

Primary Commodities and War: Congo-Brazzaville's Ambivalent Resource Curse

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Abstract (112 words)

This article empirically tests and theoretically qualifies prevailing theories linking natural primary commodities and civil war. Drawing on interviews with ex-militia and politicians, we find that oil did contribute to civil war in the Republic of Congo. At the same time, however, we also conclude that conflict would never have arisen in the first place had democratization not generated substantial political instability. Once the fighting began, moreover, petroleum's overall effect was ambiguous. Oil tempted elites to fight, but the oil fields' remote location also limited most combat to the capital city; later on, oil money helped underwrite a 1999 peace settlement. Despite polarization among Congo's three main ethno-regional groups, the country did not fracture into ethnic, secessionist, or warlord zones.

Biographical Sketch

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I. Introduction

Political economists argue that developing countries with abundant natural resources are likely to suffer from the “resource curse,” a double-barreled affliction of poor governance and irresponsible economic behavior.¹ Analysts have applied this approach to civil wars, arguing that primary commodity dependency may stimulate armed rebellion.² Abundant natural resources, they argue, are a “honey pot” tempting potential rebels to try their luck, especially in the world’s poorest regions. With few legal economic alternatives, young males will turn to violent resource plunder for survival and enrichment. This phenomenon is especially widespread in sub-Saharan Africa, resource theorists claim, because economic conditions there are particularly grim. Indeed, the incidence of sub-Saharan African civil war has been higher than other regions during the 1990s, and African war-related casualties have claimed a disproportionate share of the world’s total in that period.³

Political rebellion, in this view, has much in common with regular crime, but its incidence is lower due to greater risks and start-up costs.⁴ General claims on the effects of resources on civil war rely on large-N statistical analyses, but such arguments find support in case studies from Colombia to Afghanistan.⁵ Some studies suggest globalization exacerbates the resource effect on conflict, as improved transportation and communication helps even the least sophisticated warlord sell bootleg resources on world markets. Others suggest that dwindling superpower patronage makes resource-driven

wars particularly attractive for elites and mid-ranking members of developing-region bureaucracies and militaries.

This essay tests the resource curse and war hypothesis by analyzing four separate incidences of armed conflict in the Republic of Congo (Congo-Brazzaville), a small nation bordering on the Democratic Republic of Congo (Congo-Kinshasa, or ex-Zaire). Drawing on interviews with former militia fighters, politicians, and in-country foreign observers, we analyze the effects of oil wealth on armed conflict.⁶ We find the resource-curse theory valid in some respects, but under-specified in others.

Following an ill-fated attempt at democratization, Congo-Brazzaville endured four rounds of brutal militia fighting in 1993, 1997, 1998-99, and 2002.⁷ Three main militias, loosely affiliated with each of Congo's broad ethno-regional groupings, directly killed at least 12,000 persons, cumulatively displaced 860,000, systematically looted civilians, and raped hundreds, if not thousands, of women.⁸ In 1998, up to 35% of Congo's 2.5 million people were internally displaced due to the fighting. Our informants uniformly believe that greed for petroleum rents in a new and uncertain political context was a major motivation for the war, as political leaders, drawn chiefly from Congo's governing class, struggled for control over the country's oil wealth. Provided that the uncertainty generated by elections is taken into account, therefore, Congo's experiences appear to confirm the link between rebellion and resource abundance.

Upon closer scrutiny, however, the impact of Congo's substantial oil wealth seems more ambiguous. In late 1999, petroleum rents helped a victorious militia led by Congo strongman Denis Sassou-Nguesso re-create an autocratic, but relatively stable, neo-patrimonial regime. Sassou reinserted elites from rival militias into their former

public sector jobs, driving a wedge between them and their militia followers. These co-opted elites had been members of Congo's state bourgeoisie in the pre-war era, and after their 1999 defeat, they re-discovered "class solidarity" with Sassou's followers and neglected their ethno-regional ties to junior militia colleagues.⁹ Congo's massive oil reserves, in other words, helped elevate class interests over ethnic solidarity, permitting neo-patrimonial logic to trump ethno-regional secessionism or warlordism.¹⁰ Congo's primary commodities had provided incentives for civil war, but later helped the victor consolidate a new neo-patrimonial regime.¹¹

We also discovered that the protected enclave nature of Congo-Brazzaville's oil limited the civil war's duration and diffusion. Congo's oil is located entirely offshore and remains unrivalled as a source of revenue; petroleum royalties, however, accrue only to Congo's internationally recognized sovereign. Following the instability created by democratization, the oil fields' legal and geographic configuration created incentives for militias to struggle for control over Brazzaville, the capital, but to eschew protracted rural warfare. Unlike other commodity-induced wars, Congo's countryside has no diamonds or coltan, and limited quantities of timber. When the fighting did finally spread to remote rural areas in 1998, moreover, it was remarkably short-lived. Once Sassou had demonstrated his ability to defend Brazzaville against all challengers, most rebel leaders preferred to surrender in return for their old public sector jobs. Congo-Brazzaville was thus spared the spatially and temporally protracted wars witnessed in resource-rich countries such as Burma, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Congo-Kinshasa, Angola, Colombia, and Afghanistan.

The Congo-Brazzaville case suggests that resource curse theory be modified in three ways.¹² First, it should adopt a more fine-grained understanding of the link between primary commodities and war. Resource wealth is likely to tempt rebels only under circumstances of acute political uncertainty, as in the case of Congo's failed democratization effort. Second, not all resources are created equal; commodities are configured in widely divergent legal and geographic ways, and these differences will lead to very different war trajectories. Some scholars are working in this vein, and our essay seeks to contribute to that effort.¹³ Third, the theory should account for the class logic implied by the neo-patrimonial system of rule common to most sub-Saharan African countries, which set constraints on potential warlords in resource-rich environments.

II. Resource Abundance and War

Broadly speaking, theories of rebel motivation focus either on "greed" - the desire for economic gain - or on "grievance," a catch-all category including a wide range of perceived injustices. According to resource curse theorists, grievances are ever-present and thus cannot explain variations in civil war initiation.¹⁴ The appropriate material conditions for organizing effective rebellions, by contrast, are far less frequent, and their presence, or lack thereof, is the best predictor of rebel activity. As such, their approach resembles that of Skocpol, who argues that while revolutionary inclinations are omnipresent, revolutionary opportunities are in short supply.¹⁵

The political economy of rebellion approach argues that insurgency is a high-risk activity with low probabilities of success and substantial start-up costs. Would-be rebel organizers, therefore, encounter acute collective action problems at an early stage,

prompting rebel entrepreneurs to seek cheap access to weapons and money, or their equivalents. Once this initial group lays its hands on sufficient tangible assets, they can attract additional recruits by providing resources, arms, and further enrichment opportunities. Greed, in this view, is the prime motivator of civil war, and opportunities for personal or small-group enrichment can best explain a rebellion's emergence.

