, instead of through them, like Vigh has pointed out (Vigh 2008, 8). Crises appear as a brief state of abnormality in societies that are doing well, but in places like Congo the state of crisis becomes routinized. Vigh has argued that instead of seeing crises as a momentary disorderly break from the normal orderly functioning of things, crises act to disintegrate structures of a society, feeling of solidarity, and disjoint connections at a personal and societal levels. When crises become enduring and persistent, they become to be experienced as normal. Therefore, people living in crises situation do try to find ways to expand their influence, and act in ways that would enhance their standings in their particular situations. The disintegration that crises brings about has another side to it. It does not have to mean inactivity on behalf of the people living in crises, not so much about capability to act than a chance to act in a particular situation. When agents' possibilities for action in crises situation are being researched, it underlines agents' capability of construing their social worlds, and their motion in it Vigh has argued (Vigh 2008, 10). He has maintained that:

Researching agency as possibility rather than capacity gives us a direct point of departure in an anthropological analysis of crisis as context. It highlights that in situations of prolonged crisis we adjust our reading of the social environment, and our movement within it, to its critical characteristics. In chronic crisis we base action on fragmentation as circumstance - which makes life unpleasant but not impossible. Crisis...when it is chronic, may become normal in the sense that it is what there is most, but it does not become normal in the sense that this is how things should be (Vigh 2008, 10).

Many of the child soldiers of this study and in Congo in general were living in a situation that was bordering crises already well before the war started. From youth's point of view, the situation in Congo

was subsequently worsened due to the economic, political, and social problems that started to accumulate from the early 1990s onwards. But the crises situation that disjointed some of the existing social, political, and economic structures and relations also gave rise to new opportunities in those very fields for action and influence. New social relations, fresh economic activities, and unheard presence on the field of politics were being created and maintained by the Congolese youth, by joining militias, escaping to the towns, or becoming gold or diamond diggers, among many other things. It is the resourcefulness of the young people that we turn into next.

3.3 On Tactics and Strategies

For children to navigate and move towards their projected social horizons requires action. Many young Africans have taken action on their own in order to reach their desired stances and the prospected possibilities. Some of them has ended up on social, political, and economic routes that are uncommon, sometimes unheard of, and to a western observer, more or less wretched. This part outlines the agency needed in acting, using the concepts of tactics and strategies.

I will use French social scientist Michel de Certeau's definition of tactics when describing child soldiers' agency. De Certeau noted how everyday life is different from other parts of living, because by its nature, everyday life is monotonous and automatic. De Certeau marked a difference between tactical agency and strategic agency. For him strategy is the measure of capacity in a relation where a subject that has ambition and strength prevails. Strategy involves trying to establish one's own location from which to confront the others. Strategies to de Certeau are methods of the strong in their efforts to circumscribe the weak. Tactics, on the other hand, are measured activities influenced by the fact that those employing tactics are missing a power base of their own. Territories when using tactics belong to others, therefore tactical maneuvering occurs in social environments that has been created and enforced by others than the agents resorting to tactics. Tactics are the art of improvisation and creativity to counter the powerful strategies of the strong, seizing chances, but without being able cash on the wins for not having a power base to set up. Thus tactical agency has a movable nature, seizing on fractures in the power bases of others. To de Certeau, tactics are influenced by the missing power, and strategies are formulated by assumption about power (De Certeau 1984, 35-38). While I don't fully agree with his definition of strategies being largely at the hands of the powerful, his take on tactics is well-defined. Tactical agents are underdogs, but their actions are resourceful and unexpected. Following de Certeau, historian Timothy Raeymaekers has indicated that tactics are often represented as unwise responses

without any ideology, command, or ordered system, but usage of tactics still serve as an indication of people who have will to live a good life despite the efforts of domination by the more powerful (Raeymaekers 2009, 57). I would rather see tactics and strategies residing at particular positions at particular times. Therefore, it is the position and the context that enables or disables the usage of strategies and tactics, both of which are shifting, and can be acted towards to. From this angle, also those in marginal positions can extort their strategies if they get to a particular position at a particular time.

Tactics demonstrate the scope to mold a field that has been established by others, to counter the fixed powers, and realizations through daily activities (Raeymaekers 2009, 57-58). It is this creativity that children show, when they end up taking alternative routes and unordinary actions to get through. The ability to react includes children as well. Positive or not, children are not just passive objects being thrown around by moving circumstances and strategies of the powerful, they are also active subjects, heading towards a direction that at some particular time and location seemed most suitable for them. They possess tactics, and perhaps also in some instances to some degree strategies, even though De Certeau's definition of strategies being at the hands of the strong would rule children out from the realms of strategies.

When tactics and occasional strategies of children are acknowledged, their agency comes to be recognized as well. Anthropologists Helena Wulff and Vered Amit-Talai have argued that the agency of the under-aged has not been prominent in research. Children and youth are seen to be at the receiving end of the cultural realm. Studies that present children having an agency on their own in the social realm are hard to come by (Amit-Talai, Wulff 1995, 9-10, 22). Children's agency has not only been missing from research agendas, it has also been largely absent from all walks gazing upon their existence. It's almost like it has been built into our thought patterns and social structures that children do not possess agency, nor the ability to assess their undertakings in any way.

In defining agency, anthropologist Julia Hess has indicated that:

Children and adolescents are people, and as such, have agency. However, the concept deserves further exploration as we apply it to children. Following Giddens, we define agency as intentional action that encompasses both intended and unintended consequences. Moreover, Giddens' view of agency entails a consideration of unconscious motivations and desires (Cassell 1993: 93-95). Most importantly

however, is the recognition of the way power is related to agency. Agency refers not to the intentions people have in doing things but to their capability of doing those things in the first place (Hess 2008, 770)

Therefore, we can conclude that agency is the action to do the desired movement. When a child soldier joins an armed group, there is the action, agency at play. When a child soldier decides to leave arms behind, and return to civilian life, the agency is again at play. The action is intended, even if the consequences might not be. Like Hess pointed out, action requires agency.

3.4 Child Soldiers and their Agency

Child soldiers' tactical agency to anthropologist Alcinda Honwana means managing and taking advantage of their current reality. Child soldiers might not have a powerful status, or comprehensively acknowledge their actions' outcomes in the future, nor necessarily have any aspirations beyond the immediate horizon, but they do know the actual current payoffs and grab the chances that they can (de Boeck, Honwana 2005, 32). Honwana's definition of tactical agency suits the movements and actions of the informants of this study. Often they might not have had a clear vision what lies ahead of them, or what are the consequences of action they are taking, but they still chose to act and try to reach the opportunities, or the escapes they saw opening in front of them. Tactical agency is the outcome of an underdog position, whereas strategic agency signifies a position of influence and a clear vision of future effects of one's actions according to Honwana (Ibid., 49-50). Another anthropologist, Mats Utas, has noted that tactical agency has a temporal quality built into it (Ibid., 76). Seeing child soldiers' agency in the light of fleeting moments, where opportunities are noticed and action is being taken so that the aspirations could be reached, helps to understand the decisions children make in conflict situations in order to improve their situation.

Following in the footsteps of de Certeau, Vigh has concluded that tactics are about enhancing one's possibilities in life by navigating the terrain that has been coordinated and determined by other people. Strategy was out of bonds for Vigh's informants during the civil war in Guinea-Bissau, therefore navigating social systems of connections tactically became the only way to escape from the status of youth. They navigated the terrain of war that had become others' strategy (Vigh 2006, 134, 136-137). In the context of wars, few can have such a powerful position that would enable them the use of strategies. Tactical maneuvering is the method of the child soldiers, who are most of the time not

powerful enough to change their surroundings and the developments in it, but they can try to chase prospects, and evade destinies by using tactical agency.

None of the tactical agency happens in a vacuum, nor in a world that is somehow detached from that of the adults. Children who join armed groups inhabit the same social landscapes with those who don't, and with their parents and all the other adults. The informants of this study were living in the same world with their parents and siblings. Their social horizons were in some respects different, and led them to a different path. Vigh has maintained that youth needs to be placed into the realm of changing relations between different generations, as a social phase in it in which actors come to have joint horizons and spheres of application (Vigh 2006, 92). It could even be argued that during times of crises that involvement from children might become more intense and take new forms, because the urgency to act and react is more imminent than what it is during more peaceful periods.

Youth inhabit the fringes, seeking routes and departures in the social worlds they live in, by trying to establish resources by the way of restructuring the world that they inhabit, as anthropologists Christensen, Utas, and Vigh have noted. Young people maneuver and negotiate the current, as well as create the forthcoming on a personal, and on a joint basis. They are opposing 'social death' by imposing new social stances, maneuvering both the usual as well as the unconventional ways in their efforts to make it out for themselves (Christiansen, Utas et al. 2006, 21). For many young Congolese, the wars and the long-lasting crisis preceding it were blocking routes to attain an education, a job, gaining financial and social independence, and to start a family. Yet they still, or as a result of it, acted to avoid that social death that was looming above them. The nature and outcome of these acts were variable, but the action was there.

3.5 On dynamics in families and between generations

The crisis and the wars in Congo have altered relations inside families and notions of children, youth and adulthood. Anthropologist Maurice Godelier (Godelier 1999, 27) has stated that "there is no question of denying the existence of the functions (the imaginary, the symbolic, and the "real") of these three orders which combine to make up human social existence, human social reality." Godelier

emphasizes that the various methods in the imaginary sphere that people use to form relationships with one another and with the natural realm are important when trying to unravel that “real”. The problem is that the imagined level is not able to produce community nor bring forth communal by just occurring at the level of thoughts. The imagined has to come into being in people’s contacts and exchanges that occur in societies’ establishments and symbolic depictions for it to become part of real world (Godelier 1999, 27). Following Godelier, De Boeck then asks, what happens when the imaginary terrains turns into turmoil, and loses its power to confine people together, loses its capability to produce continuum and yield good fellowship (Boeck 2010, 13-14). I would argue that in many places in Congo, the imaginary sphere has lost its’ capacity to offer a plan and a way for executing that plan in practice, because of all the problems that culminated in the war. Not seeing the chances for reaching social and economic independence using the conventional routes can make youth apathetic. But it can also lead them to seek other avenues for that becoming.

Congolese children’s newly found and often unorthodox tactics, strategies, and actions have become visible in their families, inside their communities, and in the Congolese society at large. Social scientists Geraldine Andre and Marie Godin have observed that children’s involvement in financial activities happens at a time when traditional family structures and groups are being reshaped in Congo. New forms of transactions, exchanges, and tributes are forming and changing how children and their position are understood. The work that children have undertaken at the mines that Andre and Godin researched at Katanga province, develops their individuality through communal structures that were already there. They observed that in some cases, children’s involvement in mining work did not challenge the existing family hierarchies or alter social relations, but sometimes the old hierarchies and social relations gave way for new ones. They found out that some preferred to work on their own instead of letting their work at the mines to be harnessed for the benefit of the elders in the community. That was especially the case with children that were socially disparaged in their communities, who with the newly acquired material wealth were able to carve out for themselves a position of relative power and influence when compared with the past state of affairs. But it was not only the most sidelined children that Andre and Godin found out to challenge the existing social relations through their work at the mines. Also the sentiments for individualism that were prevalent among the local middle-class encouraged some of their children to work in the mines with self-interest, rather than being motivated by the good for the whole family (Andre, Godin 2013, 162, 170-171).

Much the same way as the mining work and the consequent individualization of children in Katanga was happening along existing social patterns and structures, to some degree there were also blueprints for children's participation in militias during the Congolese wars in the eastern parts of the country. North Kivu province has had a tradition of insurgency, local militias, and youth's involvement in them. That, coupled with fractured social relations, difficulties in reaching maturity, and gaining economic independence were some of the reasons that led the informants and many others to the armed forces. For some, the decision has been relocating from the countryside to the cities. What these children have in common, is that they decided to venture out to the world in order to secure a future for themselves before reaching the biological age that would normally sanctions such actions. They did that by using tactics, strategies, and taking action, all of which were made possible by the constantly changing crises situation that had become commonplace in Congo. That same situation altered the dynamics within families and communities, throwing obstacles to youth's maturation, while at the same time opening new possibilities and alternative routes through the immediate and towards the future.

Those changed conceptions needs to be accounted if the generational dynamics are to be understood in Congo. According to sociologist Desiree Lwambo, older generations in Congo have not grasped yet that the dramatic changes in the social setting and the war has meant that young people grow up faster than what they used to do. The inability to notice the change results from the notion that the conventional social understanding sees young people to be lower in the social order as long as they have not started their own family (Lwambo 2011, 17-18). Frustrated with the inability to start a family and therefore gaining full social independence has left many young people to seek out other means.

Although it has been hard for some to take a gun carrying child and his authority seriously, the results of child soldiers' actions have been very real and concrete, both for the children and for the society at large. But like mentioned above, child soldiers are really just one of the many cases where young people set out on paths that seem unconventional, and unwanted to most of us. Political scientist Theodore Trefon has emphasized that children are more and more appearing at the central locations for the social and cultural transactions that are happening in many parts in Africa (Trefon 2004, 155). Anthropologist Filip De Boeck, who has done research in Kinshasa among child witches and street children, has noted that children in Congo are in contact with death more than in the past, both as victims and as perpetrators. Children in Kinshasa often get the blame for sicknesses and for people's deaths because of the child witch phenomenon (Boeck 2006, 7). Besides being blamed for health

related problems and deaths, children in Kinshasa can end up being scapegoats for hardships and mental problems (Boeck 2012, 21). Like the examples from Kinshasa show, children can end up getting the blame for negative happenings, but their more central position does not only bring bad news for them. The negative attributes, and the supposed destructive forces that adults stamp onto street children, child witches, child prostitutes, and child soldiers are clear indications of the powers and positions these children have, or are seen to have. The negative attributes are testimonies of children's agencies having an impact in the adult's world. Against this backdrop, it is easier to understand why the aforementioned children do not have just the status of passive victims in the eyes of the local people in Congo. Children are having agencies on their own.

De Boeck has described how children in Kinshasa are acting agents in the social world before their age. Becoming agents in death has meant that children has yielded power and authority from older generations. Much the same way as the children Andre and Godin researched at the mines in Katanga, facing marginalization, the street children in Kinshasa are expressing personal fulfillment through occupying public realms. For De Boeck, these are signs of energy and living. Children, with their physical presence in the public life, mark down new terrains for themselves through which they are able to bypass the old restraints, structures, and patterns of the previous system. The old system has not managed to keep up with its obligations, it has been losing authorization in their eyes, and has fell short on acting as a force to organize a perception of life, and one's place in it (Boeck 2006, 11, 15). Similarly, as the old social structure and economic system was not able to incorporate the informants of this study into the existing social and economic order, they decided to pursue alternative paths in order to gain social and financial independence. Not only are these alternative paths signs of energy and living, they can also have repercussions between the generations and sexes.

Like Andre and Godin noticed, some of the children working in the mines have moved away from the influence of family relations and actions into a position that takes an advantage of the resources from the work, consequently bypassing traditional social order and giving them a new communal stature (Andre, Godin 2013, 171). For a parent, it must be hard not being able to provide for your children. It might get even harder, if the children end up providing for the parents. The desire to make it out for themselves can harm the relationships between generations for many reasons. Firstly, because of the humiliation that parents might feel about not being able to provide for them. Secondly, because the child might be bitter for the failure of the parents. Thirdly, because the parents, and rest of the family

can be upset that a child has left them to pursue goals that can appear selfish from the point of view of the family. Not to mention if those goals are unrealized, and the child returns without an education, job, or money. This was the case with many of the informants in this study.

The informants themselves acknowledged in hindsight that they are an anomaly among the population, and many of them seemed to grasp the problems following from their participation in the conflict. To what extent that was down to maturation, learning from the mistakes and from the international organizations that had taught them about children's rights, is impossible to pinpoint down exactly. But undoubtedly one reason for the resentment that the local population have towards them stems from their involvement in matters that their respective ages at the time, and the social positions children are entitled to, would not normally qualify for. Anthropologist Jo Boyden has noted how child soldiers pose a problem for the societies they are living in, because they don't enjoy anymore the position of children and all that it entails. While taking up arms and being an active agent in the political and economic realms, child soldiers have challenged the circulation of power amidst different age groups. Boyden believes this to be the case especially among young female fighters, who end up challenging not only age-related notions of acceptable behavior, but also sex-related ones as well. Boyden has noted that after acquiring power and freedom with the help of a gun, child soldiers can be hesitant to conform to the adult's authority anymore, especially as they contest the adults' competence for taking care of them based on their track record (Boyden 2003, 348-349).

3.6 Masculine protector and a competent soldier

Child soldiers have not been challenging just traditional notions relating to the generational order, they have also been influenced by, and challenged notions relating to masculinity. Sociologist Desiree Lwambo has described gender as follows:

Gender describes the characteristics and behaviors societies assign to the supposed corporal realities, or biological sexes, of men and women. Through social conditioning, individuals learn to perform gender roles, and to imbue them with meaning and order (Lwambo 2011, 8).

Issues relating to masculinity needs to be accounted when boys' and men's actions and thoughts are analyzed and dissected. To what extent exactly, depends on the context and on the questions that the research has set to answer. In the case of this research, masculine ideals certainly play a part in the

themes and narrations of the research, but not to the extent as in many other studies relating to child soldiers or conflicts. The reason for the diminished role of the masculinity in this thesis is the avoidance of issues relating to violence, especially in the physical realm, when conducting the interviews with the child soldiers. Despite avoiding direct inquiries relating to the power and violence that the army life entails, notions of masculinity surfaced in other contexts to some degree.

Anthropologist Katrien Pype, who has studied masculinity in Kinshasa, has observed that one's background impacts the type of manliness that one is trying to pursue (Pype 2011, 256). In her research on masculinity in eastern Congo, Lwambo noted how NGOs' programs often draw parallels from gender to women, thereby missing the myriad of faces and ways the issue has, and how it could be used in achieving transformation in the society (Lwambo 2011, 7). Like anthropologist Dorothy Hodgson has stressed, if the aim is to understand the mechanisms and structures of injustice between sexes, it's not enough to listen only to women, because notions of gender are tied up to a particular place and time, and echoed and manifested in the thoughts and deeds of the sexes (Hodgson 2001, 123). It is to some degree understandable that in the face of the sexually motivated violence that has plagued Congo, gender issues tend to be synonyms for females' plight. Yet, it is the altered notions of masculinity, and the problems men face in trying to live up to the masculine ideals that are in part influencing men to cause havoc between the sexes and the generations. As one has an impact on the other, all sides of the gender issue needs to be acknowledged and studied in order to gain an understanding on the problems relating to gender in Congo.

Hodgson has pointed out that masculinities, like femininities, are not just tied up to a place and time, but they can also be relative and inconsistent (Hodgson 2001, 124). Lwambo has noticed the same, saying that there can be different models of manliness at the same time, and sometimes they can even be at odds with one another, hence formulating stratified identifications (Lwambo 2011, 13). Ideals relating to gender can be very different from the realities of daily existence. Also actual deeds can be far-removed from the ideals that are thought to be guiding people's thoughts and actions on the subject. Lwambo has noted how being able to take care economically of yourself and your family has been identified to be as one of the core ideals of masculinity in many African societies. Being able to provide for your family is connected to being in control and being the head figure in the family, and these dominant patterns are being reproduced in talk and social integration even if it would be nearly impossible to fulfill the tasks because of the financial and social situation. Her informants said that not

being able to perform the tasks associated to male sex can even deprive man of his manliness.

Therefore, manliness is something that needs to be cared for by achievements in order to avoid being categorized as woman (Lwambo 2011, 8, 14, 21).

Masculine ideals in Congo is a tall order for many young men to fulfil in a grave financial and social situation, but I believe that the contextual nature of the ideals, and the ensuing chaos caused by the conflict makes it possible for some young men to pursue towards it through unconventional routes. Changing social settings tend to alter the notions of order in societies, like Lwambo has argued (Lwambo 2011, 17). As the older generations and the society at large are unable to fulfill their commitments towards the younger generations, they lose some of their authority in the eyes of hungry youth, who are faced up with questions of sovereignty and individual freedom. It is these escapes from being passive victims of the situation, transforming oneself into active agents in aspiring to reach independence and maturity, where masculine ideals of manhood, provider, and protector come into play in this thesis.

Pype has observed how soldiers are still looked up to by young men in Kinshasa despite the violence that the army has caused over the years. The image of a soldier encompasses bodily, ethical, and social supremacy, while also guarding the people. Other masculine ideals that the young men in Kinshasa attributed to men with strength were having to do with financial assets and having a solid religious standing (Pype 2011, 257-258). The militarization of the eastern provinces of Congo that started out already before the war did, had an impact on the notions of masculinity of male youth, and offered a way of trying to fulfil those notions. But like Hodgson emphasized earlier in the chapter, notions of masculinity can be inconsistent and situational. By the same token, Pype has called for methods that observe the changing conditions and times when studying masculinity in Congo (Pype 2011, 251). The image of a soldier before the war was in many ways disgrace of the ideal, because the Congolese army during the Mobutu regime was busy harassing and depleting the population. Some of the informants said to have joined the armed militias in order to protect people from the national army. The masculine notions of protector and provider still played a part in the self-armament of the thousands of boys in eastern Congo, even if that might not have happened through the national army. The informants and thousands of other child soldiers faced a different reality once they had joined armed groups though.

3.7 The reality of being an under-aged soldier

Most of the informants expressed gripes over the conditions they had to endure while in arms. Another complaint was that the warring against the outside aggressors, and putting a stop to maltreating army soldiers was often just an ideal. The horizons that they observed at the time of joining transformed into entirely different because of changing volatile conditions, lying, the realities of war, and their changed position in the groups. The masculine notions of defending your own folk as a strong competent warrior, commanding respect and awe of the citizens while scaring the foreign invaders away, was met with the cold light of reality too often, in order for the informants to have many positive things to say about how the armed groups they were part of operated.

While the ideal type of a soldier, together with the actions of its' real life complete opposite, Mobutu's soldiers', were among the reasons for many young Congolese to get involved in armed groups, their own experiences in armed groups are discouraging them to do it again. Although many informants were passionate about the reasons that got them involved in the first place, they were equally passionate about the un-kept promises, lack of moral, shortage of food, and discovering the disappointment of fighting amongst the Congolese when recounting their own experiences after some time had passed since the disarmament. Food, salary, and health were among the most often mentioned problems that the informants brought up about their time in arms. Informant 1 became ill only to find out that his group's commander was not interested:

The problems we faced in our army were food and medicine. When I was at the regrouping (two factions merged) I got sick, but they did not take care of me, so I found out that they aren't interested in one's life. I got medicine from my friends...they helped me, I got in good shape and recovered. My life today compared to the one in arms is very different...I like to remain in civilian life.

Different armed groups had different resources and conditions, like informant 3 testified:

While being in Kabila's troops, we were getting money, food, and medicine without any problems. When we joined the rebellion, life (in the army) became expensive to get food, and medicine was difficult to get...When we were in the government's troops (Kabila's army), we got 100 dollars a month for salary. When we joined the rebellion, they cheated us, claiming that we would get the same amount, we would eat well...while being in the rebellion, we didn't have anything.

Informant 5, who joined at the age of 16, got his share of empty promises in the arms:

We were promised getting a certain salary at the end of the month, increases were also promised, but nothing happened... Children saw our chiefs eating money (using money) while we had nothing. We were the ones fighting, not the commanders. We were the ones being cheated, eating badly, but it did not worry them. That's why many decided to give up arms... The captain was getting 25 dollars a month, the last one was getting 5000 francs (roughly \$5) a month that was the salary of a subordinate... The money helped to get food, clothes, and I was keeping some of the money to send for my parents. If I had much money, I sent it also to other relatives.

Food and medicine were also being purloined by the commanders:

Commanders treated us badly when it comes to food. When food came, it was supposed to be for one month, but they were giving food only for one week. Commanders decided to take food, and go out to sell it. Medicine was also sold, so they only gave small proportions. Expensive medicine was sold by commanders... They made us suffer a lot.

The same sentiments were echoed by informant 6 as well:

When it comes to getting food and medicine, they were not taking care of us. The reason why I left the arms. Food was problem, medicine too. Many were dying... I had at least a family, so I did not want to continue living that way... Daily life, we were eating maize powder and beans. That was the daily food. Maize powder and beans. Such food was disturbing me a lot.

Informant 8 echoed the dilemma of complying with the orders, while trying to face the fact that you had to rely on yourself to get food:

We were told that we would be given guns and clothes but not food by MLC (Mouvement de libération du Congo). So we had to look food in our own ways. We were beaten when we robbed, and then taken to get some medicine. If they didn't hear about robbery, there was no punishment... We were treated badly because we were living under their orders.

It was not hardship for all the informants though. Those who were part of the Mai-Mai groups or part of Kabila's troops reported being treated generally better than the informants in other groups. Some salaries were being paid, and the commanders seemed to be watching out for the interests of the fighters, like informant 7 testified:

We had a lot of food, we were eating well. We also got medicine because we had some chief supporters...Commander looked after us well, since we were not missing on anything. We got good food, civilians gave us food and we bought it. I was not mistreated by the chiefs, food and sleeping were good in the bush. They did not allow us to take civilians belongings by force.

Despite the more positive remarks towards the Mai-Mai groups and Kabila's army, it's still fair to say that generally speaking, informants' medical and nutritional situation did not improve much from what it was prior joining the armed groups. Regular salaries were paid to some informants, for few getting paid was sporadic, while others did not get any money from their involvement. Not entirely surprising, considering the chaotic nature of war, the changing alliances, and the informants' 'junior' status in their respective groups. Was it a surprise for the informants that the material conditions in the armed groups were not a bliss? Hard to say, but the disappointment echoed in the narratives in hindsight was greater in regards to the lack of morals, broken promises, and the absurdity of fighting against your fellow countrymen.

3.8 The disappointing moral blows

When being inquired about the reasons that the informants saw for the fighting, most of them expressed sentiments for a just war and their own involvement in it. A few were kidnapped, and a couple did not see reasons for the fighting at all, but for the majority, the fighting and their participation, made sense on paper. That paper soon transformed into rubbish though, when the reality hit the informants. Even after some years of hindsight, many informants noted that there was a cause for the conflicts in principle, but equally noted was the botched execution of that principle in practice. While that principle on paper was enticing them to join and take part, the principle's dissolution in practice was leading them out of the groups.

Informant 11, who at the age of 17 at the time of the interview was still at crossroads on where to go next. Despite having gripes over the conditions in arms, despite having a pregnant girlfriend and

parents who did the best they could to get their son out of the Mai-Mai group, he was still underlining the just cause and his own involvement in it.

We were fighting against foreigners that they would not enter our country, like Tutsis or others, who disturbed civilians. The enemy was (also) Nkunda, he sent bandits towards us, even some came to fight us in the camps... As Nkunda is waging war, if I was still in the arms, I would go out and fight him. Because the government soldiers who fight him cannot kick him away, but us Mai-Mais, we can do it.

The same notions of the opponents were used in different groups, like informant 5 brought up:

Everybody was saying that others are rebels who are destroying the country, so we have to fight them, so that we can build our country.

Nkunda and Tutsis were mentioned by several of the other informants as well as the reason for the warring, but in reality the enemy was often other Congolese, like informant 8 described:

I found out that Congolese are no good. We fought among ourselves, and killed one another, tribes are killing another. It's like killing your brother... We were fighting in darkness, we did not know the reasons for fighting, we were all Congolese. When our eyes were opened, everybody decided to join civilian.

In informant 8's case, the brothers in the opposing sides was not just a figure of speaking, it was the reality:

I had friends and relatives in arms. Two persons in arms were (from) the same mother and father, and a son and another father's younger brother, were in opposing side. If you saw another one, you would kill him. There was no brotherhood, if you are first to see another, you would kill him, no friendship again. There was no mercy for relatives, we had to kill each other... When you go back to village, and you would report killing brother or relative. We were killing each other. When we were in different cities, we would call each other and say that leave your side and join ours....

I demobilized with my younger brother, the two others remained in arms.

Also informant 7 found out that the 'liberation of Congo' entailed fighting against your friends:

I had two relatives in the arms, my brothers... I had only a (one) friend with whom I went to arms... The (other) friends were among the enemies. The chiefs told that even if you meet friends or relatives, you would have to kill them. So that's how we fight. Even father, we would have to kill, that's what we were told.

He felt to have been treated well, and was offered a chance to become a captain, but the declination was stemming from his disappointment over the objectives of the fighting:

We were told that we would liberate Congo, but we didn't know how to do it, because we did not see the chief commander supporting us... I found out that the enemies we were fighting was for nothing, because we did not get anything from that... They cheated that when we finish, life would be ok. I hoped that, to fight and finish the war. The promises have not realized because when the war came, the chiefs run away, abandoned us. The chiefs started fighting among themselves.

The horizons of the informant 6 left him dismayed while being in arms:

No promises have been carried out. They were just lies. During the fighting, I was told that I would get a lot of money, would be ok, and get a high position in arms to go ahead with the war. But they were lying... Subordinate soldiers were not told what the reasons for the fighting were. We just fought under the orders. Commands were commands... They didn't tell us the reasons we were fighting for. We just waited orders from high-ranking soldiers... I didn't see any reason for fighting, people were dying for nothing, and there was no solution, so I just decided to leave the arms.

The changing social environment led informant 4 to discover that the horizons he observed while in arms were not the ones informing him to join at the age of 17:

Our objectives were good, because we had Congolese commander (Kabila) in charge of the group. That objective, to liberate Congo, we had to have relationships with all Congolese provinces... We had tribalism between ourselves... Mai Mais were attacking us, because we were with the Tutsis... We had our own goals, because we had our Congolese leader to fight Mobuto, in order to liberate the country, a leader to show how to lead the country and to restore peace in Congo. But peace did not come, even now they killed him (Laurent Kabila), the son (Joseph Kabila) was elected and

he also forgot the eastern provinces...In our troops we were rebelling, commanders brought unmoral among us. They would tell us that as we are in the war, you can have small money to help us to fight the enemy. We would be having only soap and food.

Informant 3 observed the discrepancy between the rhetoric and practice once the context of the Congolese wars dawned on him:

Up till now, none of the promises have come true. Not even one promise has realized...They were telling us that the reason for fighting is to protect civilians and their belongings. The enemies were fighting among themselves (Congolese vs. Congolese) ... I did not understand why we were fighting among ourselves, they were no Rwandans or Ugandans. When I found that we were fighting among ourselves, I decided to have a leave from the army.

The broken promises, the tough conditions, and the fighting against your fellow countrymen were some of the experiences and actions that were informing the informants of those new emerging horizons while being in arms. The new horizons were very different from those that they saw prior their involvement in armed groups, and were therefore leading them out of the groups. The noble ethos of defending your country from the aggressors was met with the huge disappointment of having to fight your friends and relatives, while being commanded by people who did not care about that ethos, or of your personal well-being. The masculine notion of a strong mature soldier was met with the reality of being a subordinate junior, known just as enfantes. The positions that the informants ended up in, due to their own movement in the social environment and because of the chaotic changing environment of the war, made them to see the sort of horizons that were mostly discouraging them from further participation in the wars. The disappointing reality of being a soldier hit them only once in arms, but that disappointment and those experiences were in turn informing them of another horizons, leading them out, because the changing horizons mark new boundaries in the social field of action. One horizon looming in the distance and encouraging the informants to exit the groups was informed by the promises of educational opportunities after disarming yourself. Unfortunately for many of the informants, those were yet another empty promises.

This chapter indicated how children do use tactics, occasionally employ strategies, in doing those become active agents in the public domain, and while doing that, challenge the existing generational

order, family dynamics, and notions of masculinity. Next chapter sets out the moving social environment where informants operated, namely Congo.

4. Congo and the two Congolese wars

A war started in Congo in 1996 in the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide. At the time, Congo was still known with its former name Zaire. The name Zaire was the invention of the country's longtime leader Mobutu Sese Seko, who rose to power in 1965. The name was finally changed back to Congo in 1997, when Mobutu was ousted from the power. The Rwandan genocide acted out as a trigger event for the later events in Congo, but equally important was Congo's own development, or lack thereof that had become to characterize the post-independence Zaire. In the next sections I will describe the context and developments that led to the two Congolese wars.

4.1 Congo from 1960 to 1996

Congo gained independence from Belgium in 1960. Congolese Paul-Albert Emoungu, who researched educational issues in Howard University in USA, has concluded that on the surface, it looked like the newly independent Congo had what it takes to become a prospering country in Africa. The country's economy was thought to be among the most industrialized and progressive ones in the sub-Saharan region. Also the education system was seen to be on the right tracks with good literacy rates, although only twenty Congolese citizens had graduated from the Congolese universities under the Belgian rule (Emoungu 1987, 287). Congo had, and still has, abundant natural resources, rich in minerals such as cobalt, copper, tin, zinc, diamonds, gold, iron, ore, uranium and silver (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002, 28).

The abundant riches and the potential in the ground never really benefited the Congolese population at large though, as Congolese political scientist Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja has pointed out. Nzongola-Ntalaja has written extensively on Congo over the decades, and is an expert of administration, conflicts, and public sector capability problems. In the Congolese context those problems are underlined in Nzongola-Ntalaja's book *The Congo from Leopold to Kabila: A People's History*. The natural wealth ended up to the hands of the political leaders and their economic compatriots (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002, 2). Thanks to its' vast size and the natural resources, Congo has drawn outside forces to take part in deciding who is at the wheel of the political and economic power. These willing participants have included not only the neighboring countries and the cold war protagonists, but also characters like Che Guevara. The turbulent early years after the independence led to crises after another. Nzongola-Ntalaja has noted how the situation in the newly independent African giant was made worse by the cold war

countries desire to intervene in the matters of Congo. The first elected prime-minister, Patrice Lumumba, was assassinated in 1961 with the blessing and help from Belgian and US officials, who saw Lumumba being too close with the Soviet side in the cold war. After a few years of chaotic internal politics and secession movements in the east, the chief of staff of the Congolese army, Mobutu Sese Seko, organized a coup and became the leader of the country. Nzongola-Ntalaja has emphasized that Mobutu's promise to fight the socialist threat, which guaranteed him the backing from the western countries, was essential for his long and disastrous cling to power (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002, 141, 270-273). During the cold war era, the threat that the other side posed often overrode concerns for good governing and human rights. Mobutu undoubtedly knew that and used it to his own advantage. In today's political climate, where media and various watchdogs are on the alert looking for misuse and scandals, backing a leader like Mobutu with billions of dollars would not be easy I reckon.

Anthropologist Janet MacGaffey, who has researched anthropology of economics, has brought up how Mobutu was not ashamed of stealing the country's wealth to his own benefits. On the contrary, he even declared publicly that all what can be bought, will be bought in Congo. Hence, according to Mobutu's reasoning, to acquire a position of power made it a genuine barter tool that could be used in efforts to garner wealth and to escape responsibilities (MacGaffey 1991, 33). That Mobutu managed to do exceptionally well according to Emoungu. In 1966, an estimated 60 percent of the state budget was stolen by Mobutu's new elite (Emoungu 1987, 291). Another testimony of the width of Mobutu's kleptocracy was that in the early 1990s his personal assets were estimated to be around five billion dollars, roughly the same size as Zaire's international debt at the time. All this while the GNP per person was among the lowest around, reaching only 130 dollars annually (Berkeley 2001, 111, Emoungu 1987, 288). Congo, equaling Western Europe in area, and rich in both population and natural resources, had a budget of mere 300 million dollars in 1996 (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002, 158). Even from that sum most likely a lot vanished into the corruption in the state-system. In a way Mobutu symbolized what is wrong with African politics, embezzling the national wealth, and devising a one-party rule, none of which was totally unheard of in Africa or elsewhere, but the extent of the sickness in Congo seemed to be unfathomable.

The excess and the duration of Mobutu's plunder was disastrous for the nation as a whole. It was not just the money that vanished into the pockets of the ruling elite. It also had an effect on all the people in the country. According to Nzongola-Ntalaja (2002, 152), the long-running theft of the state's assets and

the corruption found its most devastating effects for the Congolese citizens in the diminishing national economy, disintegrating social relations, and in the near total eradication of the state. In the 1970s, it had become apparent that Mobutu's style of rule, where different factions were pushed against each other, was on the brink of collapse according to historian Timothy Raeymaekers. Mobutu's answer to the economic and social disruptions was a program to nationalize the economy, which resulted in investors leaving the country. The state's already weak measures to provide social services for its citizens deteriorated to the level of being close to non-existent (Raeymaekers 2009, 61). The nationalized state companies and their resources found their way into the hands of Mobutu's extended family, accomplices, and patrons in the privatization program. Mobutu's power was so great that he could do almost anything he wished (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002, 141).

Sooner or later, the flow of money and the silence from the critics in a dysfunctional system must come to an end, and for Mobutu events took a turn for the worse starting from the late 1970s. Anthropologist Benjamin Rubbers has shown how towards the end of the decade, the economy of Zaire cave in as a result of falling copper share prices, lackluster performance of the nationalization program, and wrong decisions on economic policies. IMF's (International Monetary Fund) adjusting measures in the early 1980s made the situation even worse. During the period from 1980 to 1985, the number of people working in public offices halved, and the salaries of those remaining in their positions kept falling (Rubbers 2004, 319-320). For a long time, the state had been there, without providing anything for the citizens. Congolese must have gotten used to it to the extent that they learned how to cope without the state, or in some cases more likely, despite the state. Even though self-reliance was the customary reality for most of the Congolese, everything and everyone has a breaking point, and that goes for Congolese people, politics, and economics as well. After decades of corrupt administration and diminishing economy, Congo, and its' people arrived to the 90s in a bad state. One of the victims of the post-independence development was the educational system.

4.2 Schools and education in Zaire/Congo

Missing a chance to go to school has been one of the many unfortunate outcomes of the problems in Congo. Even if school attendance might have never been that high in the first place, in times of economic and social crises the number of children acquiring an education has a tendency to drop considerably. The educational opportunities, or lack thereof, have an impact on young people's understanding of the chances and challenges facing them, and on the options they see available for

them. Therefore, I will briefly go through some of the developments regarding education in Congo in order to show how the challenges on schooling might have contributed to the decisions that my informants, and many other young people in Congo, were taking.

Practically all the informants that were interviewed for this study were reminiscing the days when they still had a chance to attend a school, and with the same token dreaming about a chance to go back to school, even though the return was not a realistic possibility for most of them. Informant 4, who studied all the way up to the age of 16, had positive memories of the time before the war started:

School was good, because all of us were going to school. There weren't any children staying at home (without school). In my area, parent's prioritized children's education. You may not have shoes, but you would still go to school.

If there was no money for school fees, informant 4's parents sold a cow in order to enable the education for their children. The need to pay school fees was one of the unfortunate outcomes of the problems plaguing the country.

Paul Emoungu, Congolese researcher on education, has documented how during the colonial period, educational programs in the country were handled by catholic and protestant missionaries. The colonial government restricted itself to giving some protocols for the education and financial assistance for the educational programs. The school attendance numbers grew over the decades according to Emoungu, but the education was restricted to basic mass schooling. There was fear among the colonial government that providing higher education for the local elite would create a divide between the elite and the masses of Congolese citizens that might then put the colonial authority at risk (Emoungu 1987, 292-293). Sometimes colonial authorities might have played different sections against each other in order to prevent them from finding a common ground against the colonial power. In the case of Congo, given the size of the country and the large number of ethnic identities, the Belgians probably felt that it's better to keep some distance to all the different groupings. Emoungu has nevertheless observed that despite all the problems during the colonial period, the near total lack of higher education for the Congolese people, and the subsequent turbulent years after the declaration of independence, at the beginning of Congo's independence, primary level education structure and the literacy rate was still in better shape than in many other countries in the region (Emoungu 1987, 287).

So, Congo had a seemingly good start on matters relating to education, but even a good start does not carry for long if the structures of the economy and society are crumbling down like political scientist Patrick Boyle has observed (Boyle 1995, 467). As an example, during the period from 1990 to 1994, the Mobutu administration used fourteen percent of the budget to defense expenditures, while under one percent was used on healthcare, and less than two percent on education (Bass 2004, 32). Schools operated by the churches were still doing the bulk of the education, state assisting them financially. Schools operated by the state itself were getting under 20 percent of the school's attendance (Emoungu 1987, 293). The problems at the economic and social sectors were bound to have an impact on schooling as well, but the state of the problem and its' consequences were worsened during the war. These problems also had a direct impact on the conflict itself, when there was no shortage of youth with nothing to do, and with nothing to look for. Informant 9, who studied up to 17 years, underlined some of the reasons mentioned above:

Parent's got money from farming, because they had some cows. When the war came, money became a problem. We run away, leaving everything behind, and life became very difficult because everything was looted... there were no school at all, because people had run away into the bush... I joined FDL (Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda) because I followed my friends' example. I enrolled then too to help my country... to get some money to support myself.

Different studies suggest different enrolling figures for school attendance in Congo. In a study from 1980 (Boyle 1995, 475), children's school attendance in the country was still almost at the level of the national goal, but the downhill since then has been steep. The enlistment numbers for students in schools in 2004 were 75 percent at the primary level and 25 percent at the secondary level, whereas illiteracy had grown from 26 percent in 1992, to 41 percent in 2004 (Clément 2004, 9). Another report gave a much bleaker picture of the situation, indicating that the rate of school enlistment was 36.2 percent for boys and 24.3 for girls, whereas the number of boys and girls who have finished their primary education was close to one another, being 62 percent for boys and 60 percent for girls (InDevelop-IPM International Consultants (Jérôme Gouzou et al.) 2009, 35). A third study suggested that only half of the children in Congo will find their way into a school (Boyle 1995, 477). A World Bank Study concluded that out of the 4.35 million Congolese youth aged between 12-14 years old, around 3 million were not in school, and hence had ceased to receive education. Most of the ones out of

school, 2.5 million, were not part of the official labor force either, although many are probably working within their families as unpaid workers. The numbers are even bleaker for the older youth in the study. Out of the youth aged between 15 to 19 years old, almost 80 percent numbering 5.2 million, were not attending school anymore. The World Bank Study claims that out of the 5.2 million not in school, around 90 percent were not able to read (Bashir 2006, 35). A study made in the capital Kinshasa concluded that even though children can enroll to school at the age of six, for many children the first school year comes at the age of seven, eight, or nine. According to the study, at the age of nine, there are not many children who have not attended a school at all, but the numbers for enrollment starts to decline already at the age of 11, and increasingly so after the age of 14 (Shapiro, Oleko Tamashe 2001, 365). That was the reality for all the informants of this study as well, who had had to drop out of school before the primary education was completed.

The informants had studied from five to nine years in school before dropping out. For some, the chance to go to school was sporadic, depending on the financial situation in the family at the time. Informant 10, who claimed to have joined a Mai-Mai militia at the age of nine said:

Parents lived on selling crops... when they returned from the markets, they were able to pay the school fees. When the money came, we were able to go back to school... parents gave us the school fees and clothes... I joined the militia because there was no money to pay my school fees...I was always sent back from school... When I was missing out on everything, and I had some friends who were joining arms, so I joined also.

Not having money to pay school fees was the most common reasons among the informants for the drop out from school. Informant 7, who joined a Mai-Mai group when he was 12 recounted:

My parents paid my school fees, but when I was in primary sixth... they divorced and father was not able to pay the school fees anymore. (Then I was) working in the farm. Life became difficult, so I decided to run away and join Mai-Mai.

For some, the school came to an end when they decided to join an armed group, but for many the schooling had already ended at the time when they joined the conflict. Informant 11, who had joined a Mai-Mai group at the age of 16 years old said that:

I did not go to school, because there was no money, so I stopped it. As a jobless... as I had (no money) for clothes, I decided to go to arms.

Sometimes others might have been discouraging the school attendance. Informant 5, who stopped school when he was 13 years, was at the time of interview transporting bananas from a plantation to the city with his bicycle, a job that's normally for teenagers, not for 24 years old men:

As a child, some youth were discouraging others, saying that even if you study, you will not get a job. That's the reason many opted for (to start their own business), to get some money.

After giving up on arms and having difficulties finding a job without education, transporting bananas on a bicycle was the best that informant 5 managed to find.

While this study is not trying to suggest that the lack of educational chances in itself drives youth to pick up arms, the correlation between no proper education and bleak future scenarios, and between bleak future scenarios and a willingness to join an armed group seem to work in tandem. Congo's educational system was in troubles already before the war started, and the conflict just made it even worse. The conflict made it harder for the informants and countless other young Congolese to attend schools, because the situation in the families had become socially and economically difficult.

After the decades of negligence, years of conflicts, and the post conflict turmoil, the situation today with schooling seems to be getting worse. Conflict researcher Jérôme Gouzou and his team observed that there is a divide between countryside and cities in regards to having chances to attend school, and this goes especially for girls. Whereas families that are living in the cities tend to be more receptive towards making sure that also girls get educational chances, many families living in the Congolese countryside seem to put boys' education ahead of girls' (InDevelop-IPM International Consultants (Jérôme Gouzou et al.) 2009, 35). Boys probably do get a preference in many other countries as well, despite the efforts from the development organizations to improve girls' educational chances.