Early access to material resources is typically available in one of three ways: support from other governments, diaspora contributions, or primary commodities.¹⁶ Primary commodities are particularly attractive, however, because they require little manufacturing or marketing expertise, and because they are often transported through geographic "choke points" that rebel groups can extort or control outright. In poor countries, primary commodities are one of the few ways rebels can access hard currency. If rebels can credibly threaten resource extractors, they can create armies large enough to survive government reprisals, reducing thereby the barriers to entry into the rebellion business.¹⁷

Resource curse and war theory is part of the post-Cold War trend in security studies towards privileging political economy over ideology. One of the leading proponents of this approach is David Keene, who argues that "wartime political economies may benefit governments and rebels, and as a result, some parties may be more anxious to prolong a war than to win it," with Sierra Leone and Liberia as paradigmatic cases.¹⁸ Another major contributor is John Mueller, who argues that civil war and genocide in Rwanda and Yugoslavia were mass criminal heists perpetrated by small groups of loot-seeking thugs, rather than full blown "ethnic wars."¹⁹ Andreas, to take another example, uses the political economy of war to explain patterns of civil war

emergence in the former Yugoslavia, arguing that it was shaped above all by patterns of illicit trade in weapons and other goods.²⁰ By emphasizing the role of primary commodities, resource curse theory offers one interpretation of the political economy approach.

The evidence linking primary commodities to war is suggestive, but much conceptual work remains to be done. Importantly, we should privilege politics over economic determinism, noting that resources are unlikely to trigger civil war in a stable political environment. Secondly, once war is underway, natural resources' varying legal and physical configurations will have different impacts on the course and style of the war. In the sections that follow, we address these concerns through a detailed study of Congo-Brazzaville's wars.

III. Congo-Brazzaville's Civil Wars: An Overview

Denis Sassou-Nguesso's single-party regime ruled Congo-Brazzaville from 1979 to 1992. Sassou ran the country as a neo-patrimonial rentier state, redistributing oil profits to allies and potential foes through educational benefits, military employment, and an ever-expanding civil service.²¹ In the 1980s, Sassou kept the system stable by incorporating elites from the country's three main ethno-regional groupings: the northern Mbochis, the central Laris, and the southern grouping of several distinct ethnicities referred to by some as "Niboeks."²² The president and senior army leadership were northern in origin, but southern elites held some positions of responsibility in government, civil service and the army, and benefited from the government's massive investment in public education.

Democratization and Conflict

Sassou's regime came under fire in the early 1990s, following francophone Africa's wave of post-Cold War democratization. Political pressure from southern elites, labor parties, intellectuals, and French officials forced Sassou to relinquish his hold on power. The country held multi-party presidential elections in 1992, sparking competition for the apex of Congo's patron-client pyramid and giving southern elites a legally sanctioned chance to control the country's oil wealth.²³ Sassou's two main opponents were Pascal Lissouba, who had served as prime minister in 1963, and Bernard Kolelas, a Brazzaville politician. Lissouba led the Pan-African Union for Social Democracy (UPADS), support for which came from the southern provinces, and won the 1992 elections due to the region's superior demographics.²⁴ Kolelas, head of the Congolese Movement for Democracy and Integral Development (MCDDI), was presidential runner-up, relying chiefly on his Lari ethnic kin, a subgroup of the Bakongo ethnicity comprising 20% of the population.²⁵ Sassou-Nguesso, leader of the formerly communist Congolese Labor Party (PCT), polled a distant third, largely due to the inferior demographic weight of his northern Mbochi kin.²⁶ Lissouba assumed the presidency in 1992 and briefly ruled with a parliamentary coalition with Sassou's PCT. Sassou abruptly left the government, however, when his followers were denied key posts in Lissouba's new government. Cabinet ministries were key sources of oil rents and patronage, and Sassou feared that he and his followers were being pushed aside.

As Lissouba struggled to assert control, it became clear that possession of Congo's presidential palace did not guarantee ownership over Sassou's former networks

of allies, patrons and clients. Lissouba had won the vote, but some senior Mbochi army officers remained loyal to Sassou, who also enjoyed warm relations with foreign allies such as France's then prime minister, Jacques Chirac, Gabon president Omar Bongo (married to Sassou's daughter), and Angolan president Eduardo Dos Santos.²⁷

Distrustful of the army and worried by Sassou's defection, Lissouba created a personal militia to bolster his rule. Relying mostly on men drawn from southern ethnicities, Lissouba established an independent security force, the "réserve présidentielle," later known as the Aubevillois.²⁸ Their initial military trainers, among others, were members of private Israeli security firms.²⁹ Lissouba's supporters later created three other forces, including the Cocoyes, loosely translated as "tough guys"; the Zoulous, whose name was inspired by the ongoing violence in Kwazulu-Natal; and the Mambas (snakes).³⁰ In a classic example of a spiraling "security dilemma," Kolelas' followers retaliated by creating the Ninjas, a militia led by police and military officers doubling as Kolelas' bodyguards, and staffed by local Lari youths living in Brazzaville.³¹ The kernel of Sassou's Cobra militia was formed in 1992 from his old presidential guard. It expanded further in 1995 following Lissouba's purge of Mbochi military officers, some of whom decamped to Oyo, Sassou's northern political stronghold.

Civil War, Round One (1993): Lissouba vs. Kolelas

Sassou's defection created a parliamentary crisis for Lissouba, who responded by dissolving parliament in 1992 (a move deemed unconstitutional by many observers), and called new legislative elections for May 1993. In that poll's first round Lissouba's party earned 62 seats, while Kolelas' and Sassou's followers jointly earned 49.³² Claiming fraud, Kolelas called for a boycott of the second round and civil disobedience, triggering

the first round of civil war pitting Lissouba's militias against those of Kolelas. The fighting remained within Brazzaville's borders, causing some 2,000 deaths.³³ The army, still led at this point by Sassou-appointed northerners, remained largely uninvolved.³⁴

Congo's democratization had disrupted the ancien regime's patronage networks, but Lissouba, the newly elected leader, was unable to create a stable alternative, generating an acute sense of political uncertainty whose ripple effects were felt throughout Congo's governing class. The country's petroleum fields continued to pump out some 200,000 barrels a month, however, earning a monthly \$75m in export revenue for whomever could claim legal control over the government. The first round of fighting ended in January 1994, but the stage had been set for further conflict, as the armed forces, parliament and civil service gradually split along ethno-regional and factional lines. By 1996-97, three main militia groups - Lissouba's Cocoyes, Kolelas' Ninjas, and Sassou's Cobras - had created their own zones of de-facto influence in the capital city.³⁵

Congo, in other words, was following a model familiar from other instances of democratization in which political uncertainty provoked paramilitary mobilization.³⁶ Unlike countries such as Rwanda or the former Yugoslavia, however, Congo's history of ethnic relations had hitherto been relatively peaceful, save for some inter-communal fighting in 1958-59, during the run-up to independence. Although the country was now separating along ethnic lines, these were being generated by elite manipulation in Brazzaville, rather than by deep-seated ethnic grievances. The impetus for conflict in the 1990s (as it had been in the late 1950s) was political uncertainty, coupled with elite desires to control a greater share of Congo's oil. Had there been no political uncertainty, it is unlikely that Congo's resources alone would have triggered civil war.

Civil War, Round Two (1997): Sassou and the Angolans vs. Lissouba and Kolelas

In January 1997, Sassou returned to Congo after two years of self-imposed exile in France, declaring his intent to run in the upcoming presidential elections. Spurred by a subsequent attempt by Lissouba-controlled forces to disarm Sassou's Cobras in their Brazzaville stronghold, violence erupted again in May 1997, this time pitching the Cobras against pro-Lissouba soldiers and Cocoyes. By June, Brazzaville was split into three militia zones. From May to September 1997 the fighting was an exclusively Cocoye-Cobra affair; at the very end, Kolelas' Ninjas joined Lissouba's side.

The Cobras were initially outgunned, but their fortunes changed in October 1997 when a contingent of heavily-armed, battle-hardened Angolan troops intervened on their behalf, securing Brazzaville and the southern coastal city of Pointe-Noire for Sassou.³⁷ Lissouba and Kolelas fled into exile (where they still remain after being sentenced to death *in absentia*), and Sassou assumed the presidency for a three-year "transitional period," promising he would hold national elections in 2001. Southern political and military elites fled Brazzaville with their Ninja and Cocoye militias, returning, for the most part, to their families' villages in the Pool and southern regions.

Civil War, Round Three (1998-99): Sassou and the Angolans vs. the southern militias

Violence soon erupted again, however, as first the Ninjas, and then the Cocoyes, clashed with Angolans and Cobras. For the first time, much of the fighting took place in

the southern countryside, far from Brazzaville.³⁸ According to Sassou's spokespersons, rebels and bandits attacked government garrisons in southern towns. According to southerners we interviewed, by contrast, Cobra and Angolan forces provoked the fighting through heavy-handed patrols of the north-south railway and southern towns.³⁹ A third version was advanced by a Western aid official with extensive local experience, who said the first battles were triggered by a drug deal gone bad between local Ninjas and police in the Pool region.⁴⁰ The fighting spread back to Brazzaville towards the end of 1998, when a Ninja force raided the city's outer suburbs. Elsewhere, small, semi-independent groups of Cocoyes and Ninjas launched hit-and-run raids on government forces in southern and Pool region towns. Larger Ninja and Cocoye bands of up to 100 men were led by former military officers, but many of the smaller groups, often no more than a dozen or more, were led by urban youths who had risen to prominence during Brazzaville's 1993 and 1997 street battles.⁴¹ The fighting peaked in December 1998, but skirmishes continued throughout the south until mid-1999. At the end of 1999 the rebellion ended with a deal that provided amnesty to all Ninja and Cocoye commanders, save for Lissouba and Kolelas, and guaranteed soldiers and civil servants their former jobs.⁴²

IV. An Empirical Puzzle

Congo Brazzaville's experiences recall other cases of state collapse in which rapid political transitions, coupled with ethnic heterogeneity and abundant resources, sparked civil war. Unlike Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan or Angola, however, Congo's conflict did not deteriorate into protracted territorial warfare by warlords and/or separatists. All three Brazzaville-based militias recruited rural youth, and each of the three main political parties organized along regionally-defined ethno-

parties.⁴³ Still, the first two rounds of fighting occurred exclusively in the capital, while in the third, southern militias did not take lasting control of any city (though several were briefly conquered and looted), and did not attempt to seize Pointe-Noire, the petroleum industry's administrative nerve center. Nor did they carve out warlord fiefdoms in Congo's remote areas. Instead, southern military and political leaders quickly surrendered in return for amnesty, reintegration into their former public sector jobs, and vague promises of recruiting militia rank-and-file into Congo-Brazzaville's reconstituted security forces.

For theorists of ethnic warfare, the lack of protracted rural fighting is puzzling given the ethnic heterogeneity of Congo's three main ethno-regions. For resource curse theorists, the south's quick surrender is intriguing, given that Congo's oil is located directly off southern shores, and could have formed the base for southern secessionism. Congo also confounds Reno's prediction that neo-patrimonial, resource-rich countries are likely to deteriorate into warlord zones as an "equilibrium outcome" situated halfway between chaos and state consolidation, as both rebels and governments develop some territorial control but lack incentives to build broadly encompassing state institutions.⁴⁴ Whether driven by oil greed or by ethno-regional grievances, the first three rounds of Congo's wars should not have ended so quickly, and Sassou should not have been able to re-fashion a stable neo-patrimonial regime with such relative ease.

Importantly, there were indications that the rebels might have developed either into entrenched rural warlords, or into a unified and determined secessionist movement. Examples of warlordism include a protection racket run by Ninjas from 1993 on in which travelers through one of Brazzaville's main ports were systematically extorted,⁴⁵ and

consistent claims by civilians and militiamen on all sides that from 1998 on, most of the fighters engaged in sustained looting, even against their own communities.⁴⁶ As one informant trapped in the Pool region in 1998-99 recalls, “Ninjas attacked their own populations...They collected money from their own people to let them cross the river. From May 1999 onwards, the war was but roadblocks for ransom.”⁴⁷ All of the lower-ranking militia gang leaders admitted to us in interviews that looting was central to their war activities.