The importance of education, something that the informants brought up repeatedly during the interviews, is a common sentiment elsewhere too. Even though education does not guarantee a good job, especially in a crises situation, it is still seen as an important asset in helping yourself to a better tomorrow. Most of the informants, like most of the Congolese, did not get the chance to attend higher education. For many in Congo, even finishing the comprehensive schooling is not possible. The scarcer

the educational diplomas are, the more valued they seem to become in the minds of those who never get to receive them. If the road to self-sustainment through schooling gets blocked because of family's financial problems and conflict, it is only natural for the young Congolese to start looking for alternative routes that could provide them with chances for a brighter future. Thanks to the massive failings of the state, and the example set forth by the country's leaders, Congolese have become good at looking out for themselves, which is the topic of the next section.

4.3 La Dèbrouille- surviving by fending for yourself

Besides education, another outcome of Mobutu's corruption and plunder has been manifested in the various ways that the Congolese have invented in order to make a living for themselves in a situation where the state exists merely to steal from the citizens and to intimidate them. Faced with a situation where you could not rely on the state to provide for anything, people have developed alternative means to reach a livelihood. This section describes briefly those alternative means, and how they have become to influence Congolese' idea of making paths for themselves in the near absence of the state. One of those paths for thousands of young Congolese has been joining armed groups.

As the state had become virtually extinct structure in the everyday lives of the Congolese citizens, existing merely to fill the pockets of those holding the power in the system and to further the interests of the political elite, the grey, or the 'second economy' took over the official one (MacGaffey, Bazenguissa-Ganga 2000, 32). According to anthropologist Janet MacGaffey, who has studied unofficial financial networks in Congo, "the second economy consists of activities that are unmeasured, unrecorded, and in varying degrees, outside or on the margins of the law" (MacGaffey, Bazenguissa-Ganga 2000, 4). In one of his most famous speeches, Mobutu urged everyone to deal with the worsening financial and social conditions by 'Dèbrouillez-vous', which means 'fending for yourself', or 'every man for himself' (Raeymaekers 2009, 61). The declining economic, social, and political values that the La Dèbrouille brought along became known as the 'Zairian sickness', Nzongola-Ntalaja have indicated. The end result, reversal of values, illegality and worsening corruption, destroyed the collective cohesion of the country (2002, 7). Besides Nzongola-Ntalaja, also Raeymaekers has brought up how these alternative means of securing for yourself, La Dèbrouille, has ended up validating corruption, stealing, and looting as a way to secure your existence (Raeymaekers 2009, 61). That sickness must have left its' mark in the country over the decades that it was eating up the country from inside, and it was visible during my brief encounter with Congolese system as well. An example of

participating in the corruption happened upon leaving the country. The border between Uganda and Congo was closed because of an Ebola outbreak near the border. That left planes being fully booked, but 20 dollars for the airline employee made room in the plane, so that I could reach home by Christmas. If it's hard for a wealthy foreign visitor to avoid getting mixed up with the corrupt economy, it must be really hard for the local people who are trying to make their ends meet in order to get the food to the table.

The Congolese state near total incompetence to act like legitimate states are thought to act is nothing new in the African context. African researchers Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz (1999) have shown that after the end of colonization many states in Africa have developed into inefficient constructs as a result of falling apart socially and economically, that in itself is the result from conflicting interests. They have argued that many states in Africa have failed to secure the validity and capability that are the trademarks of the modern state. Acknowledging the power of the institutions over individuals residing at those institutions, and the limited scope of their constitutional authority are the first victims of personalized way of doing politics, Chabal and Daloz have maintained. As a result, the power is personalized instead of residing at the political system and on the positions it entails. The people holding the power in an informal system are liable to their extended families, patrons, religions, and to their own localities. The validity of their power is the result of their capability to keep their personal constituencies satisfied. As a consequence, the state apparatus and its' means are being used for tribal purposes according to Chabal and Daloz (Ibid, 14-15). It is hard to think of any leader who would have exemplified the personalized way of doing politics more acutely than Mobutu. He did not even try to conceal his habit of treating the Congolese Bank and natural resources as his personal assets, because he had no reason to do so. So absolute was Mobutu's power at its height that he could change the name of the country at a whim. As Mobutu set the example to follow, the corruption and the theft was carried out by other people working in the system as well. Political scientist Denis Tull has observed how no one in Congo could have failed to notice that the state system was oppressive, because the numbers of public proxies from different sections of the state apparatus created a dominant and pervasive organization of political repression (Tull 2003, 432).

La Dèbrouille, together with the near total inactivity of the state, has left the Congolese citizens to find their own ways for their personal survival. Sometimes those ways are on the margins of more established routes, at other times considered illegal, occasionally against the customs and norms, but

almost always resourceful. Political scientist Theodore Trefon, who has specialized on Congolese issues for over 25 years, has concluded (2004) that the people of Kinshasa are remodeling the system. With that Trefon means the new and ever changing ways that people have for creating new social relations and contracts. By remodeling the system, residents of Kinshasa get the chance to continue their lives despite the problems (Ibid., 2). Kinshasa is different in some ways from the other cities and regions in Congo, but in this regard the situation is probably similar all around the country, because the failings of the state have been nationwide, not just restricted to the capital.

People have had to learn how to cope and make their ends meet in ways that have required inventiveness and flexibility, always reacting to the changing surroundings. In this system of fending for yourself, people need to rely on one another, but it has also made them skilled in the *La Dèbrouille*. Trefon has observed that the concept has become ingrained into the Congolese reality to such an extent that when Laurent Kabila took over the presidency in 1997, he said that his regime does not have power to change the situation, and parents say the same for their children. There are programs on the national radio where people get to voice their grievances against the state, but at the same time these programs encourage people to come up with their own resolutions, saying that those in power are not able to solve everything (Trefon 2004, 32). When you can only rely on yourself and on those closest to you, people get through by being inventive and active. Anthropologists Anne-Maria Makhulu and Beth Buggenhagen have noticed how fending for yourself has not only become a necessity for one's endurance, but also an ethic. Consequently, having and creating different statuses, obligations and relations has become a constant routine (Makhulu, Buggenhagen et al. 2010, 52-53). A change from one identity to another is an indication of communal, political, or financial aspirations. The growing numbers of identities has assisted the citizens of Kinshasa to compensate the failures of the state, because their net of communal ties has expanded as a result of the increasing identities (Trefon 2004, 17).

To what extent has *La Dèbrouille* altered the very notions of morality is hard to estimate. Mobutu's administration's example must have had an impact on the nation, and when poverty and crises abound, the grey areas of *La Dèbrouille* are probably easier to paint white in moral terms. To me, and for the purpose of this study, *La Dèbrouille* should not be seen from the negative angle. Instead, it is a testimony of the resourcefulness and efforts that the citizens of Congo are showing when faced with adversities. Trefon has noted that the problems of the Congolese state have led to new splits, clashes

and deceptions that people use in their efforts to remodel the country and their communities (Trefon 2004, 19). It is these efforts to remodel that child soldiers have taken on when they have decided to become involved in the conflict. In the next section, the war and the different parties will be introduced.

4.4 The first Congo war 1996-1997

The first of the two wars in Congo started in 1996, but the blueprints for it were laid out during the previous decades. The malfunctioning state, the population growth, the economic problems, and the corruption, coupled with Mobutu's divide and rule-politics, were the foundations for the war. The arrival of the Hutu-refugees after the Rwandan genocide in 1994 acted out as the trigger event for the two wars to come. This chapter introduces the wars in Congo to the extent that it is necessary in order to understand child soldiers' involvement in them.

After the Rwandan genocide in 1994, more than one million Hutus escaped across the border from Rwanda to eastern Congo, like Nzongola-Ntalaja (2002) among others has described. The Hutus were afraid that the Tutsis would revenge the killings of the genocide where close to one million Tutsis and moderate Hutus were murdered. Amongst the Hutu civilians that escaped to Congo were also politicians and members of the Hutu militia, Interahamwe, who had conspired the genocide. Once regrouped at the refugee camps in eastern Congo, the Hutu extremists started carrying out attacks against the Congolese Tutsis and against the Tutsi population in Rwanda. For over two years, the UN and the world watched idly by of the Hutu militias' violence in eastern Congo, because the idea of disarming the militias residing at the refugee camps did not gather volunteers capable of doing it. After appealing to the international community many times in order to get the people responsible for the genocide to face charges in Rwanda, the Rwandan Tutsi-led army attacked the refugee camps in Congo where the Hutu-militias and the politicians were living (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002, 223-224). Rwanda's motivations at this stage could be considered legitimate, as the need to get the parties involved in the genocide to face charges was understandable. Rwanda's attack to Congo must have stirred relations among the different ethnic groups and between the two countries. Congo was a mess at the time, there was a shortage of land and jobs, and then over a million refugees arrives, who are followed by an army chasing them, representing ethnic identities that were contested in Congo as well.

Eastern Congo has a sizeable Kinyarwanda-speaking population, who essentially are Hutus and Tutsis that have moved from Rwanda and Burundi to Congo over the decades in order to escape the persecution prevalent at times in the two countries. Stereotypes about Tutsis being cunning and greedy

and not true Congolese can be found from eastern Congo. People referred to them in less flattering ways when I asked about their status in North Kivu. Like political scientist Mahmood Mamdani has pointed out, most of the Congolese Tutsis were living in the North and South Kivu provinces. The influx of over million Hutu refugees after the genocide strained the relationship between the Tutsis and Hutus in Congo. Also the relationship between the Kinyarwanda speaking people and other Congolese ethnic groups, and the relations between Rwanda and Congo became highly stressed as the result. The people of the Kivu provinces started to live through the Tutsi vs. Hutu-enmity in their everyday existence (Mamdani 2001, 234, 256). The Tutsis' land owning rights in the Kivu provinces have been debated over the years. In times of crises, people have a tendency to seek support and security from a group that they identify with, and sometimes that belonging is felt along ethnic sentiments. It is easy to imagine 1990s to be a bad time to be a Tutsi in eastern Congo, because the social and political problems of the country heightened their position as being outsiders in the eyes of the others, who felt to be true the Congolese.

It was not only Rwanda with whom Congo's relations became strained, because also Uganda got involved in the wars of Congo, by arming the Rwandan and local Tutsi-armies, and later on sending their own troops to Congo. The involvement of the two neighboring countries from the east gave a chance for the local troops, who had been fighting against Mobutu, to join forces with Uganda and Rwanda in their efforts to get rid of the longstanding dictator. The newly created AFDL (Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Congo-Zaire) was led by a Congolese militia leader Laurent Kabila, who had waged his own guerilla war against Mobutu already from the 1960s.

Informant 4 had no trust for Tutsis but he still had to fight with them in order to get rid of Mobutu in the first war in Congo:

Tutsis came as Kabila's mercenaries. Tutsis were the ones behaving badly, they were even killing small children. Tutsis came with their own intentions, but Hutu's are the real Rwandans... I was in AFDL under Laurent Kabila. It was a rebellion movement which came to fight Mobutu government.

Informant 8, who joined an armed group at the age of 15, also wanted to get rid of Mobutu:

I joined because Mobutu's soldiers were disturbing us... I joined to get revenge.

Informant 6 experiences', who was on the government side at the time when the first war started, painted a picture of Mobutu's army's actual willingness to participate in the conflict:

When Mobuto-war came, I was a civilian guard. When the war came, we run into the bush... (later on) I was told that all soldiers hiding in the bush must leave the bush and return to arms. When I returned with my arms, I found that they (Kabila) had won the war.

Thanks to financial, material and human power from Rwanda and Uganda, Kabila's troops took over the capital Kinshasa in eight months, leaving Mobutu to flee the country in 1997 (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002, 225-226). The citizens of Kinshasa were positively surprised that the soldiers in Kabila's AFDL army, many of whom were children, did not loot the city nor resort to violence (Trefon 2004, 152). In the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide Mobutu's long term came to an end. It seemed like there was a strong desire to get rid of Mobutu all around. In Congo, people were tired at the financial and political crises, and had had enough of Mobutu's army's looting. The neighboring countries did not object, on the contrary, many of them offered help to Kabila on the way. Even Mobutu's long time backers in the west had nothing to say, as Mobutu's importance had diminished for them at the end of the cold war. In less than a year, without heavy fighting from the side of the Congolese army, Mobutu was out, and Kabila became the new president. Although Laurent Kabila did not get to enjoy the relative peace as the country's new leader for long before the former allies from the east turned against him.

4.5 The second Congo war 1997- 2003

The second Congo war started already in 1998, after Uganda, Rwanda, and their local Congolese backers in the east of the country got upset when Kabila did not hold on to his promises to give access to natural resources in exchange for the received military help in ousting Mobutu. Another contributing factor to the disappointment against Kabila was his way of resorting to politics of ethnic-bias, which led many of his supporters in the east to leave him (Scherrer 2002, 341). The motivations for Rwanda and Uganda to get involved in the effort to replace Mobutu with someone else in the first war were probably manifold, including selfish instrumental reasons, as well as a genuine worry over the situation of the neighbor in the east that could spill over the borders.

Kabila probably felt like being between a rock and a hard place, because the sentiments in the country were very much against the foreign influence in Congolese politics and army, like has been described

earlier. Against that background, in order to be seen as a legitimate Congolese leader, I believe that he felt the need to distance himself from his backers who were considered to be of foreign origin. Conflict researcher Christian Scherrer pointed out how Kabila in television speeches even urged every village to arm themselves and to destroy the opponent, in order to escape the fate of being enslaved by the Tutsis (Scherrer 2002, 255). Uganda accused Kabila of supporting ADF (Allied Democratic Forces) militia, who were fighting against the Ugandan state in the border region with Congo. A more credible reason for Uganda to get involved in the second Congo war had to do with taking advantage of the natural wealth (Clark 2001, 272, 275). Whatever the real motivation was for Uganda to get involved in the second Congolese war, the fruits of that participation were to be seen in the form of natural resources that started pouring out from eastern Congo to Uganda according to various reports and studies.

As Nzongola-Ntalaja has observed, the second Congo war led to the formation of several local militias in the eastern parts of the country. Often, they had little in common with each other except for the wish to topple Kabila from the power, and the external backing that they received from Uganda and Rwanda. The rebels of the second Congo-war in the east consisted of Kabila's former Tutsi-partners who were close with the Tutsi-leadership in Rwanda, intellectuals disappointed with the direction that Kabila had taken after getting into power, people from Mobutu's cliques who wished to retain their former privileges, and members of the Mobutu's army wanting to revenge the shame of the defeat in the first Congolese war. Nzongola-Ntalaja have argued that because the second Congolese war was seen as a civil war, it left the international community to stand by and therefore gave Uganda and Rwanda more room for maneuvering in the eastern Congo (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002, 229, 232). Some of the newly established militia leaders had no political goals in mind, they were in it mainly for wealth and power. Incidentally, this exact characterization is what Che Guevara said of Laurent Kabila after the two had met in South Kivu in the late 1960s, when Guevara was visiting the country (Scherrer 2002, 252).

Although the uprising against Kabila in the east was in many ways created by Uganda and Rwanda, like Nzongola-Ntalaja has argued (2002, 227), one internal contributing factor to the dissent against Kabila was his failure to create a space for a thriving civil society. Another reason stemming from the Congolese internal dynamics was Kabila's reluctance to face the issue of what to do with the Congolese Tutsi-minority in the east, whose nationality-, and landowning-rights had been hotly debated over the decades. Laurent Kabila blundered his chance to be looked upon as a lawful ruler of the country (Clark 2002, 109). He could have brought the nation behind him by repairing the damage done

to the state's financial and social systems during the Mobutu era, and in the war against the outside aggressors, but failed to do so. Laurent Kabila's time as the president of Congo after more than 30 years of guerilla war against Mobutu was short-lived, because he was assassinated in 2001. Nzongola-Ntalaja has brought up interesting fact about the killing. The murder was carried out by a young soldier from Kabila's own bodyguard, who were mostly child soldiers. Kabila was cautioned a few weeks before the assassination that the bodyguards were unhappy because of not getting salaries for a long time. Kabila swept aside the warning, saying that they are like his own children (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002, 246). While it is thought that Rwanda was behind the murder, this is also one, albeit rather extreme, example of youth taking action and changing history. Even if the murder would have been a hired job, it must have been easier for them to persuade the dissatisfied bodyguard into the plot than if the bodyguard would have been happy in the service. Laurent Kabila's son Joseph became the president of the country after the assassination of the father.

The various groups fighting to overthrow Kabila were divided and often ended up fighting between themselves. Additionally, also Uganda's and Rwanda's interests started to differentiate. These developments led to many changing unions within the rebel forces, and lacking for a shared objective made it hard for the public to side with their agenda. It was not only the public at large that had problems sharing objectives with the various armed groups participating in the second Congolese war. Also the soldiers themselves were sometimes having problems understanding the reasons for some of the warring. Some of the informants did have a clear picture who was the enemy, whereas for some others the developments in the fast-paced conflict where alliances and enemies changed repeatedly, were harder to understand.

Informant 2, who ended up fighting in many different groups, did not really know the reasons for fighting amongst the groups:

I didn't know why we were fighting.

Also informant 1 was unsure about the reasons:

When we were soldiers, we were always behind our chiefs, and only they knew what we were fighting for... only our chiefs knew in their hearts what we were fighting for, but us, we were following them behind. That's what I know.

The reasons for fighting seemed clearer to informant 4:

The reason for fighting was a liberation. They were saying that we were fighting against the dictatorship that we are living in. After that we would build the nation. That was the aim, liberation of the nation. During the Mobuto regime soldiers were disturbing the population, you were not able to walk with money in our pockets, and you had no freedom of walking during the late hours of night.

Also informant 9 had an understanding of the reasons for the war:

We were told to take out Mobuto regime, because the way he was leading Congo was not good. We were told to fight him, so that he would run away from the country. His party, MPR (Mouvement Populaire de la Révolution), was not respecting human rights. We were fighting the second republic regime and the things he was doing. That was the aim of the war that we were told.

Informant 7 shared the objective, but was not convinced about the means:

They just died for nothing and they didn't know the reason for it. We were told that we would liberate Congo, but we didn't know how to do it, because we did not see the chief commander supporting us.

Informant 11, who at the time of the interview was still in the DDR-process, and had a longing to go back to fight, did have a motivation for the participation:

We were fighting against foreigners that they would not enter our country, like Tutsis, or others who disturbed civilians. When we heard that some bandits have reached a village and are disturbing the population and no one knew where they were coming from... We went there, and fought them.

The external threat was motivation also for informant 10:

They told that we will liberate our country. We had to fight the Rwandans so that they would have to return to their country. In order for Congo to be self-governing. We were fighting the Ugandans. Ugandans were mixed with Congolese (in APC-militia group) ... we were not killing Congolese soldiers, only the Ugandans after capturing one.

The chaotic alliances, and the internal fighting was a disappointment for informant 3:

I was not understanding why we were fighting among ourselves, they were no Rwandans or Ugandans. When I found out that we were fighting among ourselves, I decided to have a leave from the army.

The same sentiments were echoed by informant 7:

When we fought at evenings, chiefs would go to negotiate to create partnership again. Next day we woke up to fight them again. I found that was a joke.

Informant 4 gave a concrete example of how chaotic the changing alliances sometimes were:

Some of our Congolese officers had taken off their military clothing. We got afraid. We were in one rebellion, but were about to join another, so officers threw their clothes off. Those clothes could be found everywhere in Goma.

Also informant 8 felt disappointment on many levels over the developments in the conflict:

I was joining every movement when they appeared, like Mai-Mai, RCD (Rassemblement Congolais pour la D mocratie), and FDL (Forces d mocratiques de lib ration du Rwanda). The chief rebel leader said that the reason for fighting was that when he would become president, life would be good... Later on, I found out that when the elections came, promises given were wrong. The one who was elected (Joseph Kabila, Laurent Kabila's son) did not keep all the promises... We were killing ourselves. When we were fighting, someone could even call your name, ask you to come here, and you would response... I found out that Congolese are not good. We fought among ourselves, and killing one another, tribes are killing another. It's like killing your brother. We were fighting in darkness, we did not know the reasons for fighting, we were all Congolese... When our eyes were opened, everybody decided to join civilian.

Despite the various ceasefires, the war continued to ravage for years, causing massive carnage on the infrastructure, on people's well-being, and on the natural world. Based on a study by International Rescue Committee (IRC) in April 2001, almost three million people had died, most of them as a result from malnutrition and sicknesses (Clark 2002, 118, 120, 122). Even though the government of Congo and all the biggest warring parties signed a peace agreement in 2003 that officially ended the war and provided a base for elections and for a new constitution, unofficially the war and the discontent was far

from over. By and large, most of the informants had laid down their weapons in 2005. Some a few years earlier, few in 2006. Just goes to show that even though officially the country was at peace, the reality in eastern Congo was something else.

4.6 Continuation of violence from 2003 onwards

The main instigator for the continuation of the violence in Congo was seen to be general Nkunda's troops. Many other groups have been active as well though, but the sentiments inside Congo point the finger at Nkunda. He formed the group in the aftermath of the 2006 referendum, insisting on striving for the interests of all the people in eastern Congo who has ties to Rwanda. That led many Congolese Hutus and Tutsis to join and support his cause in the beginning, but it did not lead to anywhere, and today Nkunda and his troops are seen to work for the benefit of the Congolese Tutsis only. Nkunda's fight for the interest of the Tutsis in Congo, and the continuation of the war has led to cooperation among the other militias in the fight against Nkunda (Spittaels, Hilgert 2008, 6, 13) . According to various news reports, Nkunda was captured by Rwandan officials in 2009, though he is yet to face any charges, and is living in Rwanda. An estimated 7000 child soldiers were yet to be disarmed in 2007 in Congo (Hermenau, Hecker 2013, 1). Like the almost weekly news from Eastern Congo indicate, the war is still not over, although all the biggest warring parties have been disarmed, or merged with the Congolese army. There are local militia groups left, and some thousand Interahamwes are still free in eastern Congo. It is hard to see how a lasting peace could be achieved as long as the questions of Interahamwes and Kinyarwanda speaking population are not settled, because Interahamwes' presence, and Kinyarwandas' ambiguous position regarding rights is fueling the animosities. There are also tensions among other groups that might find its' fault lines and eruptions through the sentiments of ethnic belonging.

4.7 Why the wars were fought

As the wars in Congo were fought with variable motivations and concerns, so too has the explanations been multifaceted as to why it happened. To many researchers, instrumental motivations like greed, has been seen as the main catalyst to the establishment of different conflicting parties. Ola Olsson and Heather Congdon Fors, who are specialized in economics of the developing countries, have noted in their research (2004), that grief and hardship might have initiated the conflict, but the main motivation of the wars in Central Africa has been greed (Olsson, Fors 2004, 321). To Olsson and Fors, the grief and the non-existing resistance from the state, led Congo to competing rivalries. The vast natural

riches, the elite's parasitical leanings, the condition of the social institutions, and the link between grief and the vigor for struggle were contributing causes for the plunder and war in Congo (Olsson, Fors 2004, 334). Chabal and Daloz have asserted that structured violence mushrooms in places where institutionalization of politics is frail, where the rule of law is weak, and where the second, unofficial, economy is strong (Chabal, Daloz 1999, 77). While all the factors above can be found from Congo, there's more to it than straightforward economics and politics that contribute to the creation and developments of conflicts. Congo certainly has had its' share of plunder, both from the outsiders and from the local elite. As an explanation though, resources, or lack of them, fails to account the motivations that stem from social relations and from personal aspirations.

'Ethnic conflict' are two adjacent words which are often used in narratives about conflict motives and that has also been the case regarding the wars in Congo. As more than 200 different ethnic groups have been identified in Congo, their supposed antagonism and rivalry often appear in news in relation to the Congolese conflicts. Ethnicity lends itself really easily for an explanation to violence, and in today's fast-paced reporting ethnicity seems to offer the easiest way to open up conflict motives for readers from reporters' point of view. Social scientists Saskia Hoyweghen and Koen Vlassenroot have emphasized that identification based on ethnic belonging with fixed borderlines is the consequence of a conflict, not a cause of the conflict itself. For them, ethnic background is not the reason for violent activity, it can only guide its' direction. Violence that is informed by a belief centered on ethnicity echoes the importance of one's ethnic background. Consequently, violence has a habit of reinforcing divisions around ethnic belonging, although ethnicity is not the reason for violence as such (Doom, Gorus 2000, 111-113). Ethnic identity seems to matter more when the going gets tough, as people seek shelter from their ethnic compatriots. Other shelters on troubled waters are provided by nationalities and religious communities just to name a few examples.

Ethnic belonging has raised its' head in Congo over the years, but so has the periods of peace and cooperation among the different ethnic groups in the country. Using Hoyweghen's and Vlassenroot's reasoning above, violence in Congo is not the result of the different ethnic belongings facing each other. Violence has been channeled through the ethnic lines, because at that point in time in that particular context, people have sought security and shelter from their own ethnic group, which has a habit of making those outside your shelter appear as enemies wanting to hurt you and your belongings. At some other point in time and in some other context, ethnic belonging has not meant that much to the

same people, nor has violence been slashed out through its' fault-lines. Ethnic antagonism in itself has not been the cause of violence in Congo, only the unfortunate outcome of the ruptures and crises in the structures and social relations.

4.8 Child soldiers and Congo

UNICEF's definition of a child soldier is as follows:

For the purposes of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes, UNICEF defines a 'child soldier' as any child boy or girl under 18 years of age, who is part of any kind of regular or irregular armed force or armed group in any capacity, including, but not limited to: cooks, porters, messengers, and anyone accompanying such groups other than family members. It includes girls and boys recruited for forced sexual purposes and/or forced marriage. The definition, therefore, does not only refer to a child who is carrying, or has carried, weapons. (Based on the 'Cape Town Principles', 1997) (<http://www.unicef.org/emerg/files/childsoldiers.pdf>).

Child soldiering is not a recent phenomenon, nor is it restricted to African countries even though you might be led to believe otherwise by the representation that the issue gets in the media and public discussions. This chapter deals with the reasons that are given for children's involvement in fighting. Based on the estimates of various humanitarian organizations, more than 40 percent of the child soldiers are found in sub-Saharan Africa (Bass 2004, 161). Although child soldiering is not a new phenomenon, the numbers of children in arms have increased over the last decades. Some reports even suggest that at least 40 percent of the fighters in Congo would have been child soldiers (Henriques 2006, 134). If the figure is correct, it is considerably high, although the involvement of various Mai-Mai groups in Congo would help to explain the massive numbers of child soldiers to some degree. Regardless of the precise numbers, it is a fact that there were many child soldiers in Congo and there still are. How, why, and what for, are some of the questions that numerous reports from humanitarian organizations, advocacy groups, and researchers have been asking. As for answers, they have been variable, and sometimes far-fetched.

4.8.1 On child soldiers and humanitarian organizations

Humanitarian organizations and the notions they support, are key players in the issues regarding children's participation in conflicts. So much so that the global humanitarian legislation and the affiliate organizations are seen to provide the backbone to all operations safeguarding children who are involved as participants in armed conflicts (McConnan, Uppard 2001, 16). Media and the global participants use the organizations as guides and as authors on the issue. Local knowledge and conceptions can end up being disregarded in the process.

Humanitarian organizations have to some degree different approaches to the issue of child soldiering, but an approach based on the rights has been the dominant one according to conflict researcher Yvonne Kemper (2005). She has observed that the rights based approach is resting on the notion that all children are entitled to fixed rights, regardless of the situation where they find themselves in. The rights of the children overcome borders and other situational man-made obstacles. Mankind's duty to safeguard the children in the right's based approach originates from the universal belief that children are pure, whose interest is also our interest. Thus the right's based view is aiming to bring care and safeness to children (Kemper 2005, 14). The rights based view cannot cover all the corners in situations where children themselves have crossed the borders and man-made obstacles, and by doing that leaving the presupposed care and safeness behind. Children are also entitled to agency, to the right to react and to seek ways to improve their situation. The rights based approach sees violations against children from the parents and societies, but in the process it makes children passive objects, stripping down their own will and capabilities.

4.8.2 Reasons for child soldiers' participation

Various explanations have been employed to cover the reasons and the growing scale of children's participation in wars. Political scientists Simon F. Reich and Vera Achvarina have mentioned severe economic hardship, increased numbers of children without custodians, and the expanded availability of small-arms as some of the factors that are seen to have contributed to the growth of child soldiering (Achvarina, Reich 2006, 131). A report on the Congolese society and culture states that the reasons why children are joining are a mixture of compulsion, grievance, vagrancy, and being an orphan (World Trade Press 2010, 14). The reasons listed above disregard the possibility that there might have been true will behind the decisions to join. Jill Trenholm has argued that the economic scarcity and the

martial situation acted as significant contributing factors for her informants to join. A wish for a salary, or a recognition through wearing a uniform can inspire children to take up on fighting on their own will (Trenholm 2013, 41). Also Amnesty International's report has indicated how the prospect of a salary from the army can make even the already once demobilized children return to the troops (Henriques 2006, 134). These reasons were mentioned by some of the informants of this study. Though the instrumental material reasons do not reveal anything about all those children who did not join, despite living in the similar circumstances with those who did. Several informants mentioned the unreliable nature of the promises one receives in army. It is hard to see that those promises would have been sufficient alone for the informants to join armed groups, especially given the bad reputation of the Congolese army. Like Danish anthropologist Henrik Vigh has pointed out, seeing the reasons being first and foremost financial misses out on the intricate acts in the social realm. It is not to say that financial opportunities and new chances in the social world would not be linked, but they are not alike (Vigh 2006, 29).

Anthropologist Alcinda Honwana has come up with reasons for joining armed groups that she terms 'indirect coercive mechanism'. Those include coercion, demands originating from one's group of acquaintances, being physically safe, getting a chance for reprisal, being able to feed oneself, and being protected from the elements (de Boeck, Honwana 2005, 41). A UNICEF report said pointblank that the children in Congo, especially those growing up in the eastern parts of the country, have lost their childhoods because of theft. Children are having no alternative than to join, because of severe economic hardships, being left on their own devices, having no home, and because of other dangers resulting from the conflict (Bell 2006, 2, 4). Also longtime NGO consultants Isobel McConnan and Sarah Uppard have concluded that the financial strife and the involuntary conscription leave no other choices for many young people in Congo than to join (McConnan, Uppard 2001, 37). As an explanation these are invalid in my opinion, because once again, it really does not say anything about those millions of children in Congo who never got involved with the fighting. Additionally, the 'forced-to-join'-stance paints an ugly picture of the Congolese parents and of the society at large. Sometimes the truth can of course look ugly, but in this case, seeing the phenomenon as a result of involuntary movement misses out on the child soldiers own motivations and actions. Two of the 11 informants in this study were kidnapped and the remaining 9 said to have joined voluntarily. To say that the remaining 9 were forced to join because of the circumstances disregards completely their own agency, and the agency of those who did choose not join.

Development, or lack of it, has characterized many African countries over the decades. Therefore, it is not surprising that some of the reasons for youth to join armed conflicts stems from the problems in development. Anthropologist Jon Abbink and historian Ineke van Kessel have noted that the massive population growth and struggle for resources that characterize many inadequately operating African countries has meant for many young people deteriorating prosperity and missing the chances for the necessary transitions on the social level (Abbink, van Kessel 2005, 1). Developments at the global level does not explain the great differences between countries for child soldiering though (Achvarina, Reich 2006, 132). I would also add that the global level developments as an explanation is insufficient shedding light onto the differences inside countries for child soldiering.

While it is easy to agree with Achvarina and Reich on the critic for the global explanations, or using poverty as the explanation when analyzing the child soldier problem, their own explanation for the main reason for children's participation in conflicts falls short too. Achvarina and Reich have argued that the level of security that children have at security camps is the main cause for recruitment of children into arms. Safety, or more precisely lack of it at camps is able to account for the differences in time and place according to them (Ibid., 134, 138). As a primary explanation, warring parties' chances for recruitment from camps is not satisfactory, because the recruitment, voluntary or not, can happen anywhere, not just at refugee camps. As an example, all of my informants were living at home at the time of their recruitment, nor have I seen any studies which would suggest that most of the recruitment happens at camps. While it's certain that recruitments happen also at camps, it is too simple an explanation that does not seem to reflect the reality.

Some studies have acknowledged that many child soldiers say that they joined voluntarily. Political scientists Elettra Pauletto and Preeti Patel have granted children's own wish to join, but their rationale for where that wish originates from is too one-dimensional. They argue that because the prevailing family structures and financial situation compels children to work at home, more so than before the conflict started, the lure of an army, providing nutrition, security, and action can be too hard to resist (Pauletto, Patel 2010, 52). Again, while there's no doubt that the worsening social and economic situation at home push some children to join armed groups, as an explanation, it fails to account for all those who do not join, and all those conflicts where child soldiers do not exist. Not to mention that working at home, helping your family after school, is the norm for millions of children around the

world, including all the informants of this study, therefore it cannot explain the motivations to join armed forces even if there would have been increase of the work due to the war.

Even when child soldiers own words about voluntary conscription are taken into consideration, it is often seen to have happened in a situation where there have been no other choices. Jay Williams, who is specialized in international law, has observed that despite some children being forced to join, most children at arms are youth between the ages of 14 and 18 years old who have said to have joined at their own free will. Williams uses double quotes around the word 'voluntary', because he points out to two studies that show how many have had no other choices than to join (Williams 2011, 1074). Or like political scientist Lorraine Macmillan have noted, in cases where voluntary recruitment is acknowledged, it is often seen to have occurred in a context where actors have been too ignorant to foresee the outcome of the decision, in other words to have acted illogically. This angle misses the particular settings and time in which children make decisions. Never mind how restricted the choices might have been, they can still be sound moves (Macmillan 2009, 43). For many of my informants, the time in the armed forces was not what they had expected. Getting food was sometimes problematic, promises were broken, and having to fight against your fellow citizens instead of foreign aggressors were the most often mentioned disappointments. Being disillusioned about what life in the armed forces would be like is not restricted to child soldiers though. The most common complaints that the informants had have been heard many times from adult fighters as well, and not just in Congo, but from all over the world.

There are similarities between children who end up fighting, but there are also differences between them. The drives that push them forward, the pulls that suck them in, and the whirlwinds created are always individual to some degree. Conflict researcher Joanne Korbin has noted how a child might choose to get involved in fighting as an active agent if he or she sees that there's no way to avoid being a participant, or if they support the reasons for fighting, or as a way to obtain the necessities for survival. Participation can also work as an avenue for higher self-respect, and attaining respect from elders (Korbin 2003, 435, 440). In the case of Mai-Mai fighters in the Kivu provinces, anthropologist Luca Jourdan have observed that the majority of the soldiers enrolled voluntarily, but it happened against a background of narrow number of options (Jourdan 2011, 97). The choices and prospects that a child growing up in a country like Congo has are in many ways more limited than what they are in a

western country. Yet they have some choices, otherwise all the children would have ended up joining, not just a small fraction of them.

In a study of Congolese child soldiers, some of the reasons for joining voluntarily were found out to be general inactivity and not having a job, achieving a higher stature, helping to chase out the troops from other countries, getting away from bad family situation, impact of mates, retribution on behalf of close ones who had been victims of violence during the conflict, family's inability to look after them, sympathizing with the objectives of an armed group, aspirations for a greater personal safety, urgency to try to help ones family's income, will to obtain land, and the alleged economic gains to be made (Watchlist 2006, 43). Many of the reasons listed by the Watchlist report were mentioned by my informants. Despite the common denominators, every case is still different to some degree. Therefore, it is important to treat everyone individually.

Many of the informants were at pains to achieve their desired goals and stances in life before the war started. The lack of educational chances and getting a decent job were mentioned often. Honwana has argued that it is not just family relations and customary rituals, but also education system, religious institutions, and organizations meant for young people that have had a part in becoming a fully matured individual in a society. During economic crises and conflicts, these establishments have suffered badly, making youth to come up with solutions on their own on how to succeed in social becoming to an adult status. Some of the chances to accomplish it are participating in conflicts and politically motivated upheavals, Honwana has observed (de Boeck, Honwana 2005, 37).

Anthropologist William Murphy, who has done research about child soldiers in the Sierra Leonean and Liberian civil wars, has identified three prevailing portraits of child soldiers in the two countries. One is where child soldiers are seen to have been forced to join, and therefore being static objects in the conflict. The second portrayal is to see child soldiers as being young radicals, revolting against their marginal position in the public realm. Unlike in the first portrayal, here young people are seen having an active agency, reacting to the circumstances. Seeing child soldiers as young gangsters, responding to the adversities from a selfish angle and profiting from the turmoil is the third common portrayal (Murphy 2003, 64-65).

Common to all three portrayals is to see grown-ups having neglected the children. To Murphy, they all catch something essential of what children go through in civil wars, but they all miss one important part of the puzzle. That is how the structures of the social networks, and their ideas for integrating children

into the armed operations, affect children's participation. Therefore, Murphy has brought out a forth portrayal that he has termed 'youth clientalism model'. With youth clientalism model, it is possible to accommodate how young fighters handle their action and subjection in a social system of restricting patrimonial networks, where their subservience to adults is a combination of cruelty, individual generosity, and interrelation. Youth is relying on 'big men', whose wishes they pursue in order to reap financial and social gains. Political parties' sections for young members have been important arenas for these systems of reciprocity. Murphy points out how many former child soldiers bring out the importance of their commanders, from whom they have gotten food, shelter, and a chance to sustain, in exchange for duty (Murphy 2003, 69-70). Some of the informants in this study did mention their commanders in a positive context, like informant 5:

A soldier is working only when the chief is ready. You worked for the leader you like. Soldier is like a lady without a man, you make your own choice.

Also informant 7 gave recognition to his commander:

Commander looked after us well, since we were not missing on anything.

Whereas some others expressed their disappointment when their commanders could not, or would not, deliver what they had promised. Informant 4 did not get respected:

We were called *enfants* (French word for children). We were known only as *enfants* to our commanders.

Commanders did not leave a lasting positive mark on informant 5 either:

Commanders decided to take (our) food and go out to sell it. Medicine was also sold, so they only gave small proportions.

In the Congolese context, the youth clientalism model might place too much importance on the 'big men', and on youth's desire to carry out the big men's wishes in my opinion. Mai-Mai militias, who hosted many of the child soldiers, did not have the sort of political structures where big men could pursue their personal goals by using child soldiers, because the Mai-Mai leaders were not high-profile politicians or businessmen. Before the war, local politicians and other power holders did use occasionally youth gangs to pursue their businesses, but the war periods were chaotic and the coalitions

ever-changing to the point that following one commander, or big men, must have been almost impossible.

In a situation where you don't have a chance to educate yourself, or get a decent job that would support your independent life, or see possibilities on the horizon for achieving any of those, joining an armed group may work as a route towards immediate and to-be-reaped rewards. Despite having less room for maneuvering, and fewer chances when compared to youth in the western countries, it is still incorrect and harmful to see a context like this as compelling youth to join. It is not absolutely necessary for them to join in a context like this, but they make an active choice to join in order to improve their short-term and long-term situations in a context where the options are limited and characterized by uncertainty, but also by new opportunities.

The phenomenon of child soldiering has some common characteristics that were analyzed in the previous chapters. Every conflict and every decision to partake is still of particular nature, therefore making it important to take the local context into consideration. In the next section, I will outline some of the reasons why Congo had, and to some extent still has, so many child soldiers.

4.8.3 Child Soldiers in Congo

There have been many explanations for the high number of child soldiers in Congo. Some of them are stemming from some unique Congolese circumstances, like in the case of Mai-Mai-militias, whereas some others are of more universal nature. Anthropologist Luca Jourdan has observed two primary reasons for the occurrence of child soldiers in the eastern parts of Congo. Firstly, Mai-Mai militias were operating in the countryside of North, and South Kivu provinces. Secondly, thousands of young people and children enlisted to the militias as the result of the social and economic problems that has made it hard for the youth to assimilate into the society. As the land distribution system and educational institutions were at disarray, many young people in the Kivu provinces sought to find an alternative route to social becoming from the armed forces, according to Jourdan (Jourdan 2011, 95-96). Another anthropologist, Axel Poullard, has claimed that Mai-Mais' habit of enlisting children into their ranks stems from local communal and cultural sentiments that the people have regarding children. According to Poullard, boys are considered adults from the age of 16 years, which is the age they can get married. Safeguarding the well-being of the neighborhood belongs to everyone, including children, and the scarcity bolsters the duties children face (Poullard 2002, 24). Poullard's take on the issue is somewhat

controversial, because it can be interpreted as if the local culture is not only enabling, but also to some degree encouraging the use of children as soldiers. Whether that is what Poullard really intended is hard to know, but one has to read explanations like that carefully. There aren't any doubts though that the occurrence of several Mai-Mai militias in the Kivu provinces long before the wars started, coupled with their 'home defense-ideology', has made the recruitment easier and more common than might have been otherwise the case. On the other hand, all but one of the nine informants in this study, who said to have joined voluntarily, escaped from home which would indicate that the sentiments of their parents and home communities were against them joining armed groups. Eagerness to defend Congo from the outsiders definitely was one important reason for many of the informants to join, and that eagerness was one reason for the existence of the Mai-Mai militias, but not the only one.

As much of the Kivu provinces are suffering from high population densities, there's a shortage of land. That shortage, coupled with the economic problems is another explanation given for the high numbers of child soldiers. Jourdan has observed that the land owning rights went through changes that increased the disparity between generations, and created new dynamics between them in eastern Congo. Younger generations emerged as the losers, leaving behind a number of young people with no access to land. The withering Congolese economics could not ingest the leftover youth, and the increasing population pressure made the situation even worse according to Jourdan. Youth in the Kivus felt degraded already in the early 1990s. It was against this background that many young Congolese in the Kivu provinces sought membership in the armed groups in order to become someone socially, and to get retribution against Mobutu's violent administration (Jourdan 2011, 96-97). Many of the informants in this study were experiencing firsthand the problems described above. There is no doubt that the problems for the youth had started already long before the Congolese wars occurred. The informants seemed to value a chance for education over owning own piece of land by a clear margin though. They had seen the hard work and the small income that farming had brought to their parents, and were looking for something else.

Jourdan has argued that as the conventional ways for social becoming were not working anymore, and as there was nothing to replace it because of the massive failures in developing and modernizing the country, the end result was a deep sense of disappointment and annoyance that led many young people to seek membership in an armed group in order to find different paths to social becoming and identity formation (Jourdan 2011, 102). Child soldiering is one of the methods that young people have used to

improve their situation in Congo. There have also been other signs that serve as indications of the problems and changes in the traditional order in the social realm. Development researcher Claudia Seymour has observed some of these, like prostitution, and becoming street children, which have become more common in recent times. To Seymour, these different techniques to survive are indications of the options and compromises that young people make in the unfavorable contexts of their lives. She has noted how it is apparent that youth does come up with practices that help them to fulfill the necessary requisites in difficult context, although the price they pay for it is often great (Seymour 2012, 376, 378). The price to pay for these techniques in order to survive is great, but so is the price of being stuck at the gates of social becoming, with no chance of moving forward, getting a job or an education that in turn could facilitate independent life with own house and family.

Another explanation for the occurrence of child soldiers in Congo stems from the ideas of masculinity particular to the region. Desiree Lwambo has noted in her gender-related research how manliness, exemplified through military, has played a part in the alteration of ideas of masculinity among the civilian population in Congo, especially among poverty stricken males with no educational opportunities or social connections in the eastern parts (Lwambo 2011, 19). In a study about notions of masculinity in Kinshasa, anthropologist Katrien Pype has observed how the image of a soldier continues to be the embodiment of masculinity for adolescent men in the capital, despite all the violent actions that the soldiers have partaken in. That image of a soldier encompasses bodily power, communal and righteous strength, and the safeguarding the population (Pype 2011, 256-257). Informants in this study took great pride in defending the population from the outside aggressors. Especially the Mai-Mais were respected in the countryside as the defenders of the population in the absence of the regular army. The widespread looting and violence that Congolese have become accustomed of from the armed forces still must have lowered the appeal of soldiering to some degree in the eyes of the youth. Revenge, or setting it straight, seems to have been one motivation for some of the informants to join, but the reactions from the civilians towards former soldiers would indicate that there's not much to be gained in the form of respect by being a soldier. Judging by the remarks of the informants aimed at the soldiers of the Mobutu era, the actual deeds of Congolese' army soldiers did not garner respect before the conflict, but the idea of defending your own definitely did command respect among the informants. That would help to explain the popularity of Mai-Mais to some degree. The ideal masculinity and its' representations in a soldier might have been luring young men to join armed groups, and paradoxically also the Congolese army's awful past record in day-to-day existence

with the civilians during the Mobutu era contributed to the desire to join in order to get revenge. It seems like the army had an aura that worked on two totally different levels to the same end result. Although the militarized masculinity was not brought up by the informants in other contexts than defending the country from the outside invaders, that might be down to the nature of the fieldwork data and methods.

4.8.4 Female soldiers in Congo

While all the informants in this study are males, there are female soldiers in the armed groups as well. This chapter briefly describes partaking in conflicts from females' points of view. As I had no encounters with female fighters personally, this will be but a brief introduction.