There are also indications of occasional efforts by high-ranking figures to create an organized secessionist/liberation movement in the south, especially during the 1998-99 fighting. Consider the account by a former Ninja officer who called himself the “*Commissaire*,” and claimed he resolved to “defend” his region in 1998 by building a political-military organization grounded in traditional local structures. “I got in touch with the wise men of my village,” the *Commissaire* recalled, “and they told me to “go and ‘free the villages.’ So I called in the Ninjas one by one until I had about 250 men, along with 200 new ones that I trained myself.” After attacking a local army garrison, the *Commissaire* consulted traditional leaders, who encouraged him to “go on fighting to liberate our region.” Each village that he liberated, the officer said, was assigned a military leader “who worked together with the village chief.”⁴⁸ The *Commissaire*, in other words, claimed to have created an alternative political structure in the Pool region with the help of his rebel armed force and traditional village chiefs. Similar claims came from a senior Cocoye commander, Colonel Mboundou-Mboundou, who claimed that in the southern Pool region, he and his followers had organized a “popular war, just like the Vietcong,” during the 1998-99 fighting.⁴⁹ There was good reason to believe in 1998,

therefore, that Congo-Brazzaville might be headed towards protracted war in the cities *and* the countryside, with the prospect of organized secessionism in some areas, and long-term lawlessness in others. If Congo-Brazzaville's civil war had deteriorated into Sierra Leone-style chaos, or Sudan-style secessionism, these events would have easily been explained by resource curse theory.

Instead, however, the exact opposite occurred. The Ninja- Cocoye alliance never materialized, the southern militias remained disorganized, towns were "liberated" but then quickly abandoned, and key national infrastructure, such as the Brazzaville-Pointe Noire railway, was never seriously threatened. Ethnic polarization remained limited as populations suffered as much at the hands of their own ethnic militias as from government reprisals. And, most importantly, the 1998-99 rebellion was over soon after it started, with most of the senior political and military leaders returning to Brazzaville and receiving back pay from the civil service or military. As a result, virtually all of Congo's territory reverted to the autocratic, but largely stable, rule of Denis Sassou-Nguesso.

V. Asset Specificity, Norms of Sovereignty, and the Dynamics of Violence

Congo's trajectory was shaped by the geographic and legal configuration of its oil reserves, which are located offshore and expensive to operate, making them accessible only to international petroleum companies. Contrary to what some have argued, this does not make Congo's oil invulnerable to looting, since oil revenues can be illegally diverted into slush funds for a broad variety of purposes. During the 1997 war with Sassou's Cobras, for example, embattled president Pascal Lissouba reportedly siphoned off

substantial amounts of Congo's oil revenues to arm his private militias.⁵⁰ Indeed, all of Congo's leaders have "looted" the country's oil revenues for their own neopatrimonial purposes. The offshore nature of the country's oil fields, however, means that to access (legally or otherwise) oil revenues, Congolese politicians must first be recognized as the country's sovereign government. Given the structure of the international legal regime, foreign oil companies will pay revenues only to broadly recognized sovereign leaders.

African coup makers exercising effective control over capital cities are typically recognized internationally, unlike warlords with state-like qualities. As a result, control over Congo's capital, Brazzaville, is one of the few strategic goals worth pursuing. Oil is the main natural resource, and there are no major trading/smuggling routes to provide protection for, as in the case of Afghanistan. Consequently, Congo's political struggles are likely to end once a major faction credibly wins the war for Brazzaville.

Congo and its oil industry

The Congolese oil industry is dominated by the Belgian-French company TotalFina Elf, successor to France's Elf Aquitaine. With an estimated US\$10bn worth of Congo investments, TotalFina produces some 60% of Congo's 265,000 barrels per day.⁵¹ Next in line is Italy's AGIP, responsible for some 30% of production, while smaller actors handle the remainder, including the U.S. firm CMS Nomeco, with 4.1% of production. The government-owned Société Nationale Pétrolière du Congo (SNPC), created in 1998, independently markets - but does not produce - some oil.

The vast majority of Congo's oil fields are situated 30-50 miles off the coast of Pointe Noire, the major southern port city. Fields in operation before the 1990s have

terminals in Pointe Noire, but the most recent and lucrative ones, including the massive Elf-controlled N’Kossa field (70,000 barrels a day), have their own offshore terminals. Pointe-Noire, in other words, is not physically crucial to Congo’s oil industry, since its administrative functions could be easily handled elsewhere.

Only the most technologically sophisticated international companies can extract Congo’s oil. The N’Kossa field is located 38 miles off shore in 600 feet of water, while other fields are a further 12 miles away under 3,000 to 6,000 feet. Petrol is loaded directly onto tankers from offshore terminals, eliminating the need for pipelines. Armed non-state groups, therefore, have virtually no access. Pirate-style raids on the platforms themselves or on tankers are the only alternative, but neither is particularly feasible. Furthermore, even if they could damage oil extraction infrastructure, rebels could not operate the platforms on their own. Congo’s oil wealth, in others words, is physically inaccessible to local armed factions.

Oil is also Congo’s economic lifeline, accounting for 90% of foreign exchange earnings, 40% of GDP, and 70% of government revenues.⁵² Congolese access to oil profits is possible only due to the international legal regime, which awards sovereignty rights to offshore mineral resources. Were oil a precious commodity during the colonial era, Europeans would have seized the oil without compensation. Today, Western companies are the only actors able to physically extract the oil, but they must also pay rents to Congo’s sovereign rulers.

Oil rents come in various forms, the most important of which include royalties on sales by Western companies, which amount to 12% of Congo’s overall export value, and a 1991 agreement awarding the state half of the oil companies’ profits, equal to 19% of

export value.⁵³ A third source of rents comes from sales made directly by the state-owned SNPC. This company's accounts are not transparent, however, making SNPC profits a crucial tool in Congo's presidential patronage system. According to observers, SNPC monies are a hidden slush fund that Congo's internationally recognized ruler uses to purchase arms for his private militia, pay off friends and potential rivals, and keep the country's neopatrimonial system afloat. The SNPC is a vehicle for "looting" Congo's oil, but is available only to the country's internationally recognized sovereigns.

The Importance of Brazzaville

Following Congo's democratic transition, Lissouba failed to demonstrate credible control over Brazzaville due to poor relations with the army's senior ranks, paramilitary mobilization by all three contenders, and lukewarm relations with important foreign actors. His rivals carved out militia zones in the capital, and both Kolelas and Sassou fought sharp battles with Lissouba loyalists in the city. The fighting, however, remained centered in the city, since the latter was the only real prize worth having.

As such, Congo is the opposite of Angola, where easy access to alluvial diamonds allowed UNITA to endure for several decades, despite the MPLA's control of offshore oil.⁵⁴ In Congo, factions that are not formally in power have no way of raising funds from natural resources, and "rebel" forces cannot fund their efforts, shortening the fighting. The combination of physical and legal restrictions on Congo's oil also explains why southern rebels did not try to seize Pointe-Noire from its Angolan defenders, or even attempt to destroy its facilities. A successful attack would not have secured control over

the oil fields themselves, and the oil companies could have easily moved their headquarters elsewhere.