There have been female fighters in many African wars. Some estimate that all the way up to 30 percent of the warring parties in African wars are women. A 2005 Safe the Children report argued that around 40 percent of the children in armed forces in Congo were girls (Coulter, Persson et al. 2008, 8-9, 19). Almost a fifth of the Congolese army consisted of women. Women's roles in the army varied from fighters, to cooks, to victims of sexual labor. The conflict brought both chances and hardships for Congolese women in civilian. In the absence of men, women took control, and restored social organizations. Women were not just suffering, but also fighting for their endurance. The victim-representations of women in conflicts are easy to come by, but the boost in self-determination and self-assurance does not come across from those accounts, like Nadine Puechguirbal has argued (Puechguirbal 2011, 1273-1274).

Mats Utas likewise has noted that when women are seen only as prey in wars, their reach as relevant agents in the realms of political and social life is missed. Conceptualizing fighters as men is disadvantageous to all the females in the forces. Many of the reasons for involvement in armed forces are same between male and female fighters, but girls often have been trying to get away from maltreatment and scarcity, whereas women have had religious and ethical reasons for joining more often than girls according to Utas (Coulter, Persson et al. 2008, 10-11). Automatically attaching male attributes to soldier's means that women fighters have to overcome the seeming handicaps resulting from their sex in order to be on level with males. It is also easy to agree that the reasons for joining are often similar between the sexes, as the problems they face, and the aspirations they chase, are similar as well. To what extent the sexual abuse that the various armed forces in Congo are known for has been deterring females from joining is hard to assess without interviewing female fighters and those women

who decided not to join. In some cases, it might be that they have joined in order to seek security from that abuse.

In some regards, former female fighters' situation is more difficult than their male counterparts, as the stigma that comes with it is greater, like Utas has observed. Many female fighters in Congo have chosen not to participate in the DDR programs in order to avoid being recognized as a former combatant by the public, because the public at large dreads and mistrusts women who have participated in the war. Unwelcomed at home, and participating in the events that are seen to be out of proper behavior for women results in former female fighters to suffer humiliation that can make the return to civilian life much tougher (Coulter, Persson et al. 2008, 27-28). I would also assume that women's participation in armed groups might put them in shame in front of their communities due to the allegations about sexual activity that women in arms are thought to go through voluntarily, or as a result of rapes. Women participating in conflicts are bound to have broken many norms, and gone through experiences that put them in an altered position when returning to civilian life.

Women's' involvement in armed groups is not just negative though. Just like with child soldiers, also female fighters might be able to gain something positive from being an active agent in a conflict. Those positive experiences might be hard to come by when the focus is, to some degree understandably, on the misery that often accompanies warring. But like Utas has observed, wars bring about a shift in actions and expectations regarding gendered behavior. For some females, being in arms might entail a chance for acquiring influence and a capacity for action (Coulter, Persson et al. 2008, 30). I believe that the sentiments of losing power and control over women is similar among men whose' daughters, sisters, or wives have taken up arms and participated in the conflicts. I saw some women in the Congolese army at road blocks, but most of them were men. Just like in most other countries, being in armed forces is not something that women are thought to do. Even here in Finland that takes pride in being one of the most gender equal societies in the world, women who decide to go to army face questions about the decision. Power, opportunities and resources that membership in an armed force might bring about for a women can in some cases be worth all the questions and ridicule

5. Implications of being young in Congo

Even though children worldwide share some characteristics, and should be entitled to certain prerogatives, the lives that they are living, and the surroundings that they inhabit, can be very different. This chapter deals with lives of the young in Congo in light of the theoretical discussion of the previous chapter, and how their tactics, strategies, and agencies changed their status and perception in their families and communities after giving up on arms. What are the roles, expectations, and notions of children and youth in Congo, and how have those altered due to the changing social environment, and child soldier's own movement in that.

5.1 The roles and expectations towards the young Congolese

Congo, like many African, countries has much younger population than the western countries. According to a report on the culture and customs in Congo, children are seen to be gifts from gods and symbols of affluence. Children are a blessing, and giving birth to a one is a spectacle. Starting already from early childhood, children are coached for the obligations that adulthood in time will bring about. Biological parents are customarily the prime caretakers, although grandparents' role in the upbringing of children has increased as a result of AIDS and the wars that has resulted in the deaths of many parents (World Trade Press 2010, 8). Even if both parents are still living, they might be missing because of the movement that the uncertainty, conflicts and financial concerns are creating (Trefon 2004, 162). That was the case with some of the informants, who had lost a parent as the result of death, divorce, or moving to a new location. Having to provide more for yourself, take on more duties, and to have less time and money for school were some of the consequences that the informants were faced up against.

As unfortunate as it might sound to a western observer, the informants were working already before the war. That is the case for many young people growing up in developing countries. Out of the children aged between ten and fourteen in Congo, an estimated thirty percent are working full time (Bass 2004, 67). The law in Congo forbids working from anyone who's under 14 years, but the law is not really enforced in public. A child in Congo is seen to be an important factor in family's survival (World Trade Press 2010, 15, 18). Congolese parents are often getting the blame from western observers for their children's seemingly unfortunate situation, like the following passage exemplifies: "A number of

children are also forced by their parents to beg on the streets, leaving them vulnerable to beatings, torture, rape, and murder by armed gangs (World Trade Press 2010, 14). The picture of Congolese parents coming across from descriptions like that works to justify the western notions of good childhood and proper parenting, and the interference by the humanitarian organizations in order to deliver those notions of good childhood to Congo.

Those feeling the urge to interfere are missing that children in Congo are seen to be actors already in the present, not just in the future once they have matured enough. Helping out their parents after a school day seemed like the natural thing to do for many of the informants in this study. Informant 5 probably never thought that helping at this father's farm might constitute violation of his rights:

My father was a farmer, there were nine of us children. Through farming profits my father was able to take us to school. We were studying, father was farming, and when we left school, we helped him with the farm.

Helping little bit at home seemed like a natural duty for informant 2 as well:

We were playing football and did some housework. After that I would tell my mother that I've finished the housework, so that she could let me go to play football.

Some of the informants were living away from their parents. Anthropologist Alexandra Cimpric has observed that children are not just part of the family they are born into; they also belong to the community where the family is living. Therefore, it's not only the mother and father who are raising the child, but also their family at large in Congo (Cimpric 2010, 21). Large family networks in the countryside have traditionally served as a structure for backing to the relatives in need, but the war in the country has destroyed part of those networks (Bass 2004, 165). The average number of children in the families of the informants was 6. For some of the informants, the war destroyed the networks for support. The networks changed, but the informants tried to replace them with new means of securing survival. Lwambo has noted how relatives and communities at large act out as arenas where children can watch and gain an understanding by following other people. People in the countryside have come to realize that young men have lost interest in following the proceedings of the village committees, because changes in the social relations have weakened the existing communal order (Lwambo 2011, 17). Losing interest is closely related to the inability of the old order of things to provide spaces and means for young men to reach independence and social maturity. Another contributing factor for the

weakening of elders' authority must have been modern influences such as cash economy, consumption culture, and the trappings from the global youth culture that have reached the Congolese countryside as well.

The number of siblings in the families of the informants was big by western standards. Like economists Oleko Tambashe and David Shapiro have noted that the number of siblings has an effect on Congolese' teenagers' life trajectories. The fewer the number of siblings, the bigger the chances are that sexual activity, marriage, and getting children are being postponed. Also the level of education that parents have undergone, whether they are still alive, place of living when growing up, and school attendance all matter in the trajectory from youth to adulthood (Tambashe, Shapiro 1996, 1033-1036). All the informants of this study were working before the war came, but only two had a fulltime work, for the rest the work was on a part-time basis. A few had worked at gold mines, one was selling products on the street, whereas rest of the informants were working at family farms. Some had dropped out from school already before getting involved with the armed forces, and almost all were longing back to school. With the exception of one, everyone was living in the countryside while growing up before the war started. In this respect, one could assume that their life trajectories had some similarities in the sense Tambashe and Shapiro brought up.

Informant 4, who was already 27 at the time of the interview, had not married yet:

My family has nine children, the other ones have already married, and it's only me remaining. The family is asking me to marry... I tell them to leave me alone, until my situation gets better. Maybe when I'll turn 30 years, if life is good, I'll get married then.

It is customary in Congo to get married once reaching the relevant age and social maturity, according to African researcher Mukenge Tshilemalema, who has written a book on the customs and culture of Congo. Social maturity in the Congolese context is to accept and having means to fulfil the responsibilities that comes with gender, and as a husband or as a wife. Getting married is the norm, an adult who's not married is considered unusual in Congo. In the countryside, women anticipate marrying a man who can provide for them. It is the husband's task to provide for food, clothing, medical care, and even take care of wife's parents (Tshilemalema 2002, 118, 124, 127). Providing can be a challenge even during good times, let alone during troubled times. Informant 4 had two children with two women, but he was not able to provide for them:

Now I cannot be engaged with a wife when life is bad...I do my own cooking and laundry...every child is at his mother, I cannot take responsibility of them. If I get some small money, I sent it to the parents of the girlfriends.

The job that informant 4 had to rely on was selling petrol in Beni. Two and a half dollars that he earned from selling 20 liters did not make it possible for him to become the breadwinner of the family, even though by Congolese standards he was getting old to be a single. Getting married and having children are important landmarks on a path to maturity. Therefore, being married is very common in sub-Saharan Africa, and it often takes place at an early age (Tambashe, Shapiro 1996, 1029). Marriage is still often a prescribed affair in the Congolese countryside, and elderly people play an important role in the matching. As the connections between lineages are important, marriage has an important role in reinforcing and producing relationships between different families. The age for getting married is around 15 years for females, and 18 years for males (World Trade Press 2010, 16). Some of my informants had received a helping hand in finding a wife, like informant 10, who at the age of 19 had been together with his two years' younger wife for two years:

Her mother told me to stay with her, because the two families know each other. Her mother knows that we are staying that way. I accepted what she asked, because I like it too. We love each other.

Those lucky enough to get a full education and to find employment after graduating are expected to share part of the income with their parents. Not complying with the expectations regarding with sharing may lead to witchcraft accusations (Cimpric 2010, 22). Understandably, none of my informants had gotten a full education, but some of them were helping out their parents financially if they had a chance to do it. One informant even sent money to his parents while being in the arms, if he managed to get any. Presumably, the situation in towns regarding the gender roles is somewhat different from the one described above, as Congolese cities have modern influences, like cities everywhere I think. The economic and social turmoil has not really altered the notions of men being wage earners and heads of the families in Congo, even though it has become hard for a lot of men to cope with these expectations (Lwambo 2011, 11). The experiences of informant 4 not being able to provide for his children, nor to the mothers of the children, is an example of the difficulties in coping with the expectations. Not having the assets to provide for the family becomes connected with diminishing self-worth and pride. Not having the means required to take care of one's own have led some men to leave their families in

shame (Ibid., 14-15). Another example is how some of the informants had to drop out from school because their fathers could not pay the school fees anymore. In one case, the mother of the family had died, in another the parents had divorced. In both cases, the fathers were unable to provide in the manner that they had done in the past.

Some of the informants were married, but most were not. Not having chances for education or jobs that could comfortably provide for their family was holding them back from marrying. The reality for many young men in Kinshasa is that they simply are not able to come through with the requirements regarding marriage gifts (Trefon 2004, 171). Although Kinshasa is different from the countryside, in this regard I believe the situation to be pretty similar throughout the country. Many of the informants brought up the impossibility of getting married and settling down because of not having a proper job. Trefon has emphasized that the gap between generations has grown everywhere in Congo, not just in Kinshasa. The social and economic forces affect everywhere, not just in the capital. Children in the countryside want something else than living in a small house with a farm, unlike their parents (Trefon 2004, 170). All but one of the informants were from the countryside, but most of them had decided to live in Beni. One of them brought up that at least in the countryside you could grow your own food, whereas in the cities without a good job you are in trouble. The others, despite the problems they had faced after returning to civilian life, were content that their chances would be bigger in a city.

The opportunities that young Congolese see on the horizon in order to be able to provide for their girlfriends or wives might be one of the reasons leading them to join conflicts as fighters. Might sound farfetched at first, but given the difficulties in making out a decent living, a prospect of a salary that an army promises to deliver, could have tempted some to consider it. Informant 4 received a 100 dollars a month salary while being in the army, which is a considerable sum on the Congolese standards. Informant 3 also received regular salary while being in the arms. Informant 5 was promised one, but never got it. That was the case for some others too, but what they all had in common was that they were promised a salary, or they were aware of a possibility of getting money while being in the arms.

5.2 Changes affecting the notions of youth and maturity

Like already mentioned, most of the informants were living in the countryside before the war started. Some of the changes that made it easier for them to leave homes and join armed movements had started already years earlier, whereas some others happened during and as a result of the war. Cimpric has

observed how the urban migration, salaried jobs, rising consumption culture, and economical problems have altered the authority of parents in Congolese families. Children are more at stake for their own well-being, and having to rely on yourself has a tendency to diminish the power of the elders in the family. Whereas in the past, chronological age and social position were the determining factors in the communal hierarchies, today wealth is becoming more and more important according to Cimpric. Parents' bad financial situation undermines their position, whereas youth, some of which has managed to acquire wealth, are seen by some as the new authors despite their young age. Much the same way as Cimpric elaborated, a child carrying a gun ceases to be seen as weak, but instead as someone posing a threat to the others. While acknowledging children's vulnerability and suffering that they face during adversities, it is also important to realize children's capacity to be active agents. That capacity includes the power to do both positive and negative things Cimpric has maintained (Cimpric 2010, 22, 24). While the problems in the families of the informants most likely undermined the informants' parents' authority to some degree, it's hard to assess to the extent that the informants acted as sources of new power in the eyes of the other children. Their situation after giving up on arms was not affluent enough to be the role models for a new generation. The time that they spent in the arms nevertheless did break some conventions.

Many of the informants expressed concern over the chances that they are facing. In a study about masculinity in eastern Congo, Lwambo noted how male youth are anxious over the options available for them. Learning the skills needed in agriculture feels like a waste, because there's no land available for them to farm, nor is farming lucrative or respected among the youth in Congo. The mass media and modern trends in towns has taught Congolese male youth to seek alternative ways that would bring them the money, esteem, and appreciation they crave for, according to Lwambo (Lwambo 2011, 17-18). Informant 4, who lived in the countryside before the war, emphasized the importance of choosing yourself:

When you are young, it's the time to prepare your life, to choose the place to get money, to decide which part to spend for future life...our region here, there are problems, and it's not possible to plan your future. There are no jobs, they are in other towns. I have stayed in towns, so agriculture is hard for me...you'll have to stay in a place where you can do your business properly, and get money easily...agriculture is

for long-term... in two years you can get crop to grow for harvest. Living in the town, you can get a small job and get some money.

Informant 2 stressed the importance of education in today's Congo. The value of education becomes even greater during troubled times when the straws to hang onto are far and between:

In today's life education is important. First of all, to get education, after education you can have another kind of life. I don't know can anyone have a good life without education because people who never study you find that they are pushing lorries, small jobs that you yourself cannot imagine. But if you are someone educated, you should not end up in such a life. Even if you studied and you don't have a job, you'll not accept to push the lorries, because you'll be shunned. If you're jobless and educated, you'll feel better because you will still have your diploma. You can stay at home with your diploma, so everywhere you choose to stay, there's no problem.

He felt the lack of education in the armed forces as well:

When I was in the army I thought that if I would go to school I could be a big man (army doesn't educate). As I had not have studied, they didn't consider me in the army to fit a higher position, that's why I decided to leave the army...if the army had adults with people who are educated, the army should have big values. But the Congolese army didn't have values because they started recruiting children into the armed forces. They used children's ideas, there was no respect of each other, since we were children.

Out of the 11 informants, he was the only one who had managed to enlist to a school after being disarmed, and therefore on the path to receiving an education:

Today I have resumed school and now I'm studying. The life I was living before is different from the one I'm living at the moment. My mind has changed. Education is in my mind and I've become educated. Now I know how to choose good from bad. If I notice that something is good, I'll do the good, if something is bad, I'll avoid the bad.

Informant 2 was kidnapped at the age of 11. Despite the ordeal of being forcibly abducted, it seemed like in the end he was about to get his life back on track. Reuniting with the parents and going back to

school were out of reach for most of the informants. Informant 3 outlined the possible consequences of not getting a good start in civilian life after the return:

Among the demobilized, some want to return to the army because they don't have work or education. Many soldiers are not educated.

The informants did not let their biological age determine the actions that they saw available for them. De Boeck has stressed that age still matters, but it's not so much tied to actual chronological age, but instead to related age (de Boeck, Honwana 2005, 204). Certain biological age does not automatically bring new social relations and statuses, because social age is part of the puzzle. When circumstances are blocking the traditional routes for reaching that social age, some young people take alternative turns, and disregard whether their biological age would permit them to do that. Informant 11 joined a Mai-Mai group voluntarily at the age of 15:

I did not go to school, because there was no money, so I stopped it...the problem was money. If you have money you have everything ... As a jobless I went into the arms...it was better to go to arms and stay there.

5.3 The status of child soldiers after giving up on arms

Some of the informants had not visited their home villages even years after had passed since giving up on arms. Although I believe that the hesitation for them had more to do with being ashamed of not really achieving anything concrete while being in arms, than being concerned about their parent's possible efforts to extort influence over them again. The reactions from the citizens of Beni towards former soldiers were a telltale of the unorthodox agencies and positions that child soldiers in the local context were seen to have. Informant 3 described the sentiments from the people of Beni:

When I left the army, the civilians were afraid of us. They thought that I might still have a soldier's mind.

Also informant 5 mentioned the projections that people might have towards them:

Till now, I have not robbed or done anything harmful to civilians. I have a good life with them... if you had pictures of yourself while being in arms in your house, you had to take them back to Conader, so that you will not have any signs of arms in your house (that other people would not know about being a former soldier).

Even though informant 7 initially returned to his home village, the reception was not that welcoming:

When I left arms, my parents welcomed me, but some neighbors were afraid... neighbors thought that I had become a very bad boy because of staying in the bush (with the militia he was part of). They thought that I might kill them, but that was not my plan...they thought that if I stay, other Mai-Mais would come to disturb them again...my parents thought that it's not good for me to be at home, so they took me to the center to get some education...my problem in civilian life is that people don't trust me.

Informant 9 had bad experiences as well:

People consider us as enemies, because we were soldiers. They say that we made them suffer.

The sentiments were shared by informant 10:

I'm living well with the people, but we are badly looked, we make noise according to them, whenever some demobilized makes trouble we all get the blame... sometimes among demobilized there are thieves, so then all child soldiers are blamed for that because the thieves have no jobs.

Some informants were already adults at the time of giving up on arms, so it's hard to estimate would the reactions from civilians in their cases have been different if people would have known that at the time of joining they were still children. In some other cases, the knowledge of child soldiering did not lead to more benign reactions. That I believe stems from the fact that from a Congolese perspective, children who left homes to join the conflict did just that, left their homes leaving behind the parents and the siblings. The reactions then can't be just pity.

If a quest for independence and a chance on advancing on social maturity were some of the reasons that led many young Congolese to join armed groups, it seems like they genuinely found that freedom and maturity only after giving up on arms. Almost all the informants were relishing the command-free life that being a civilian grant you, despite the problems of money, lack of education or proper jobs.

Informant 3, who left the arms in 2005, was a happy man:

Since I left the army, my life is good. When I wake up in the morning, I'm on my own. Nobody can tell me what to do. I have no wife. When it comes to money, I'm using it as I like... I've found that I'm living well right now. Nobody can command me, I'm in charge of my own life. I'm living well... In the army I had many problems while being under command of others. Even the job you do not like you had to do. Now I'm in command myself.

The same freedom was echoed by the informant 5. He left the arms in 2006:

Since I left the arms, I'm ok. I have been working since I got the demobilization ID card, I'm free. I got bicycle, and that bicycle is helping me... there's nothing wrong in life at the moment. The small money we are getting is helping us in the daily life. We are not begging or following orders from other people. I'm looking money slowly, after getting some it will help us.

Despite the lousy job of transporting bananas on a bicycle, informant 5 had a bright outlook on his situation:

I have had no problems in civilian life, because when I was young, my parents taught me so well. I will remember the advices I got from the parents, their advices assists me... I've found out that I'm living in peace because while being in arms you had to move around, you would not have time to look after your family. You wouldn't have any time to plan your family's future. When you would die you wouldn't have anything to help your family in the future, like taking care of your children and wife. After that I left I found that I'm planning the future of my family, I've got a plot of land. They are the most important things since the demobilization.

Informant 8 left the arms in 2006, after spending 10 years as part of a local Mai-Mai group:

The changes have been good, because when you are in arms, you don't have a fixed place, it changes every day, I found out that being in arms is a waste of time. Going back to civilian to work for own life was good... There was no salary. We worked from 1st to 31th of the month and there was no salary. Since I have been adult I will not steal anymore, so going back to civilian life was better, so that you can plan to build your own life... Life was very good before the war, we got good money and the

life was good. Nothing was difficult, but when you are young you want to experience everything. When I left the mining, I joined in arms, but I have found that life was more difficult in arms than in civilian so I went back to become a civilian.

Prior joining the Mai-Mai group at the age of 15, he was working at mines, which seemed to share some similarities with being in arms:

Sometimes you could go for six months without getting any minerals, but the day you will get you forget all the bad experiences of the past... you worked in a group, you had a leader who was supplying food, after getting money, you would pay him. For medicine the same... we were living in a group of mutual assistance, in that way you could get clothes, or something else. That's how I was living when I was living a civilian life.

Informant 10, who was still under-aged at the time of the disarmament, was notably disappointed to the life as a civilian:

Adults who are demobilized gets money but we don't get any. Their life is going well since they are getting money and soap...When I left the arms we were not given anything, not even a franc. We got trousers and shocks and then they took us home... I don't like to live without any job. I'm staying near the market. If I get at least 200 francs, it will assist me.

All bitterness aside, there was a silver lining to informant 10 as well:

I wouldn't like to return to war anymore. I prefer suffering in civilian than in arms. I would better stay civilian than be in arms, which is commandment after another, too much commanding in arms. That makes you easily angry. Better miss something while with living with parents and friends than miss in the army...travelling without seeing your family. When you leave the arms, you have a chance to see your family, going back would mean not seeing them.

Informant 11, who at the age of 17 was still participating in the DDR-process at the time of the interview, predicted some of the problems that he faces once the process would be over:

When I was in arms, I didn't know how to leave the arms. I didn't know how to get money when joining civilian, because of no school or jobs... getting money will be a problem Parents are afraid of joining the arms again.

For a 17-year-old that had a pregnant wife back at home, the period in the DDR-process felt like a waste of time:

We are just staying, when food is ready we eat, only that there is nothing else... I dislike that they have told us that we have left the arms, but we are staying without doing anything, jobless. I would like them to take me back to my parents.

5.4 An effort not in vain

Informant 11's experiences of the DDR-process where nothing happens and rumors of financial benefits create mutinies, together with his parents' concern over returning to arms, serve as a reminder that despite the freedom that many former child soldiers enjoy as civilians, the problems in the reintegration might push others to join armed groups again.

Most of the informants had not achieved money or a high profile job as a result of their participation in the wars in Congo, on the contrary most of them seemed to be in a precarious situation at a first glance living among civilians as a former combatant. Yet, they all had achieved some things directly and indirectly as a result of their participation in armed groups. For one thing, they learned to appreciate the freedom of making decisions on their own, no matter how the restrained by the volatile economic situation. Secondly, the participation had transformed their physical location from the countryside to Beni, leaving behind the grounds and professions that their parents had cultivated. While many were longing for the chance to spend time with their parents, the life in the urban environment was still preferred over the rural existence. Additionally, their social position had changed from dependent youth to an independent adult. Some had started families, a few had found a wife while being in arms. The DDR-processes, despite all the problems and mismanagement, had enabled many of them to start small-scale businesses on their own, never mind how meagre the income might be.

While it can be argued that they could have achieved these transformations without taking part in the conflict, participating nevertheless helped them directly and indirectly. As most of them were in a situation where attending school, finding a good job, and therefore starting an independent life and

family on their own was near impossibility before the war, the participation did open some doors for them. The horizons that led them to join were in many ways very different from the ones they observed while being in arms. That is the nature of social environment in motion, as theorized by Vigh. As they moved through the environment, and were moved by the environment, they acquired new horizons that informed their understandings and chances of movement in it, eventually relishing the life of a civilian. The vital conjunctures that Johnson-Hanks has used to describe a major life situation that has the element chances and ambiguities in it, were not only leading the informants to join armed groups, but also leading them to leave the groups at a later stage. The expectations that the informants aspired, and the destinies they were trying to be dodge, were informed by the horizons that the informants were seeing at that particular moment. The un-concrete, yet to come nature of the prospects at any given vital conjuncture makes it necessary to gain a view of the horizons informing their actions. The trappings of being young in Congo was not the only reality guiding and inspiring the informants' movements. Another contributing factor to their actions and agencies stemmed from the characteristics of Kivu provinces, which is the topic of the second results chapter.

6. The Kivus and the Mai-Mais

It was not a coincidence that much of the fighting happened in North and South Kivu provinces, nor was it a coincidence that many of the child soldiers were fighting among the Mai-Mai militias. This chapter deals with the circumstances and developments particular to the Kivus and Mai-Mais that contributed to the child soldiering phenomenon in the region. Kivu provinces and Mai-Mais are dealt in this same chapter, because in many ways they were closely interconnected, and influenced by one another.

6.1 The social terrains in the Kivu provinces

The North Kivu province, where all but one of the informants were living before the conflict started, is in northeastern Congo. In what follows, I will describe some of the local developments in the North and South Kivu provinces that had an impact on the informants' prospects for future, and on the actions that they pursued to improve their lives. What was the impact of the developments in North Kivu on the prospected horizons of the informants? How did the changing social terrains move them around, and did they manage to navigate their projected course in it?

The province has a population of around 6 million people on an area that is roughly 60 000 km², therefore almost 100 people on average are living on km². Rwanda and Uganda are close-by across the border. Happenings in one of the countries traditionally has had an effect on the others in the Great Lakes Region of Africa, as both armed and unarmed people move across the borders, creating tensions and dynamics. Anthropologist Janet MacGaffey has described North Kivu as being an agrarian landscape with farming and cattle herding being the main modes of subsistence. While Kinshasa is over 2000 km away on poor roads, the close-by Rwanda and Uganda have meant that the unofficial second economy has flourished in the region. The scarce chances for acquiring salaried jobs for the ever growing population of North Kivu has lead people to embrace the various ways of securing subsistence and shelter through the second economy (MacGaffey 1991, 45, 47). In North Kivu, there can be almost 300 people living on a square kilometer on certain areas, so the competition for farmland can be fierce (Prunier 2010, 142). Although the average population density in North Kivu is three times smaller than the one Prunier mentioned, much of the land area in the province is natural parks, other protected areas, and mountains, making the land suitable for living more populated than the average figure might suggest.

Political scientist Denis Tull has emphasized that in order to understand the war and the various factions of it in the Kivu provinces, one needs to integrate the recent happenings with a view that goes back decades in an area which has been infamously challenging to control (Tull 2003, 431). The Kivu provinces were, and to some degree still are, hotbeds of rebel activity, but there's more to it than opposing the Rwandan and Ugandan influence in the Kivus. Many locals put the blame of the conflict and violence on the outside aggressors and on their local proxies, but insurgency goes a long way back in the Kivus. Belgian conflict researchers Ruddy Doom and Koen Vlassenroot have emphasized how opposing the outsiders influence on land-related issues is nothing new in the eastern provinces of Congo. Sometimes the objection has been based on folk beliefs, at other times on past events. Regional armed bands have gathered to guard the established ways of controlling land ownership. Many historical cases demonstrate a connection between the tribal bands and local rulers in the eastern parts of the country. The various ethnic groups in the Kivu provinces have established political bodies, and the rich soil have advanced a sense of collective land owning rights. Hence, a sense of security through ethnicity, both on a cultural level, and as a way of acquiring rights to the land, has been always at the forefront in the Kivus (Doom, Gorus 2000, 55, 282).

French historian Gérard Prunier, who has often covered the Great Lakes region of Africa in his writing, has suggested that there are at least three reasons why ethnic groups have stuck together more in the Kivus than elsewhere in Congo. One reason is the highland geography of the region, which can accommodate regional micro-level distinctions. Another, according to Prunier, is that the Kivus have not had any large scale industry that would have caused large masses of people to move after a job. The third one is that because of the impact of the kingdoms of the Great Lakes region of Central Africa, many ethnic groups had grown into small chieftains that resisted the central powers' influence during the colonial era (Prunier 2010, 146). Therefore, it is easy to assume that the high population numbers, the economic crises, the shortage of land, and the citizenship issues have strengthened peoples' sense of ethnic belonging in North Kivu. The conflict made the distinctions between different groups bigger, when people were seeking security from one's own group, hence deepening the animosities among the different groups. During the war though, it seemed like the strongest animosities were felt towards those considered to be outsiders and not so much towards other Congolese groups. That was the case at least on a verbal level, in practice it was mainly Congolese killing another Congolese, like the informants found out to their great disappointment.

Koen Vlassenroot together with political scientist Saskia Van Hoyweghen have argued that much of the co-operational activities in the Kivu provinces were centered on ethnic association already in the late 1980s. This was exemplified in North Kivu when two ethnic groups, Nandes and Hundes, mobilized to oppose immigrants coming from Rwanda who were perceived to pose a threat to the well-being of the local population. A conflict for land developed then into a conflict where ethnicity was the decisive factor, and it culminated in violence against the Rwandans in North Kivu in 1993 (Doom, Gorus 2000, 106). Like the chapter on Congolese development since independence brought up, the Kinyarwanda-speaking Congolese' citizenship-, and landowning rights were contested many times over the decades since the independence in 1960. Tull has noted how the land that used to be a communal source of wealth started to be a financial resource after village chiefs became incorporated into the party-politics. When the land started to be distributed from chiefs to political actors, large parts of the population in the Kivus became excluded from land ownership, which had both economic and social consequences according to Tull. The growing population numbers, the ethnically motivated conflicts of the early 1990s, and the aftermath of the genocide in Rwanda made the situation even worse for many people in the Kivus (Tull 2003, 437). Also Vlassenroot has stressed that despite the Kivus having a long tradition of local militias, the armed groups of the last 20 years have been more against the prevailing authorities than having sided with them. The reason being that this time around they have consisted largely of unemployed young men who have been disappointed by the existing order of things (Doom, Gorus 2000, 282).

6.2 The horizons of the informants while growing up in the social terrain of North Kivu

Political scientists Morten Bøås and Kevin Dunn have observed how these shared circumstances have left many feeling social discrimination, notably among the younger people (Boas, Dunn 2007, 15). When faced with adversities, it is easy, and to some degree a human characteristic, to start looking for scapegoats from those who are deemed to be outsiders, and as a consequence of that, start feeling closer to your own group of belonging. It's also unsurprising that young people, on the brink of becoming adult members of society, get frustrated and decide to find a way on their own if the customary routes to full maturity and social independence are blocked. To gain an understanding of the various horizons informing and guiding the informants' actions, and of the shifting environment moving them around, it is necessary to incorporate the micro level dynamics of the informants' lives with the macro level developments in the Kivus.

Informant 11, who joined a local Mai-Mai group at the age of 16 years, felt the dire situation at first-hand:

Before joining, we were working in agriculture. There are 7 children in our family. Money and everything else came from agriculture. The problem was the money. If you have money you have everything. I did not go to school, because there was no money, so I stopped it.

The war made the situation worse:

We run into the bush from the farm, we got food there. People did not go to school. As a jobless I went into the arms. I decided to go to the arms because I had no job. It was better to go to arms and stay there.

Also informant 3 became frustrated over the situation before the war that led him to join a Mai-Mai-group at the age of 17 years:

I followed my friends (in joining), I followed them I when saw that I was alone in the village... The reason for joining the army was that my father had already died. I had no possibility to finance my studies. I left the school at primary 6 (being 12 years old at the time). I found out that level 6 does not able one to work in an office job... So I found that I could only work manual labor (with that education). I was jobless in the village, as I had no job. If something went missing from the village, I was blamed for it. That's why I left the village, to avoid accusations of theft... I joined army voluntarily.

The case of informant 3 is an example of the situation where there are many issues to consider when trying to fathom youth's horizons and actions in a conflict situation. His friends had already joined, he was not working nor studying, his father had died, and he came to the conclusion that his education would not be sufficient for any good jobs. He also mentioned the desire to liberate the country and protect the citizens from looters.

Informant 7 felt the impact of the problems in Kivu as well, influencing the horizons, directing the tactical action:

Doing agriculture, life became difficult so I decided to run away and join Mai-Mai... I was 12 when I joined the arms... I joined voluntarily with my friends after I noticed that life had become difficult. There was no way to go to school, so I decided to join... If I would have had to tell parents that I will join the arms, they would have refused, so I just escaped from them. They wouldn't have liked that (their) child joins the arms.

What are the tactical capabilities of a 12-years old boy is a good question, with no unequivocal answers. Yet the dire situation informed the angle and the projections. The school fees were a problem for the informant 4 as well:

When we had no money in the family to pay the school fees, if there was no one to authorize selling of one of the cows, our farm was near the river so we went fishing to get some fish and to pay the school fees with the money we got from fishing.

For him, the situation turned for the worse after the Rwandan genocide:

When the Rwandan genocide happened, everything became worse, because in our area we were living with some Rwandans. They were coming into our villages and we used them in agriculture. We gave them money, accommodation, and food. After finishing one, we would go to look for another one. After the genocide they were going back to Rwanda, but some of them came back with military training. We found out that they were the same people who came back to our villages, (this time) with arms. They had all the military (tactics) planned...they knew we had our farms, crops, etc. When they came, they came to look for our wealth, and started killing us. Tutsis were the killers. We were living with both (Hutus and Tutsis) in our villages. If they didn't like you, they would give you poison. During the rebellion, they showed their ambitions and nature by killing indiscriminately anyone... We didn't know what kind of hearts they had when we were working with them (during the refugee phase). They were poisoning us. When Kabila reached Kinshasa, troubles started. Tutsis were told to go back to home. During that time Tutsis came back from Rwanda to enter Goma (capital of North Kivu).

Informant 4's story is a testimony of the tensions that the Rwandan genocide and its' aftermath had created. Tutsis forced him to join a militia at the age of 17 years, during the second Congo war in their fight against Kabila after Kabila had broken his promises to his Tutsi backers.

Informant 8 had bad encounters with Congolese army's soldiers during Mobutu's regime that encouraged him to join a Mai-Mai group at the age of 15 years:

I didn't join the arms because I liked them. I joined because former Mobuto soldiers made us suffer, they stole our belongings, so I decided wear the uniform. My aim was to fight the Mobuto soldiers one day... As they run away from the FDLR war (the first Congo war), when those soldiers met you, they made you carry their lootings. Sometimes they would beat you, or loot your belongings...When I was interviewed by the chief why I had joined the arms, I replied that I would like to liberate Congo. Then I was asked will I succeed. For the test, they gunned into the air to see if we can resist the noise of a gun. Some run away, but I remained. So I was chosen immediately, they found out that I was a fighter... All four children in our family joined the arms voluntarily. All four are still alive. Two of us demobilized, two are still in arms.

Life before the war appeared good to him, even though it might have violated many notions in the UNCRC:

Before I joined the arms, my family was working in mining... gold and diamonds, because it was most common work in the Orientale province. All my friends were also digging gold and diamonds... Life was very good before the war, we got good money and the life was good. Nothing was difficult, but when you are young, you want to experience everything. When I left the mining, I joined in arms... My parents paid the school fees, so when the war came, life changed for worse. Everybody was looking for another life, so I chose arms.

Informant 5, who joined the Congolese national army FAC (Forces Armées Congolaises) at the age of 16, had a friend with whom he decided to enlist:

I had a good friend and if he had not slept in our house, then we would sleep at his house. With that friend I got the idea to join in the arms. When I left the arms and he

heard about it, he also quit the army... I joined voluntarily in arms. I joined after finding out that people were running everywhere, sleeping in the bush, to hear that a relative has been killed. All these things made me to decide to join the arms... So, I decided to go work elsewhere. I went to arms in order to fight in the region, to end the war.

It may not have always been that simple, but informant 5 underlined the decision that he felt was available for him and his friend at the time when they decided to enlist. Life before the war was good according to him:

My father was a farmer, there were nine of us children. Through farming profits my father was able to take us to school. We were studying, father was farming, and when we left school, we helped him with the farm. We were living well, like others.

Informant 5 was 13 years old when he quit school, so he was working at his family's farm for three years, before enlisting to the army.

For informant 10, life was hard before the war:

As we were living in our area, the problem was that I didn't have money for school. I was playing football... My parents got some money from agriculture. They lived on selling crops to Kabasha. Our parents paid the school fees when they returned from the farms. When money came we were told to go back to school, parents gave us money for the school fees and for clothes.

He was selling peanuts and cigarettes on the streets when there was no money for school. The informant 10 was only 9 years old at the time of joining a Mai-Mai group, in his own words voluntarily. While it's fair to assume that he did not fully know what he was getting into, it is also important to take his own words and reasoning seriously in order to get information of the tactical agency that they possess or strive towards for. That's the only way for acquiring an understanding of the scenarios and prospects that lead children like him to join armed groups at a very young age.

When we joined the arms, there were two of us, me and a boy from the neighborhood. We reached the Kasua area, and joined Kitambala's group (Mai-Mai leader). I joined the Mai-Mai when money for school was not available anymore. I was always sent back from the school. That one evening, we went and slept in Musineni, and then we

slept in Lubero. We stayed there until the Mai-Mai came. We run away from our family to join. We did not want them to know that we would join arms.

6.3 A Family matter

When being asked why children might want to join armed groups, informant 10 said that:

It's because sometimes family has neglected the child. Some of us were told to leave the arms but the children sometimes refused to leave. Sometimes they have caused problems in their families.

Informant 6 said to have had a satisfactory life before joining the war, but an altercation with his brother-in-law acted out as the trigger event for him to join Mobutu's guard at the age of 15:

Before I became a soldier, I was ok, because I was selling in my brother-in-law's shop... and I was also digging gold with friends, it was helping a little...I joined voluntarily. I was not forced to join, I liked the arms. I joined the arms because I was angry at my brother in law, because he chased me from my work, and let me walk in the bush. I thought that when I'm in the arms, I will kill him.

The brother-in-law accused him of stealing from the shop where they both were working at the time. Although the anger must have played a part in the decision, there were other reasons as well:

I entered into the army without any problems, my friends joined also.

Also informant 9, who joined Kabila's FDL (Forces Démocratique pour la Libération du Congo) in the first Congo war at the age of 17, shared the experience with his friends:

I joined FDL because I followed my friends' example. I enrolled them to help my country... We were carrying guns to defend our country from the enemy. I joined FDL because it was the national rebel movement of Laurent Kabila. I joined them after finding out that life had become a turmoil. During that time FDL soldiers were getting some salaries. I joined to get some money to support myself, since the Mobuto soldiers had looted our belongings. A car travelled to different villages to recruit young people who had support for them. I decided to join with friends... I was free from my family to join.

Young people come to have joint prospects and perspectives, like Vigh has observed (Vigh 2006, 92). Also informant 9 experienced the difficulties that the wars brought with them:

I was depending on my parents, they got money from farming because they had some cows... When the war came, money became a problem. We run away leaving everything behind, and life became very difficult because everything was looted. Getting money, food, and medicine was problematic, and there were no school at all because people had run away into the bush... Mobuto's soldiers were looting.

The various problems at the local, national level, and international level has had a profound impact on the developments in the two Kivu provinces. The micro level developments happening in the Kivu provinces over the years, together with the larger regional upheavals helped to create localities who were filled with idle, marginalized, and frustrated young men. The social terrain moved, impacting the positions of the informants, and their chances of moving in it in the crisis. The momentary nature of those horizons needs to be recognized. North and South Kivu provinces had problems already well before the wars started due to the ethnic animosities, local history, regional spillovers, land owning issues, and population pressures. These developments were exacerbated when the wars started. Therefore, they were deeply influencing the horizons and vital conjunctures appearing in front of the informants, the chances they tried to chase, and the destinies the informants tried to avoid. Another local influence informing the youth in the Kivus was the development of local militias using the name Mai-Mai.

6.4 Appearance of Mai-Mais in the context Kivu and social navigation

North and South Kivu were the two provinces that suffered the most during the two Congolese wars. Much of the violence against civilians was seen to come from the RPA (Rwandese Patriotic Army) and from their local Congolese allies, like also many of the informants in this study claimed. At the same time, it was in the Kivu provinces where coordinated fight against the invading forces was formed. One of the coordinated efforts to fight were Mai-Mai militias. Five of the informants, and thousands of other young Congolese joined or were forced to join to one of the many Mai-Mai groups during the war. This chapter deals with how the particularities of the Kivu provinces were manifested through the Mai-Mai militias.

The word Mai means water in Kiswahili, a Congolese dialect of Swahili. The name originates from a conviction that when water that has been ceremonially treated with an elixir is splashed onto a person, bullets can't harm that person because the bullets transform into water (Wild 1998, 452).

Informant 7 described the process as follows:

We were sitting in mornings while doctors were preparing the anti-bullet medicine for us. They oiled your body, created scars.

Informant 8 was introduced to the medicine as well:

I was joined by baptism (with ceremonial water). I was 15 when I joined voluntarily, because they told that we would liberate Congo with the water of Kasindi.

Informant 11 told about the rules regarding the anti-bullet medicine:

To get the anti-bullet magic, you are supposed not to make any mistakes, like rob, or have sexual relationships, because the medicine does not have effect then.

Punishment for breaking those rules was tough:

When we heard that a Mai-Mai had disturbed a civilian, he was punished. He was told not to do it again because of the rules... The punishment was a beating.

Adhering to those rules during the war time when the promised salaries might not have been paid, when there were occasional shortages of food, when looting and sexual violence were common must have been hard sometimes. For informant 11, the rewards from the medicine outweighed the pleasures that a soldier might enjoy in the form of stealing and having sexual relations, because he believed to be under the protection of the medicine even at the time of the interview. For him, the medicine had worked well in battles:

We had nearly no guns at all, we had only 2-3 guns, and some arrows. They (the enemy) were all armed, but they feared that we were not killed by bullets (because of the magic). They found out that we can't be killed by bullets, so they run away. When we shot them, they were dying, but we cannot die to their bullets. Their numbers were like 10 or 15 times bigger.

Taking food from civilians is pretty common during wars, but informant 11 stressed that they did not steal food in order to follow the rules and to have the medicine protecting:

We got food from the civilians, from the markets, and from the bush. Like cutting bananas, village chiefs allowed us to cut bananas... Some went to medical treatment (at a hospital), but we did pay the bill. It was not stealing.

Emma Wild, who has researched religious encounters in sub-Saharan Africa, has brought up how certain avoidance rules have been so important among the Mai-Mais that they have tested each other's trustworthiness by firing at another soldier in order to see whether the soldier is wounded by the bullet, and in that way to find out whether the avoidance rules has been complied by the tested soldier (Wild 1998, 453). At the time of the interview, informant 11 had a pregnant girlfriend, but he still believed to be protected by the anti-bullet medicine:

I'm not a Mai-Mai anymore... I still have anti-bullet... No mistakes mean that I'm still covered by anti-bullets.... I'm sure that bullets would not kill me.

Also for informant 6, the anti-bullet medicine was something new, and most likely played a part in his decision to enlist to a Mai-Mai group. Initially, he had been part of Mobutu's army, but like so many others of the national army at the time, he escaped to the bush when the first Congolese war started. Upon returning from the bush the news had caught up with him.

I found that they (Kabila) had won the war, and that there were soldiers who were not killed by bullets... My friends were Mai-Mai too, and they asked me to join.

6.5 Respect despite going against the grain

Mai-Mai is a general term for a local militia in Congo. As such, Mai-Mai does not refer to any particular group, unless the group's leader is mentioned too. On a good day, Mai-Mais were local home defense militias, like they claimed to be. On a bad day, they were just like any other armed groups in the two Congolese wars when it comes to respecting human rights. That being said, they still commanded respect, not only from the informants of this study, but also from the local civilians in general. Often Mai-Mais were seen to act in the absence of the national army. At some other times, they were seen to be helping the national army.