Interestingly, southern rebels also made no serious attempt to create a southern secessionist movement that might have claimed international recognition of their sovereignty over the oil fields. As noted above, secession was briefly discussed as an option if the regime refused dialogue, but the debate was half-hearted. Not only was Congo-Brazzaville's oil offshore, but in the contemporary international legal climate, secessionists tend not to gain international recognition, as illustrated by the case of Somaliland.⁵⁵ As Colonel Mboungou-Mboungou, vice president of the *Conseil National de la Résistance* (CNR), told us, "the idea of secession came up during the fighting but it got no support. Had we tried, we would have been beaten. What country would have helped us?"⁵⁶ Contrary to the resource curse argument, therefore, Congo's oil reserves did not solely promote rebellion and conflict. Instead, the physical and legal specificity of Congo's natural resource also thwarted the emergence of prolonged rural warlordism or secessionism. Resource abundance, in this case, had ambiguous effects.

VI. The Patrimonial Peace: State Control and Class Interests

Congo's resource configuration also contributed to the unusual nature of Congo's peace. Although the rhetoric of war often stressed the importance of north-south ethnic divisions, our interviews suggested that intra-ethnic class divisions were also important, and helped bring about an end to the war. Common class interests among southern and northern elites, nurtured historically by the state's patrimonial distribution of oil rents, eventually overrode ethnic cleavages and facilitated a peace deal. As such, the interests of

southern political elites differed substantially from their rank-and-file militia supporters. The former ended the war and returned to relatively lucrative public sector jobs, while the latter were left to fend for themselves or to solicit modest support from an international “reinsertion” campaign for veterans.

Elites and Militias in the 1998-1999 Fighting

During the 1993 and 1997 fighting in Brazzaville, Lissouba and Kolelas exercised reasonably tight control over the militia supporters through a cadre of political elites and military defectors, often at the rank of colonel. During the 1998-99 fighting in the south, by contrast, centralized control over these two factions broke down. Lissouba and Kolelas fled the country, and their militias scattered to the countryside. Although second-tier political and military leaders were also in hiding, only lower-ranking militias were actually involved in significant violence. Sadat, a Cocoye “*chef d'écurie*” (gang leader) from Brazzaville who commanded some 150 fighters, alleges that he attacked and briefly occupied Nkayi and Dolisie in 1998. As he puts it, “the colonels could not control us very well. Officially, they gave us orders, but we controlled the elements.”⁵⁷ According to Stéphane Rostiaux, chief demobilization officer for the International Office of Migration in Brazzaville, “Most of the fighting was carried out by small bands led by low-ranking militia leaders,”⁵⁸ a finding strengthened by our militia interviews.

Lower-ranking militias privileged looting over long-range strategy. Consequently, real alliances did not emerge between Ninjas and Cocoyes, who attacked each other as well as Sassou’s forces. Furthermore, both groups were weak, unorganized and fragmented, assembling fewer than 200 men for any single attack.⁵⁹ Hence, although

militia groups, army defectors and civilian opponents all escaped Brazzaville for the south after October 1998, they were far from a uniform group and never acted in a collectively coherent manner. Militiamen attempted to defend themselves from Cobra attacks and to sustain their wartime lifestyles by continued looting. The political and military leaders kept out of the fighting, for the most part, and hid in remote villages.

The importance of social class

Militia fighters differed from the leaders in terms of social class, defined chiefly by their historic relationship to the state. A comparison of the social backgrounds of militia leaders with that of the rebel elites who signed the 1999 peace accord illustrates these class divisions.⁶⁰ Jean-François Guembo, a self-declared regional leader of the 1999 rebellion, was appointed *sous-préfet* of the southern town of Makabana by Sassou in 2001. Before the war, he had twice been a member of parliament during the communist era, as well as a senior executive for Comilog (a then publicly-owned timber company) in the 1970s and 1980s.⁶¹ The members of the National Resistance Council (CNR), the southern rebel politico-military umbrella organization, whom we interviewed, displayed similar class backgrounds: Colonel Mbougou-Mbougou was a high-ranking army officer; Luc Koussala, a medical doctor; Josphe Mankita, an accountant; and Benoît Bati, a former justice.⁶² Other political leaders who negotiated with Sassou on behalf of the Southern rebels included Abel Mokono, former mayor of Bacongo; Eugène Banguissa, former *préfet* of the Pool region, and Bernard Ntandou, a former Gendarmerie commander. The militiamen, by contrast, came from far more humble backgrounds. We

interviewed a number of “*chefs d’écurie*,” who included a former army sergeant, two market stall owners, a local gang leader, a hospital janitor, and an electrician.

Until 1997, the core of each of the country’s three main militia groupings was composed of military or quasi-military origins. Beyond this, however, the rank-and-file was composed of mostly un-or under-employed young men, few of whom had a chance of working in the stable, publicly-owned formal sector. These youths were recruited by Sassou, Lissouba or Kolelas loyalists at different times during 1993 to 1997.⁶³ At first, the politico-military elites used these young men to wage their factional struggles, chiefly in Brazzaville. Most of the militiamen we interviewed, whether on the side of the Sassou regime or the opposition, declared having received at least part of their weapons from higher-ranking military officers. *Le Japonais*, a former stall owner and gang leader before the war, said that his Cocoye band received its weapons from the military. “One evening,” he recalled, “our brother, who was a military commander, brought us fifteen AK47s.” In 1997, “a colonel came and gave us weapons and asked us to fight with them. He paid CFAFr 15,000 per week.”⁶⁴ According to the *Commissaire*, the Ninja band leader, “Commandant Camille, who had been in jail with Kolelas, recruited youth for the Ninjas.”⁶⁵ For elites, militias were political instruments, but for the rank-and-file, conflict was an opportunity for small-scale looting. Hence, the propensity of militiamen to rob people of their own ethnic background, including their own political leaders.

The return of neo-patrimonial logic

As the violence progressed during 1998-99, elite-militia class differences led to diverging political agendas. For the elites, the most pressing concern was to end the war

and return to Brazzaville, as they grew fearful of their militia “followers,” who seemed increasingly uncontrollable. The elites hoped to build a support base amongst ordinary southerners, but these were being looted and intimidated by the militias. In the words of Colonel Bougouanza, one of the highest-ranking military officers in the southern rebel movement, “Idle youth is like a bomb. When kids go to war, it is to improve their material existence, which reduced our chances of success in the war.”⁶⁶ Whereas militiamen recall the war with nostalgia, the elites speak of 1998-99 as one of fear and hardship.