I believe that the respect for the Mai-Mais stems partly from those avoidance rules, partly from the determination to fight the foreign influence, and partly from the past developments in the Kivu provinces. Political scientist Mahmood Mamdani has observed how the militia occurrence and the Mai-Mais in the Kivus goes back to the 1960s, when local militias regrouped to oppose Mobutu's coup (Mamdani 2001, 256-258). Although the Mai-Mai militias have had a long history in the Kivu provinces, it was in 1993 when the political unrest and financial turmoil led many young people to drop out from school and left with nothing to do, many of them ended up joining the ranks of Mai-Mai in the Kivus, giving Mai-Mais a new momentum (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002, 242). Vlassenroot has noted how the Mai-Mai groups evolved around their regional tribal neighborhoods, but one common denominator was the belief in the invulnerability through the use of the divine crops. Another shared character between the different Mai-Mai groups was dislike towards those who were deemed to be outsiders ethnically. Despite springing from the local communal structures, Mai-Mais' relations with the leaders of their communities has been problematic (Doom, Gorus 2000, 282). In the early 1990s, local armed troops marshalled people to fight for the local chiefs against what was thought to be external influences. For Vlassenroot and Acker, the birth of the earlier groupings of Mai-Mai has to be found from the structures of social isolation (Vlassenroot, Acker 2001, 60).

It seems that in the beginning, Mai-Mai groups were siding with the local leaders, but later on developed a mind of their own. A mind that sometimes was on the same tracks with the local political elite, while at other times going against the established norms and traditions. During the war, the young fighters filling up the ranks of the Mai-Mai groups most likely stirred the local conventions and relations, even though their efforts to keep the outsiders at bay still commanded respect. Wild has observed that when the social and political situation in the 1990s worsened, the Mai-Mais reemerged in those neighborhoods which were the most disparaged. She has asserted that the main emphasis for Mai-Mais has been safeguarding their terrains, so that others would not start to live on them (Wild 1998, 453). This 'home defense' seems to be a trait that different Mai-Mai groups have had throughout the decades of their existence. Informant 4 described Mai-Mais' stance on the foreigners in the conflict. He was kidnapped by a Tutsi militia at the age of 17:

Mai-Mais are patriotic, they love the country... They were attacking us, because they were not happy that Tutsis came to dominate the Congolese. During those times, if Mai-Mais noticed that you were a Congolese, they would not kill you, only Tutsis

since they were foreigners. Mai-Mais asked from you are you Congolese, and would hide you. They would take you in their side for fighting... Mai-Mais didn't like foreigners to dominate the Congolese, and that's what people want today too.

The frail truce that the local communities in North Kivu had agreed upon in 1993 was destroyed by the arrival of the Hutu refugees (Vlassenroot, Acker 2001, 63). The aftermath of the Rwandan genocide changed the conditions and prospects for many of the informants as well, like has already been described earlier. The lure to join an armed movement that sprang from the local beliefs and conditions, whose' fighters were protected by the anti-bullet medicine, and who commanded respect from the population, must have been high for many children in eastern Congo. Additionally, people were really fed up with Mobutu and his ill-mannered troops. When they saw an opportunity to get rid of the long-time dictator, the lure to join became even stronger.

In the first Congo war, Mai-Mais were initially part of the rebellion against Mobutu, but soon they were fighting against the rebels, because their aim was to oppose the Rwandese occupation and influence in Congo, and at that point Kabila had not yet gotten rid of his Rwandan allies (Mamdani 2001, 259). Prunier has argued how the Mai-Mais evolved from a mythical sensation into a political phenomenon, ultimately luring in schooled youth as well, who saw a chance for unification in the Mai-Mais' fight against the outsiders (Prunier 2010, 155). Mai-Mais, whose ranks were mostly filled by youth, had chased Mobutu's pillaging troops from the cities in the east of the country, raising prospections among the population of a better administration. Reliance on miraculous forces gave rise to an extra lure for them, leading many young people to join their ranks (Wild 1998, 454). Informant 7, who said to have joined a Mai-Mai group voluntarily at the age of 12 years, explained why many Mai-Mais were often child soldiers:

Child soldiers are used by Mai-Mai, because the children respect the anti-bullet medicine. They cannot be destroyed. Perhaps when it comes others, because of sexual activities or if they had done many things in life, medicine is not taking care of them... The reason why they took child soldiers, whenever they struck medicine to very young, he would become very strong.

The people in the Kivu provinces credit the fall of the repressive Mobutu-era to Mai-Mais in many ways (Wild 1998, 450). Even though various reports show that also Mai-Mais have been guilty of causing suffering to civilians, they still garner respect among the population. There was a positive aura

around them when people referred to them, at least when compared with the other parties in the conflict.

6.6 The many faces of the Mai-Mais

As there were many different groups acting under the Mai-Mai-‘umbrella’, the different Mai-Mai groups also sometimes had different goals and different methods to reach those goals. Some had political objectives, while others just adopted the name in order to create a smokescreen for their cruel antics and exploitation of the people. Conflict researcher Christian Scherrer has estimated that at the turn of the century, there were at least 10 000 Mai-Mai fighters in the Kivu provinces (Scherrer 2002, 261). Political scientists Steven Spittaels and Filip Hilgert have argued that Mai-Mais’ behavior occasionally mirrors that of your regular outlaws in some regions (Spittaels, Hilgert 2008, 15). Vlassenroot has observed that Mai-Mais have been missing a political appearance. Beliefs and contentions of them often have been dependent on the context in question. Chasing momentary targets has sometimes meant changing affiliations (Doom, Gorus 2000, 283). While it’s certain that Mai-Mai groups, like so many other armed factions in the Congolese wars, have changed affiliations, I would still argue that there was more to it than being common bandits, or just running after short-term pleasures. For informant 11, there was a duty to fulfill:

We were fighting against the foreigners so that they would not enter our country, like Tutsis or others, who disturbed civilians... We heard that some bandits have reached a village and are disturbing the population and no one knew where they were coming from. We went there, and fought them. If we liked them, we just took away their arms and take them prisoners, and immediately they joined our group.

It was that duty that left a positive mark to local civilians as well, even though Mai-Mais were not innocent when it comes to crimes against the civilian population.

Informant 10, who said to have joined voluntarily APC (Armée Populaire Congolais) at the age of nine, and was later kidnapped by a Mai-Mai group, explained what it meant to be a member of the Mai-Mai:

We were told that we have to fight APC as an enemy... They told that we will liberate our country. We had to fight the Rwandans, so that they would have to return to their country... In order for Congo to be a self-governing. We were also fighting

the Ugandans. Ugandans were mixed with APC. We were not killing the Congolese soldiers, only the Ugandans, if capturing one.

The time he spent in APC was worse to him than the time in the Mai-Mai group:

We were neglected a lot, because we were from APC... We were only getting food; we did not have any salary. We were robbing crops, there was no money... we searched our own clothes... We went to the road, and looted the cars travelling on the road... Medicine we stole from the hospital, and then got treatment... We were in a different position when being in the Mai-Mai group. We got food, and they had their own hospital in the bush, so we were getting medicine.

Also informant 8, who joined a Mai-Mai group voluntarily at the age of 15, had his hopes high in the beginning:

The chief rebel leader said that the reason for fighting was that when he would become the president, life would be good. We would liberate Congo.

Another reasons for him to take part was the legacy of Mobutu, and the Rwandan influence:

I joined because Mobutu's soldiers were disturbing us, I wanted to get revenge... As the Rwandans had bad hearts, they started to put soap into our food in Kisangani. So we left Kisangani to Rumangabo. People were dying to diarrhea because of the poisoning, 30, 38, 40 people were dying.

For informant 7, who joined voluntarily a Mai-Mai group at the age of 12, the anti-bullet medicine played a part in the decision:

I was in a Mai-Mai group. I liked the group, because of the anti-bullet medicine they were using.

Getting food to eat was not a problem for informant 7 either, while being in the Mai-Mai group:

We had a lot of food, we were eating well. We also got medicine, because we had some chiefs as supporters... During the day you would rest. At evening, you would eat...then you would go to sleep. If you got sick, there were traditional nurses, doctors for local medicine.

If the anti-bullet medicine was initially one of the prospects luring youth at a vital juncture to join, in some cases the failure of the magic was informing the changing horizons of the fighters, leading them at another vital juncture to leave the Mai-Mai groups behind. Informant 7 first lost a commander. The commander had had sexual relations with a woman, causing the anti-bullet medicine to malfunction resulting in the death of the commander, according to informant 7. Later on, his close friend died, even though the friend was supposed to be protected by the medicine. These malfunctions of the magic made him escape from the militia group and give up fighting.

To me it does not seem like Mai-Mais would have appeared as hooligans hell-bent on destroying and looting. Not to the youth or to the local civilians anyway. Their reputation did get tarnished during and after the wars due to the violations against civilians, but Mai-Mais still pertained some of the respect and lure after most of the groups had given up fighting.

The Mai-Mais' involvement in the campaigns and violence against the 'outsiders' that happened already years before the Congolese wars must have contributed to the sentiments of respect and appeal that they enjoy in the Kivu provinces. The violent escalades in the Kivu provinces throughout the decades have often been seen as ethnic conflicts. This ethnic antagonism has also made the Mai-Mais appear as the unified front opposing the outside aggressors. Boas and Dunn have emphasized that Mai-Mais' beliefs must be seen as new interpretations of the already existing conventional understandings relating to warring (Boas, Dunn 2007, 17). The roots were already there for the Mai-Mais to appear, and these roots helped the Mai-Mais to get respect and help from the civilians. The Rwandan genocide, and the wave of over a million refugees were the trigger events, but the actual causes must be located from the sentiments and prospects of the youth, who were the ones filling up the ranks of the Mai-Mais. Vlassenroot and Acker have argued that taking up arms have acted as a way to avoid the social death, because it has opened a window to what seemingly looked like an accessible living (Vlassenroot, Acker 2001, 63).

The windows that appeared in front the informants opened the way to the fancied prospects that they were anticipating from the future. By becoming a Mai-Mai enabled them to move to a different position in a moving social environment, chase aspirations relating to food, health, respect, and money, while at the same time avoiding death, both on a practical level through the anti-bullet medicine, and on a social level by moving to a position that entailed command, recognition, and adults' tasks. The history and the developments in the Kivu provinces sprang the Mai-Mais in the first place, but it was

the happenings of the last two decades, and ambiguities and the chances on the horizons that lured the anxious youth at their vital conjunctures to join Mai-Mais and in part turn against the established old order.

7. Child witches and child soldiers

During the last decades, a number of children have been accused of witchcraft in the Central African countries. Anthropologist Aleksandra Cimpric, who has studied the issue for UNICEF, has outlined the basics of the problem as follows:

Behaviours commonly associated with accusations of witchcraft include violence, mistreatment, abuse, infanticide and the abandonment of children...Children accused of witchcraft are subject to psychological and physical violence, first by family members and their circle of friends, then by church pastors or traditional healers. Once accused of witchcraft, children are stigmatized and discriminated for life. Increasingly vulnerable and caught in a cycle of accusation, they risk yet further accusations of witchcraft. Children accused of witchcraft may be killed, although more often they are abandoned by their parents and live on the street. A large number of street children have been accused of witchcraft within the family circle. Vulnerable children accused of an act of witchcraft can be divided into three categories. The first category are typically orphans who have lost one or both natural parents... children with a physical disability, or especially gifted children... Children showing any unusual behavior, for example children who are stubborn, aggressive, thoughtful, withdrawn or lazy, also make up this category... The second category covers children whose birth is considered abnormal... The third and final category concerns children with albinism (Cimpric 2010, 1-2).

There are certain similarities between child soldiers and children accused of witchcraft and how they are seen in their respective societies. Therefore, in this chapter I will describe the child witch phenomenon occurring in Africa and especially in Congo in regards with the similarities with child soldiering. What is the common ground they share, what they tell about the society and about the situation of the children in those societies. That leaves the role of the different churches, who publicly entice violence and hate towards those children who are accused of witchcraft and perform exorcism rituals for the children in exchange for money, to be left out of the focus in this chapter. Likewise, the issue of street children at a larger perspective, who are not all accused of witchcraft, is not in focus in this chapter. It should also be noted that not all children accused of witchcraft live on the streets. Only

the children accused of witchcraft is dealt here, and only to the extent that the issue shares with similarities with child soldiers.

7.1 Children accused of witchcraft

Most of the citizens in African countries are children and youth. They are very much involved in the events and developments, shaping up their communities and countries, despite the tendency to position them at the fringes of developments and common spaces. Youth in Africa don't see themselves, nor are seen by others, as a force to be reckoned with once fully matured, but as active agents whose' existence is felt already during the immediate. The problems in the existing structures and patterns become manifested through the actions of the resourceful children in their efforts to make it out for themselves (de Boeck, Honwana 2005, 1-2, 199). It is these manifestations that are misunderstood, misrepresented and misjudged by outsiders in my opinion, creating advocacies and practices that fail to address the problems. Anthropologists Filip De Boeck and Alcinda Honwana have remarked how despite the precarious situation of not being able to attend school, take care of sicknesses, attain a proper job, or even reach adulthood, young people in Africa are able to generate a status for themselves, and make their presence noted in various public spaces. The precarious situation, and young Africans skills to negotiate their way in it in one way or another, posits them centrally, and induces them with authority, because it is these fringe-areas that act as boundaries where old and new, regional and international, and customary and modern clash and become jointed (de Boeck, Honwana 2005, 10-11).

One highly visible indication of children's activity in the public realm has been the child witch phenomenon that has been occurring in some of the Central African countries, most notably in Congo. Filip De Boeck, who has done fieldwork among the street children in Kinshasa, estimated in 2003 that there are at least 23 000 street children in the capital who are thought to be witches (Cimpric 2010, 14). The actual number of street children in Kinshasa is bigger, because not every child living on the streets is a child witch, but the overall number of children living on the streets in Kinshasa is not known to me. Even less is known about the situation in other Congolese towns, because most of the attention relating to the issue seems to be concentrated in the capital. I did not hear about street children or child witches while in Beni, although I did not specifically enquire about them either. To a casual visitor, street children can easily go unnoticed during the brief moments spent on the streets.

Anthropologist Alexandra Cimpric has noted that the child witch phenomenon has mainly occurred in those Central African countries that have been in turmoil because of wars and political and financial crises over the last decades. Urban life, salaried jobs, consumption economy, strained economics, together with the growing individuality, are some of the reasons Cimpric observed as having changed dynamics in households that in turn has led to disturbances among different sexes and generations. Youth is the age for taking up steps in becoming an active agent in the social arena, the age for having a say in the public life. Cimpric has indicated that children who have acquired some wealth and status in the public life have faced witchcraft accusations. Relations within families and between different generations have been strained because of the chaos in the economic and social spheres of life. Being a witch has acted as one of the ways for gaining independence Cimpric has argued (Cimpric 2010, 2, 15-18, 20). And accusations of witchcraft have been one of the symptoms of the problems and of the changed dynamics in the families I would assume.

De Boeck has emphasized how the gradual dissolution of the country, together with the impacts of the happenings in the neighboring countries, has created new spheres for mortality, and led violence and demise to become more trite and commonplace. The street children in Kinshasa are not involved in matters relating to dying only through the qualities and accusations relating to the witchcraft phenomenon, but also by partaking in on funeral possessions in various clandestine ways. The residents of Kinshasa see street children and child witches as being embodiments of a 'dead society' according to De Boeck. Children are dying, and in the shared conceptions, also causing deaths in greater numbers than before, consequently having stripped the older generations' of their privilege and authority towards mortality (Boeck 2010, 15, 18, 21, Boeck 2006, 7). Gaining independence at an earlier age than what is the accepted norm has repercussions for both the young, and the people around them. Independence can enable and make things happen instead of just watching things happen, but it also changes the relations the youth has among the generational order. I believe that is the case for both child soldiers and child witches. De Boeck has observed how the changed authority, and the notions relating to death has allowed the youth in Kinshasa to leave the old structures and restraints behind, and craft their own moral and social spaces in public life. By discarding the traditional notions and prohibitions relating to dying and grieving, children are deemed as depraved agents in a city that cherishes the righteous Pentecostalism (Boeck 2006, 14). The same seemingly depraved agency is at play when children pick up guns and therefore enter the adults' arenas relating to death, wealth, and

authority. None of this would be possible without the drastic changes that Congo has gone through the last decades.

7.2 Children accused of witchcraft in Congo

The child witch phenomenon is thought to have started in the big Congolese towns during the first part of the 1990s. The development of the issue is seen to be in concert with the changing position and perception concerning children. De Boeck has understandably therefore argued that the changed position of children is a manifestation of bigger transformations (Molina 2003, 18). Despite the relatively bright early years after gaining independence, and the hopeful aspirations that woke up due to the political rhetoric's of the 1970s, affluence passed by most of the Congolese. Coupled with the transformations induced by the growth of commercialism, rural to urban migration, and educational opportunities, the relations between the generations and sexes became strained. A member of a family, who has had the privilege of completing an education and managed to find a job, but would not share the fruits of the position, might be labeled as a witch. Whereas in the past, when social order was modelled after maturity and one's place in a family or a community, today it is modelled after wealth. This has, in some cases, lead children being the powerful ones, leaving the parental authority to diminish even more (Cimpric 2010, 20, 22). De Boeck has observed that Congolese children now have a more significant status in the society. Unlike the passive consumers in the western world, the children in Kinshasa have an entry into the international economic system, and are repeatedly competing against the older generations. Children have an important, but at the same time a problematic stance. In the process, some children have ended up being seen as witches as a result of the breaking up and reorganization of the concepts of maternity, gerontocratic control, and family relations (Trefon 2004, 157).

Javier Aguilar Molina, who has done research for Save the Children on the issue, has argued that Congolese children are more eminent than ever before, but that eminence in the local context is not stemming just from victimcy. To Congolese, street children are also hostile agents who pose a threat, therefore being key players in sex, destruction and wealth. Child prostitutes and child soldiers do not garner the same sort of hatred as the street children according to Molina, because children on the street are the epitomes of the dissolution of families and communities, and the values attached to them. A juvenile witch is not bound by the communal norms (Molina 2003, 19). The accusations are visible indications of the changes that the Congolese society is going through, and of the problems that the

transformation is bringing along. Much the same way, child soldiers are not just victims in the Congolese context. Their decisions, actions, and positions in the social realm, together with the changes transforming the society, has altered how child soldiers are seen and acted upon.

It has not been only the material realms where changes have taken place. Transformation of the notions regarding children and youth has happened on other realms as well. De Boeck has described the changes on violence and death as follows:

The oneiric, nightmarish character of the forms in which violence and death appear in daily life, as well the transformations of the qualities and realities of what constitutes life and death, are characteristic of some deeper alterations that Congolese society as a whole is undergoing (Boeck 2010, 28).

Molina has argued that the phenomenon of juvenile witches is deeply connected to the transformation in the conceptions and positions of Congolese children. Although all the changes are not totally clear to him, Molina nevertheless has identified three common conceptions of Congolese children that has surfaced during the 1990s and last decade. One is seeing youth in erotic light. This has appeared as a result of teenage girls acting as sexy dancers in popular musical groups, coupled with the ever more prevalent child prostitution. Another changed conception that Molina has identified of Congolese children relates to child soldiers, and the third to the issue at hand in this chapter, street children and child witches. Many Congolese children are therefore deeply involved with matters relating to dying, sex, and wealth. To Molina, one of the more profound changes in the Congolese society that relates to all three issues is the absence of mutual help that one could get from the kin and neighbors. The structures and connections for mutual assistance have deteriorated recently, putting more pressure on the closest family members (Molina 2003, 18-19, 23). The emergent notions of children that puts them in ambiguous positions are therefore not just resulting from the economic, social and political problems that the society as a whole is going through, but also from the positions and actions that children landed in, or ended up taking on their own, as a result of the movement of the social terrain, and as a result of their own movement in it. That movement and those actions have been informed by the horizons that children have seen in front of them.

Cimpric has observed that the witchcraft allegations are aimed at children of all ages. One source of allegations stems from the recent changes in amassing wealth that has led some young people in possession of it, because youth in possession of money and power are often dealt with allegations of

witchcraft (Cimpric 2010, 16). Another source of allegations of witchcraft stems from medical, physical, and mental adversities that people go through in their families and communities, because the adversities are sometimes seen to derive from children's involvement in the nocturnal world (Boeck 2010, 28). Many young people consequently reach the status of youth, a time when one becomes more prominent in communal life and starts to acquire a bigger role for him or herself, as witches. A child witch is a manifestation of the society's response to the plight, according to De Boeck (Cimpric 2010, 16). So, much in the same way as child soldiers, children accused of witchcraft are shaking up the norms and conventions of what children can do, and what is their position in the social realm. Being an active agent in the public life, grabbing chances, chasing opportunities, and avoiding the stagnancy that might otherwise wait for them grants them the independence, the possibilities, and the more prominent role that they have been craving for, but it also puts them into a position that emits dangers and evokes hostilities.

De Boeck has noted how children are at the same time central agents and being preyed upon, and in both roles changing the communities in Congo. To him that contradictory image of Congolese children is most visibly manifested in the children accused of witchcraft, who are seen to convey issues relating to strength and sex. The more powerful financial position that some children have managed to acquire has led to strife between different generations. Although the harshness and brutality of the street life is acknowledged, streets are also imagined as arenas to chase aspirations and as avenues for departures from the norm (Trefon 2004, 156,162, 166-167).

As the phenomenon of child witches and of child soldiers, and the reactions from the rest of the Congolese towards them are deeply tied up to the events shaking up Congo, it is therefore vital to track the developments in the society in order to understand the actions of the children and the reactions of the adults. De Boeck has noted that the changes are also creating new connections and sentiments inside the communities, but at the same time they have driven different generations further apart from one another. Like with some of the informants in this study, also De Boeck has observed how youth that is growing up in the countryside are not keen to carry on with the farming, and how those in the cities have been marking new boundaries for themselves in their efforts to gain more liberties for themselves. Urban youth has sometimes managed to create ties based on family or age connections in which authority and wealth are circulated, therefore jumping ahead of the age curve. Age still matters though, resulting in conflicts between different age groups (Trefon 2004, 168, 170). I believe it is the

same aspiration towards social and financial independence, authority, and freedom that are some of the reasons striving young Congolese to pick up arms, or to position themselves to streets. It is also the same dismay, beliefs, and accusations from the older generations that the street children and child soldiers are faced up with. Also the reactions from the humanitarian community is similar for street children and child soldiers, assigning the status of 'only victims' to both groups.

Many young Congolese are motivated by the same feelings in their efforts to escape from the stagnancy that they saw in front of them. De Boeck has emphasized that children living on the streets of Kinshasa are escaping what they deem to be scarcity of their family's situation, seeing the street as a space where they have a chance to chase their own opportunities. The disturbance at the societal and family levels makes the street children's existence possible, by rearranging family relations. These new arrangements are felt at a family level between generations and sexes (Trefon 2004, 168).

Much same way, child soldiers' existence is possible because of those disruptions, and that existence is changing the dynamics between generations. Like De Boeck has stressed, even though age still matters, young people in the cities are converting themselves into adults, and embracing the gerontocratic patterns ahead of their chronological age which creates clashes (Trefon 2004, 170). And it is not only the chronological age that they can get ahead of. If young people are stuck at the position of youth because of the social and economic problems, they can free themselves of the cage of that social age as well by becoming active in the public life and taking up roles, therefore bypassing the customary notions regarding wealth, power, and control.