Others have noted that Congo’s militias looted their ethnic kin, but few have reflected on this development’s political importance. The militiamen’s growing importance in the 1999 fighting threatened to sideline the southern political and military elites, and the looting of civilians created a groundswell of local support for peace talks. According to Mossendjo mayor Maurice M’Bobi, a member of the southern political leadership, his colleagues elected to rejoin the state “to bring peace for the local populations.”⁶⁷

Fearful of their own fighters and eager to regain their public sector jobs, southern elites responded to Sassou’s 1999 peace offer enthusiastically, calculating they would be better off reintegrating a stable, oil-funded neo-patrimonial state than remaining in villages with unreliable fighters. Sassou was ready to oblige, since a peace deal would legitimize his conquest of Brazzaville. This “patrimonial peace” began in November 1999, when southern leaders signed a cease fire with Sassou’s representatives in Pointe-Noire, and continued in December, when the southern political leadership, the CNR, surrendered in exchange for amnesty and public sector reintegration. The CNR describes

itself as a “political movement of popular essence” based on a sense of social injustice and on the need for cohabitation after the war.⁶⁸ It portrays itself as the political wing of the militias, but is staffed chiefly by senior southern military officers. Most CNR activists are former members of Lissouba’s UPADS party or Kolelas’ MCDDI, but the organization does not represent the exiled leaders directly. Indeed, the CNR leaders we interviewed had little sympathy for Kolelas and Lissouba and, according to some observers, went against the latter’s wishes in negotiating the peace. In effect, the CNR represents the second tier of politico-military leaders who rejected Lissouba and Kolelas, on the one hand, and the life of rural guerrillas on the other. Under the 1999 peace deal, CNR members can return to state employment in Brazzaville, an option available neither to Lissouba, Kolelas, or to militia fighters themselves. The result is the unusual (but rational from a patrimonial politics point of view) situation of former opposition elites eagerly rebuilding central state institutions to protect themselves from their own militias, a far cry from the “warlord equilibrium” that might have been expected.

Had natural resources been locally available, the south might have sustained a warlord situation and young militia rank and file, with their comparative advantage in violence, might have seized leadership. Without readily available resources, however, the logic of patronage proved stronger than that of warlordism, and the system reverted to its neo-patrimonial outcome. As the Mossendjo mayor noted, “we now have the right to position ourselves for ministerial, prefectural or mayoral posts. That’s what democracy is about.”⁶⁹

This strategy appears to be working. Participation by MCDDI and UPADS politicians in government is limited, but the government takes care of most opposition

elites. Several are housed at government expense in Brazzaville hotels, while they and others receive their salaries, despite not working. In fact, the 200-odd military members of the CNR all receive their pay, as do a few dozen senior civilians. Accommodation has also brought considerable peace in the south. All the political and civilian authorities we met in the south, including mayors, *sous-préfets*, and census workers, were appointees from the “resistance,” while the local military command was more northern. This policy is a relative bargain for the state, compared to the cost of accommodating the exiled Kolelas and Lissouba. Some 1,000 Ninja and Cocoye fighters had been integrated into the army by mid-2001,⁷⁰ and others were being helped by a UN assistance plan that gives business grants in exchange for illegal weapons. As of end-2001, some 7,250 former militiamen had been assisted under the plan, in return for 11,000 weapons.⁷¹ According to one report, however, 41,000 of 74,000 illegal weapons were still in circulation.⁷²

The 2002 Fighting

Violence flared up again in March 2002, when a group of Ninja militiamen led by “Pasteur Ntoumi” in the Pool region attacked government forces. The fighting spread to Brazzaville in April, displacing 15,000 before conditions normalized.⁷³ Ntoumi had signed the 1999 peace agreements, but refused to surrender with his 500 fighters, saying guarantees for the latter’s integration into military or civil life were insufficient. Interestingly, Ntoumi’s social origins differ from others in the CNR. A religious leader and former director (or patient, depending on sources) of an insane asylum in Brazzaville, he did not fight in 1993 and 1997, and had not been politically active before 1998. Although he is currently the only senior figure in Congo not to participate in the

patrimonial peace, this last round of violence seemed related to shortcomings in the 1999 peace accords implementation, rather than to new grievances. Ntoumi was rumored to be demanding an appointment as army general before surrendering.⁷⁴ He is also said to want his Ninjas to benefit from the UN reintegration program, which has run out of funds. Moreover, the recent violence also occurred on a much smaller scale than earlier instances and involved none of the better-known southern political and military elites, who seem unwilling to return to war.

Comparative, Theoretical and Normative Implications

This article has offered a single-N test of the resource-curse-and-war theory. As the theory might expect, Congo-Brazzaville's substantial petroleum resources helped fuel civil war in the 1990s, but some of Congo's experiences also run counter to the theory. Congo experienced very little violent conflict prior to the 1990s; its battles were largely concentrated in the capital; secessionism and territorial warlordism were aborted in the hinterland; and the fighting was largely over by the decade's end. These elements of Congo's trajectory are not easily accounted for by resource curse theory.

It thus seems crucial that we maintain our understanding of the interaction between primary commodities and domestic politics. If a country has a stable political system, authoritarian or otherwise, it is unlikely to experience civil war, regardless of resource availability and distribution. Thus during the 1980s, while Sassou-Nguesso remained firmly in control of the country, Congo-Brazzaville did not experience civil war; once democratization dislodged Sassou's grip in the early 1990s, however, resource-related wars did break out. In this respect, the experiences of Botswana, Gabon and

Cameroon are instructive counter-examples. Despite abundant reserves of accessible diamonds (far more “lootable” than Congo’s petroleum), long-democratic Botswana has not only avoided civil war but has been quite successful at building institutions.⁷⁵

Cameroon and Gabon too have proved more peaceful than Congo-Brazzaville, although they share similar political and economic structures. This is because their leaders negotiated democratization efforts in the early 1990s with greater skill and stability than Sassou in Congo.⁷⁶ No matter how tempting natural resources might be and how they may exacerbate ongoing instability and armed conflict, they are unlikely to stimulate civil war on their own unless the political context is already unstable.

This finding has important implications for democracy-promoters in Africa and elsewhere, grimly illustrating the potential risks involved. Like Sassou’s Congo, many authoritarian systems are based on neo-patrimonial structures that rely on personalized, de-institutionalized power machineries. Electoral change and sudden elite turnover do not present newly elected leaders with a neutral state apparatus, but rather saddle them with biased and uncooperative networks. Reshaping and controlling these networks, as Congo-Brazzaville’s Lissouba attempted to do in the early 1990s, may trigger militia-formation and resistance by fearful or excluded elites and, consequently, spiraling security dilemmas. Democratization does not *inevitably* lead to violence, but it can certainly be provocative, especially when lucrative natural resources are involved.