Children, by leaving their homes and occupying streets, are engaging in positive action in the sense that they are trying to improve their own situation by their own effort. They run ahead of the aging-curve, taking up roles and responsibilities, partaking in on action that is deemed belonging to the adult's domain. All of this is causing a stir among the population at large, breaking up the cherished notions of what are the divisions between the generations and sexes. Being anomalies, they face up charges of witchcraft and mischievous behavior, even though they are only reacting to the failures of the Congolese society to incorporate and maturate them into the existing social order. De Boeck has argued that occupying spaces and roles in the public not deemed to belong to children, street children are not merely taking a stance regarding politics or communal issues, but also issuing moralistic protest against the realities of their lives. Faced up with untimely demise and marginality, youth in Kinshasa are relishing the living by using their own physical corpses in crafting new spaces and spheres for

themselves in the public life, bypassing the old structures and prohibitions, because they have severely disappointed the youth in keeping up with the commitments, therefore having lost power and control to guide young along the traditional pathways towards a comprehension of life and one's place in it (Boeck 2006, 15).

7.3 The common ground between child witches and child soldiers

From the western standpoint, children accused of witchcraft are seen as victims, but in the local beliefs, a child ceases to be a child once the witchcraft has been proven, and a child becomes a witch (Cimpric 2010, 41). Congolese see these children as being agents in their own right, as antagonists, not necessarily to be protected by, but to be protected from (Molina 2003, 19). The exact same words could be used to describe how people feel about the child soldiers. Depictions of children accused of witchcraft are closely tied with the disarray of the norms that matter to the Congolese people, norms that have provided cohesion at the level of families according to Molina (Ibid., 19). Godelier's theory of the imaginary sphere that has acted in tying generations together to the same communal fabric in the reproduction of the society is not working properly in Congo, like De Boeck has argued in the theory chapter. The disappointments and failures at the level of families and of society has left behind a large number of youth who have felt betrayed by the existing social order.

That disappointment, together with the realization of the chances and dangers on the horizons has led many young Congolese at their vital junctures to embrace actions and positions that posits them in opposition with the older generations and order of things. The established social order and hierarchies see it as a challenge to their position, and also disrespect from the youth. Their answer to that challenge has been the witchcraft accusations and the ambiguous status accorded to the child soldiers. The transformations in the dynamics within families, generations, and sexes has resulted in child soldiers and child witches who are the real life embodiments of the changes. They are the embodiments of the ruptures in the Congolese society like de Boeck (Trefon 2004, 155) has argued, cause-and-effect relationships in action. In both cases, children do react, and take action in the face of challenges they are faced up against. Those children, in taking that action, establish new relations and postures for themselves that leave up the rest of the society to abhor them. That's because they are standing on the toes of the existing but in many ways dysfunctional order, breaking bad in order to make room for themselves. For good or for bad, child soldiers and child witches are manifestations of children's agency and newly found positions in the public life.

8. Discussion

The motivation for this thesis was to discover children's own active agency and coping mechanisms', and to propose against the prevailing understanding that during times of crises children's agencies are not absent but heightened with ample of will to live and of desire to enhance ones' position in life. It is not only within humanitarian discourse and in media, but also to a lesser degree in anthropology where children are thought to be passive victims inhabiting a separate space from that of the adults, therefore rendering their participation in adult's domains as forced or senseless without true will or understanding of the consequences. The views that discredit, disables, and disregards children's involvement in public, politics, economics are untrue and unhelpful. They block us from realizing the capabilities that children possess, the agencies to which they commit themselves to, the differing nature of the adversities they are faced up with, and the different backgrounds of the children that in turn influence the actions they take on vital conjunctures. In short, it renders them to the status of a dependable object, often a victim at the hands of adults, at the mercy of the all-knowing older generations. But what if the old order is not able to, or interested in delivering the sort of horizons that would bind children and youth into the existing order of things, give them a sense of meaning, and a chance for participation in that order? Isn't it only natural that in such cases, young people try to forge paths and avenues on their own through unconventional routes that their respective ages would not entitle them to do?

Despite having a clear vision of the problems of common portrayals of child soldiers, both within anthropology and outside the discipline, coming up with sound results that acknowledges the inventiveness, the capabilities, and the experiences of children who were part of the wars in Congo has been difficult. It has been hard not only because of the delicacy of the subject matter, the horrors of war, and the restraints that the respective ages of the participant's poses, but also because of the shallowness of the fieldwork conducted for this study. I have tried to balance the problematic fieldwork material with ample written sources, both on child soldiers and on the development and characteristics of the Congolese society. Luckily for me and for the readers of this study, much has been written on both subjects throughout the years. I have also tried to avoid drawing too strong conclusions from the fieldwork data, and weigh it against written sources on the issue. Hence it is time to go through the premises and the findings of the study.

Like already noted, the premise of this study was to locate and appreciate children's own resourcefulness, agency, and action in situations in which they were stuck at the margins, looking for a way out and more importantly for a way forward. As theoretical concepts to facilitate finding those qualities from child soldiers, social horizons, social navigation, and vital conjunctures were employed. To track that planning and movement of children in crisis and war situations, the concepts of tactics and strategies were introduced. To highlight the changing family and communal dynamics in Congo, transformation and new relations between the generations and sexes were noted. And finally, to address the issue of masculinity, Congolese conceptions of men's duties and ideal soldier were touched upon.

Johnson-Hanks and Vigh has not been the only anthropologists to focus on children's capabilities in coping and surviving in difficult situations despite some of the implicit weaknesses that children have to bear. Mats Utas, Alcinda Honwana, Filip De Boeck, Jason Hart, Veena Das, and many others have noted the same. The theoretical concepts of horizons and vital conjunctures by Johnson-Hanks and Vigh offered me a way to locate the horizons of my informants, and many other Congolese children as well by using written material on the subject. The concept of moving in a moving terrain helped to understand the constant change in their family relations and dynamics, in their home regions, and in Congo and the neighboring countries in general that in turn impacted those horizons guiding the informants' actions during the years. Nine out of the eleven informants were seeing the sort of horizons prior their involvement in the conflict that led them to leave home and join armed groups.

The last part of the theory chapter dealt with the informants' experiences and thoughts of participation in hindsight in light of masculinity and victimcy. The argument was that while they were passionate about the horizons leading them to participate, the huge disappointment of the reality painted equally passionate horizons that escorted them out of the arms. Having to fight against your countrymen, and in some cases even against your friends and relatives, turned out to be something totally different from what they had envisioned. The lack of respect from the commanders and lies made the situation even worse leaving most of the informants to have no respect for the moral and authority in the armed forces. As notions regarding masculinity and the image of armed soldier was not directly inquired upon from the informants, the material on this regard is thin. It looks like the home defense ethos was so strong that when the informants found out to be fighting mostly against their countrymen, it was hard to recover from the disappointment, or to carry on fighting. Despite the limited material on the subject, I would argue that when talking to me after already giving up on arms, the informants did not try to

present their participation and actions in the light of ideal masculinity and soldiering. The bitter tone when describing the daily life in arms would crush such poseurs. Yet they were not to be victimized either; they were happy with their lives, and had good memories from the time in armed forces as well. If they expressed victimcy, it was merely against the background of broken promises and negligence from the commanders, and from the plight of the youth in general. I did not get the feeling that they would have avoided victim representations because of the masculine ideals of a strong man and a competent soldier. They did bring up their difficulties in fulfilling the role of the strong man and the disgraceful actions of army soldiers in the past, both of which go against the notions of holding onto the ideal of a strong competent man who avoids narratives dealing with weaknesses. This is one issue that would have undoubtedly benefited from a more in-depth fieldwork material though. The wars and the lack of development preceding the wars influenced the movements, positions, and chances that the informants had at their hand, and that influence was mostly negative and restrictive in its' nature. The burden of the conflict, and the impoverished financial and social position still did not strip the informants all of their agency, tactics, and chances.

The first results chapter of the youth in Congo made the claim that the young Congolese have a role in the family life and in public way before their western counterparts. That role comes with responsibilities, but also with expectations. The premise was that children and youth in Congo are anticipating towards the future like youth all over the world, but importantly also acting already in the present. The help that the informants were giving to their parents after a school day as an example of the role the youth has lined up for them in the generational and community dynamics. Like Cimpric and Trefon had observed, and many of the informants confirmed, the relations within families and the networks for support have become weakened and destroyed due to the economic decline, and later because of the war. That left the informants, and many other young Congolese to look elsewhere for the social maturity and independence they were craving for. Like Lwambo have noted, the situation has been especially bad for young boys because they have been unable to fulfil the role that they are expected to do as men. The lure of towns was strong for many of the informants, because life and livelihood in the countryside does not hold the sort of appeal that it used to have. The chapter also proposed that it has not only been the physical location of countryside and the occupation of farming that has lost its' appeal in the eyes of the youth, also biological age does not restraint the young Congolese in the same way as it used to do, following De Boeck notion of related age. The long-standing crises situation has forced the youth in Congo to bypass the blocked customary routes to social

becoming, and in the process taking alternative routes and unorthodox actions making them more visible in the public than ever before. Child soldiering is just one of the manifestations of children's new agencies and escapes.

Most of the informants were happy to give up on fighting, and had few positive things to say about life in the arms though. With that in mind, it may look like they failed in pursuing that alternative route to a better future, or that the whole premise of soldiering as a way to forward was wrong. I still insisted that it had worked for the informants as a way to independent life. Some had received educational opportunities, others learnt new skills at the DDR-processes that had enabled them to start small-businesses. None were living in the countryside anymore, many had children and wives. Whether they had these on horizon when they enlisted to the armed forces is hard to say. The fieldwork material did not go deep enough to make such a claim. With the same token it could be said that the disappointment what the army life turned out to be was not on those horizons either. While it can be argued that their lives in Beni at the time of the interview was a long way from triumph, the same can be argued about millions of other Congolese young adults as well. They seemed happy with their current lives. The biggest lost they seemed to have gone through due to the involvement in the armed forces was the separation from the family. I'm at odds in trying to balance the informants' situation and feelings when compared with what those might have been without their involvement in the armed groups. I would still make the claim that the hungry youth in Congo is looking for ways to overcome the weaknesses of the traditional order of things that is blocking their own way forward. How well that works out for them in the long-run and in the big picture is another matter, because that's the nature of the social horizons and environments like Johnson-Hanks and Vigh has pointed out; they are anticipated and dreaded, but not yet fully known.

The results chapter dealing with the particularities of North Kivu and development of the Mai-Mais proposed that because of the local history and development, youth's involvement in armed groups and the birth of the Mai-Mai militias had already blueprints from which to emerge. The chapter relied much on written material on the subject by political scientists, combining it with the narratives of the informants. Despite being long and perhaps incoherent, the chapter laid out the reasons for the militias and child soldier's existence in the northeastern parts of the country. There were political groups and armed bands motivated by ethnic belonging already well before the first Congolese war started, like Vlassenroot, Hoyweghen, and Doom had shown. The chapter claimed that despite the ethnic

antagonism among the different groups in North Kivu, during the war it was the outside aggressor bearing the brunt of the hostile attitudes, like the narratives of the informants demonstrated. Yet in real life, those militia groupings turned against the prevailing order of things because of the massive failures of the social, political, and economic development in the Kivu that affected especially the youth. The delicate question of how much the informants had choices when they listed into the armed forces challenges the argument in the chapter. It is fair to assume that they did not fully know what they were getting into, and the lack of resources was definitely one of the reasons driving them to join. Yet to claim that there were no other options, or that they had no other goals than to survive to the next day, misses out on the local history and on the intricate developments in North Kivu, both of which were facilitating the formation of the militias, youth's willingness to join, and the turning against the old hierarchies.

The second part of the chapter dealt with Mai-Mais' ability to attract children and command respect in North and South Kivu. Many of the reasons and qualities attached to other militias in Congo apply to Mai-Mais as well, but the home defense ethos, and the use magical crops gave a unique aura to them. Despite the misdoings amidst the war, Mai-Mais have managed to retain some of that unique aura and respect from the people. The chapter claimed that Mai-Mais' efforts to chase out the outsiders from the region gave a sense of duty and belonging to the informants who were part of the militia, and earned them the respect from the civilians. The strict avoidance rules played a part in that, was the argument. It was not only respect from the civilians that kept the informants happy, it seemed also that the Mai-Mai commanders treated them with respect when compared with the experiences of informants who were not Mai-Mais. Food and medicine were not among the complaints from the informants who were part of Mai-Mai militias. The use of divine crops seemed to entice the informants to join, but equally leading some to leave once it had proven to be unreliable. In the context of the Congolese wars where many armed factions operated, groups were merged, and new alliances and enemies created sometimes on a daily basis, Mai-Mais might not appear that different from the others. It would still be wrong to dismiss them as just another Congolese militia making civilians to suffer, because their origin, actions, and beliefs had a local twist to it that attracted many children in the region to join, and many more to respect them.

The third and the last results chapter dealt with the children accused of witchcraft and how that relates to child soldiers. One of the common characteristics was the crises impacting the Congolese families,

communities and economic spheres, creating new tensions, relations and divisions from which both manifestations seem to emerge and get part of their life force, like Cimpric has pointed out. Also de Boeck stressed the nature of the decline in Congo that has left children to occupy roles and spaces that were unheard in the past. Those roles and spaces, the argument in the chapter went, include child soldiering and children accused of witchcraft. Like is the case with child soldiers, child witches are not seen just as harmless victims either. They are the visible indications of the dissolution of family and communal norms and customs, thereby amassing also hatred. I referenced to Molina in the chapter, who made the argument that there have been new notions concerning children and childhood resulting from the changes in the society and among the family dynamics. Unfortunately, I could not provide own fieldwork on the subject because I found out about the child witch phenomenon only after I had already completed the fieldwork. The parallels are still there though. The decline impacts the families and the society in many ways, creating new divisions and relations between the people and between the citizens and the state.

The chapter argued that child soldiers and child witches are breaking up the established norms. It is the same constraints, beliefs, and aspirations in the turmoil of the Congolese nation that leads and pushes both groups of children towards the unconventional. When doing that, they end up taking or getting roles that are sometimes bereft of sympathy, but also actively changing the families and the society. The claim that they are taking positive action is a bold one, but it's a matter of perspective. The tenet of this thesis has been to see the resourcefulness, capabilities, and positive agency in the actions of children who have faced adversities coming from the established order that is not able to accommodate the millions of young Congolese. Without undermining the impact of those adversities in narrowing down the scope for possible action, or overestimating young people's understanding, they are demonstrating the sort of resourcefulness that commands respect and acknowledgement if we want to understand these developments and their root causes.

9. Conclusions

Like already noted in the previous sections, child soldiers have been getting a lot of attention from media and advocacy groups over the last decades, but they are not a recent phenomenon by any standards. Children's involvement in arms has been historically documented during different eras. Children are known to have acted as servants for knights during medieval times, and been on the lookout for the enemy and engaging in espionage (Faulkner 2001, 494). Sometimes being in armed forces and participating in conflicts has been activities that are meant for members of a society who are already full members of it. Status as an armed combatant has often marked a shift to full maturity (de Boeck, Honwana 2005, 36). Social scientist Jean-Hervé Jezequel has observed how the usage of children in arms is not particular to Africa, but a more far-reaching practice (Jezequel 2011, 5). Yet, media uses child soldiers as symbols for dysfunctional, barbarous African wars that disrupt the precarious lives of children (Abbink, van Kessel 2005, 232).

There's no denying though that children have been perpetrators and victims too often in African conflicts. One of the conclusions of this thesis is that there's a two-fold agency at play in the Congolese context when assessing child soldiers. While it is certain that their misery is acknowledged by the Congolese population, it is also clear that child soldiers in Congo are seen to have exercised active agency, both before enlisting to arms and during their involvement. The stigma that comes with participation is an indication of the ambiguous agency of former child soldiers. For reintegration back into society to be successful, this vague agency needs to be understood by researchers and organizations working on the issue. Further research is called for, focusing on the stances of the Congolese population, especially what parents and other family members make out of child soldiers. A neglect that is repeated in this research, like in so many others.

Jezequel has argued how pictures of gun yielding children have come to epitomize the image of Africa as a place for the type of violent behavior that is detached from tolerable and logical to the western witness (Jezequel 2011, 1). To some degree, it really seems like Africa acts out as almost the last bastion of barbarity in our minds. Social scientist Lorraine Macmillan has written that we are looking at the child soldiers and the countries where they operate through the glasses that make a difference between the observer and the observant, when it comes to race, rationality, and inhumanity. The child soldier narratives reinforce the already existing north-south pecking order (Macmillan 2009, 37). Humanitarian campaigns and international legislation have also impacted the way how children caught

up amidst wars are seen. Jezequel has noted that a modern humanitarian campaign with a right to interfere is being brought to Africa under the save the child soldiers mission. To him, the current campaign shares many qualities of the colonial mission from the past centuries that were meant to civilize the continent. Regardless of the earnestness of the western mission in Africa, he has called for attention onto how children are the key topic in the efforts to codify the western interference in Africa (Jezequel 2011, 1-3). No doubt that the humanitarian organizations working on the issue of children's rights have good intentions. Nevertheless, when children are the center-pieces of the western efforts, who could oppose their well-being and rights?

The western understanding of children and their rights is thought, or wished to contain universal qualities that would then help saving them and justify the interference. According to researcher of international law on children's rights Jenny Kuper, its' impact on the emerging mechanisms of global legislation and protocols cannot be overemphasized (Macmillan 2009, 36). Detaching adults and children makes it hard to see either categories consisting of people as singular personalities, with particular backgrounds and personal wishes, which to Macmillan is ironic, considering the stress that is put on children's rights on their own right by the western media and organizations (Ibid., 43). With that in mind, one of the premises of doing this research was to highlight the informants' personal backgrounds and aspirations and the way those impacted their actions, even if it meant blurring the line between an adult and a child, an agent and a victim. It was shown that biological age did not confine the informant's movements, whereas they might get stuck at their relative age long after their biological age moved pass that marker. The informants showed that getting stuck at youth can circumscribe you socially and economically, which is the exact opposite of the sentiments that youth carries in the western world.

Macmillan has noted how during its thirty-year existence, the discussion and rhetoric around child soldiers have evolved into a confined niche, where only particular accounts, cases, and understandings are taken in, and from which a particular status is given to children in arms (Macmillan 2009, 36). The understandings and status that are at play in the organizational rhetoric around child soldiers does not necessarily resonate at the level of local context where child soldiers exist. The notions local civilians give to child soldiers and their roles, can be very different from those that the NGOs and the humanitarian campaigns harbors. Another contribution that anthropological research like this can bring, is narrowing the gap between the local conceptions and the ideals of the humanitarian mission, so that

organizations and researches alike can get closer to the Congolese context and notions of children and youth. While people in Congo do understand and share the concern about children in arms, the local understandings of the phenomenon has other straits as well that are missing from the discourse of humanitarian campaigns. Macmillan has observed that the methods that are being used by the non-governmental actors in their efforts to stop child soldiering reinforce the prevailing notions of child soldiers. These notions are repeated by the media in the western world to their audiences, whose' shock and resentment calls for even more powerful discourses. The notions of those communities where child soldiers exist are being reproduced as underdeveloped places where amoral wars abound, and where they use children to fight them (Macmillan 2009, 45). Children are less powerful and less tarnished than adults, but they also are a powerful symbols for calls to action and interference. Children's own active involvement and agency in conflicts would make them less powerful symbols, and harder for the organizations to garner sympathy towards them and to their cause. Acknowledging the active agency was done in this thesis in order to paint a picture of the scenarios, routes, trajectories, and escapes that children take in a moving environment.

The pervasive image of a children carrying a gun also hinders recognizing the continuum of violence in war and peace that children face in their lives (Jezequel 2011, 9). There's violence also during peaceful periods, and that violence can lead to further violence during troubled times, as it exposes people to suffering that can breed more violence. The structural violence that the informants faced before the war due to the failings of the state, was in part informing their horizons and guiding their actions. Africa is still often referred to as the 'dark continent' in public representations. Boas and Dunn have claimed that if the news were to be believed, the armed youth in Africa has only their own existence, and the satisfaction they get from pillaging on their minds (Boas, Dunn 2007, 10). Missing from the news is the insightful coverage of African youth that conquer the challenges they face on their way to social, political, and economical independence. Missing are all the resourceful ways and coping mechanisms that are used by the youth in order to attain that independence. Certainly the choices the informants faced up were limited, but they did made choices and took action. The life in arms turned out to be something different from the prospected, hence new emerging horizons informing them to leave the arms. By and large, most of the informants were not longing to go back to arms. The freedom of being a civilian was enjoyed by all. Follow-up studies on long-term success of DDR-programs ought to be done though, to assess the needs and challenges faced by former child soldiers.

As Vigh has argued, seeing young people's participation as senseless does not make sense. Attention needs to be given to the social stances, environments, and reasoning's of the young people involved (Vigh 2006, 28). All the informants had their own reasons for joining the conflict, but those reasons had very little to do with the preconceptions that we harbor and cherish in the west. This research indicated that in the context of pre-conflict North Kivu, the informants and thousands of others young Congolese were not in the process of being integrated into the society in the same way as the previous generations had been, because the various problems at the family, community, and state levels were blocking the routes. Social becoming is not just anticipated and waited in a place like Congo. It requires action, which is exactly what the informants ended up taking. This study showed the complex interplay of personal, communal, local, national, and regional developments leading the informants taking up on arms, and at a later stage, leading them out, recognizing children's resourcefulness and coping mechanisms during crises and in the midst of social becoming.

More research is needed on the stances and actions of all those millions of Congolese youth, who did not end up in arms or streets, because research tends to focus on particularities like child soldiers, or child witches. It was hard to find research on Congolese youth other than those involved with soldiering and witches, and unfortunately this study does not change the situation. Yet, there are millions of Congolese who are facing the same challenges and constraints without turning to arms or streets, therefore there must be methods and resources that are unrecognized and unappreciated by the researches and others alike.

The child soldier treatise has carved out for itself a very powerful status, both at the global and local settings, like Macmillan has observed. The western dichotomization between personal and private, versus public and political, is spread globally through the discourse on child soldiers, reiterating the reliant status of children (Macmillan 2009, 48). When that western dichotomization between private and public is spread globally, we fail to see that in some societies, children do have a role in the public realm too. Not even in our societies do we treat youth as having no agency or power on their own. That agency in public is an asset to children and youth who are making a room for themselves through participating in the world that is trying to shut them out.

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