A second implication of the Congo case is that the legal, physical, and geographic specificities of natural resources are crucial. When resources are physically accessible and geographically dispersed, protracted and territorialized conflicts may occur. This is the case in the Democratic Republic of Congo (Congo-Kinshasa), where rival armies

have carved out warlord enclaves based on widely dispersed subsoil minerals. If, by contrast, resources are physically accessed only with great difficulty by technologically sophisticated mining companies, wars will be temporally and spatially limited. Revenues accrue then to recognized sovereigns through mining company royalties, not through physical access itself. This prompts political actors to try to control the sovereign apparatus in the capital city, rather than peripheral territories. Warring parties, moreover, may be more readily willing to collaborate with whomever establishes credible, long-term control over the capital city. Angola's protracted civil war was an important counter-example. The country has substantial offshore oil resources, but its diamond deposits are easily accessible in outlying regions, which made protracted territorial war possible.⁷⁷

The Congo case also suggests that prospects for civil war termination are better when the conflict is preceded by a reasonably inclusive neo-patrimonial system. Although the 1990s were bloody, Congo's legacy of peaceful elite participation in Sassou's regime in the 1980s meant that once Sassou re-conquered the capital, opposition elites could imagine cooperating once again under his rule. Sierra Leone presents an interesting counter-example: prior to the civil war in the 1990s, Presidents Stevens and Momoh used diamond revenues to build exclusionary, self-serving "shadow" structures of power, rather than inclusive neo-patrimonial systems.⁷⁸ When civil war erupted, therefore, rival groups readily resorted to territorialized warfare. Neo-patrimonialism, in other words, can promote *either* political stability *or* violent conflict, depending on its level of inclusiveness.

Congo-Brazzaville is not an idiosyncratic case. Many African countries have embraced neo-patrimonialism at one time or another, and many of those systems were (are) underwritten by a single, or dominant, export commodity. Congo's experience can thus provide insight into why many weak African states have not collapsed into warlordism, even after the drying up of Cold War patronage.

Although this article focuses on primary commodities and war, this is only one of several paths to violence. Rwanda, for example, had very little in the way of lootable natural resources, but did have deep reservoirs of ethnic insecurity, and a legacy of inter-communal violence. When democratization pressures and a guerrilla insurgency reached a crescendo in the early 1990s, the result was ethnic hyper-mobilization and genocide.⁷⁹ Oil, diamonds, drugs, coltan and other natural resources may persuade some to take up arms, but ethnic fears, when stoked by political propaganda, can be equally, if not more, destructive. Congo-Brazzaville, in many ways, was blessed by its lack of deep-seated ethnic fears, which helped facilitate war termination.

A final cautionary note: Congo-Brazzaville's civil war has largely ended, but the outcome is not all positive. Sassou's refurbished rule is not conducive to democratic deepening, and most Congolese remain as poor and disenfranchised as before.⁸⁰ Although some elites may have been reshuffled, the country's basic social cleavages remain unchanged, and the war has apparently not lead to political consciousness-raising, democratic mobilization, or popular organization.⁸¹ Over one third of the country was displaced, tens of thousands were killed or injured, and thousands endured sexual assault. Most Congolese are relieved that hostilities are over, but prospects for long-run positive change are few. And remarkably, recent advances in international human rights scrutiny

and war-crimes accountability have had few discernable effects on Congolese events or discourse.⁸²

¹ Terry Lynn Karl, *The Paradox of Plenty: Oil Booms and Petro-States* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997); Michael L. Ross, “The Political Economy of the Resource Curse,” *World Politics*, 51 (January 1999), 297-322, and “Does Oil Hinder Democracy?” *World Politics*, 53/3 (2001); Jeffrey D. Sachs and Andrew M. Warner, *Natural Resource Abundance and Economic Growth* (Harvard Institute for International Development, 1995).

² Philippe Le Billon, “The Political Ecology of War: Natural Resources and Armed Conflicts,” *Political Geography* 20 (2001), 561-584; Paul Collier, “Doing Well out of War,” in Mats Berdal and David M. Malone, eds., *Greed and Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil Wars* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2000), 91-111, and “Rebellion as a Quasi-Criminal Activity,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 44/6 (2000), 839-853; Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, “On Economic Causes of Civil War,” *Oxford Economic Papers* 50 (1998), 563-573, and “Greed and Grievance in Civil War,” (Unpublished paper, World Bank, Washington, D.C., 2000); and Indra de Soysa, “The Resource Curse: Are Civil Wars Driven by Rapacity or Paucity?” in Berdal and Malone, eds., 113-116. Two important works in progress include Michael L. Ross, “Oil, Drugs and Diamonds: How do Natural Resources Vary in their Impact on Civil War?” in Karen Ballentine and Jake Sherman, eds., *Beyond Greed and Grievance: The Political Economy of Armed Conflict*, forthcoming; and Richard Snyder, “Does Lootable Wealth Breed Disorder? States, Regimes, and the Political Economy of Extraction.”

³ Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, “On the Incidence of Civil War in Africa,” (Unpublished paper, World Bank, Washington D.C., 2000). According to our compilation

of annual SIPRI publications, sub-Saharan Africa is responsible for 52% of all direct war-induced casualties in the 1990s.

⁴ Collier, “Rebellion as a Quasi-Criminal Activity.”

⁵ Philippe Le Billon, “Angola’s Political Economy of War: The Role of Oil and Diamonds, 1975-2000,” *African Affairs*, 100 (2001), 55-80; Catherine Brown, “Burma: The Political Economy of Violence,” *Disasters*, 23/3 (2001), 234-256; Global Witness, *A Crude Awakening: The Role of the Oil and Banking Industries in Angola’s Civil War and the Plunder of State Assets* (London, Global Witness, 1999); Tony Hodges, *Angola from Afro-Stalinism to Petro-Diamond Capitalism* (Bloomington, IN, Indiana University Press, 2001); Michael T. Klare, *Resource Wars: The New Landscape of Global Conflict* (New York, Metropolitan Books, 2001); Bertil Lintner, *Burma in Revolt: Opium and Insurgency since 1948* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994); Barnett R. Rubin, “The Political Economy of War and Peace in Afghanistan,” *World Development*, 28/10 (2000), 1789-1803; and William Reno, *Corruption and State Politics in Sierra Leone* (New York, NY, Cambridge University Press, 1995), “War, Markets, and the Reconfiguration of West Africa’s Weak States,” *Comparative Politics*, 29/4 (1997), 493-510, and *Warlord Politics in African States* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1998).

⁶ The authors conducted 55 semi-structured interviews with key informants, including 15 former militiamen, from June 26 to July 16, 2001, in the Republic of Congo. Interview locations included Brazzaville, Pointe Noire, Dolisie, and Mossendjo. Some militia members were contacted through the militia reinsertion program of the International Office of Migration in Brazzaville. We identify high-ranking political or military figures by name, but have preserved the anonymity of lower ranking individuals.

⁷ Remy Bazenguissa-Ganga, "The Spread of Political Violence in Congo-Brazzaville," *African Affairs*, 98 (1999), 37-54; John Clark, "Petro-Politics in Congo," *Journal of Democracy*, 8 (1997), 62-76, and "The Neo-Colonial Context of the Democratic Experiment of Congo-Brazzaville," *African Affairs*, 101 (2002), 171-192; Pierre Englebert, "Congo: Recent History," *Africa South of the Sahara* (London: Europa Publications, 2001); and Patrice Yengo, "Un recours endémique à la violence," *Afrique Contemporaine*, (1998), 33-57.

⁸ See Englebert, 397; *SIPRI Yearbook*, (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, Stockholm, 2000), 25; and United Nations, *UN Plan: Republic of Congo, 2001-2002* (United Nations Brazzaville office, 2001-02), 1. The latter estimates 50,000 overall deaths due to violence, disease and malnutrition. According to relief officials in nearby Kinshasa, an additional 50,000 were displaced during the spring 2002 fighting (Author email communication, June 4, 2002).

⁹ On social class and the African state, see Richard L. Sklar, "The Nature of Class Domination in Africa," *Journal of Modern African Studies*, XVII/4 (December 1979), 531-551; and Catherine Boone, "The Making of a Rentier Class: Wealth Accumulation and Political Control in Senegal," *Journal of Development Studies*, 26/3 (1990), 425-449.

¹⁰ On neo-patrimonial politics, see Michael Bratton and Nicolas Van de Walle, "Neopatrimonial Regimes and Political Transitions in Africa," *World Politics*, 46/4 (1994), 453-89; Christopher Clapham, ed., *Private Patronage and Public Power* (London: Frances Pinter, 1985); and Richard Snyder, "Explaining Transitions from Neopatrimonial Dictatorships," *Comparative Politics*, 24/4 (1992).

¹¹ This view is consistent with the resumption of fighting between Sassou's troops and a rebel holdout force in March 2002, led by a religious leader who was never part of the state elite. See below for details.

¹² In addition to its implications for war, it should also be noted that Congo's oil wealth has had some long-term effects on society, including relatively high rates of wealth and education. See John Clark, "Resource Revenues and Political Development in Sub-Saharan Africa: Congo Republic in Comparative Perspective." *Afrika Spectrum*, 37 (2002), 25-41.

¹³ Ross, "Oil, Drugs, and Diamonds," and Snyder, "Does Lootable Wealth Breed Disorder?"

¹⁴ Paul Collier, "Rebellion as a Quasi-Criminal Activity."

¹⁵ Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979). Skocpol's "opportunity," however, is state collapse, rather than the ready availability of resources.

¹⁶ Collier, "Rebellion as a Quasi-Criminal Activity."

¹⁷ See Collier, "Rebellion as a Quasi-Criminal Activity," 842, for a comparison of the costs of rebellion and household crime.

¹⁸ Keen, "Incentives and Disincentives for Violence," 27.

¹⁹ John Mueller, "The Banality of 'Ethnic War,'" *International Security*, 25/1 (2000), 42-70.

²⁰ Peter Andreas, "The Clandestine Political Economy of War: Lessons from the Balkans," paper presented to the American Political Science Association (San Francisco, 2001). Stathis N. Kalyvas, "'New' and 'Old' Civil Wars: A Valid Distinction?" *World*

Politics, 54/1 (2001), 99-118, argues that civil war greed is not a uniquely post-Cold War trend.

²¹ The bureaucracy grew from 3,300 persons in 1960 to 80,000 at the beginning of the 1990s, or almost 7% of the country's adult population. See Clark, "Petro-Politics in Congo," 66, and the *World Bank Africa Database 1998/99* (CD Rom). For rentier states, see Hazem Beblawi and Giacomo Luciani, eds., *The Rentier State: Nation, State and Integration in the Arab World* (London: Routledge, Kegan and Paul, 1987); Hootan Shambayati, "The Rentier State, Interest Groups, and the Paradox of Autonomy," *Comparative Politics*, 26 (1994); and Douglas Andrew Yates, *The Rentier State in Africa: Oil Rent Dependency and Neocolonialism in the Republic of Gabon* (Africa World Press, 1996).

²² "Nibolek" is a relatively new ethnic marker derived from the contraction of the names of three major southern provinces, Niari, Bouenza, and Lekoumou.

²³ For Congo-Brazzaville's democratization experiences, see Jean-Pascal Daloz and Patrick Quantin, eds., *Transitions Démocratiques Africaines* (Paris: Karthala, 1997) and John Clark, "The Neo-Colonial Context of the Democratic Experiment of Congo-Brazzaville," *African Affairs*, 101 (April 2002), 171-192.

²⁴ Some 48% of Congo's population are "Niboleks." See, Political Risk Service (PRS), *Congo: Country Report* (Syracuse, New York, PRS, 2001), 1.

²⁵ In the second round Lissouba earned 61% of the vote to Kolelas' 39%. Sassou gained 17% in the first round.

²⁶ In subsequent parliamentary elections, Lissouba's party won 39 of 125 seats, while Kolelas and Sassou earned 29 and 19, respectively. See John F. Clark, "Socio-Political

Change in the Republic of Congo: Political Dilemmas of Economic Reform,” *Journal of Third World Studies*, 10/1 (1993), 56-63.

²⁷ See *Africa Confidential*, 21, 24 October 1997. Although we acknowledge the importance of the roles played by France and Angola in the outcome of the Congolese conflict, we do not focus on this dimension in this paper. For an excellent discussion of France’s role, see John Clark, “The Neo-Colonial Context...,”

²⁸ Their first training camp was in Aubeville, located in Congo’s Bouenza region.

²⁹ The Israeli connection was indicated by a former southern sub-prefect, who was a Lissouba supporter (Author interview, Dolisie, July 6, 2001), and by a representative of the Israeli Aircraft Industries (Author interview, Brazzaville, July 2, 2001).

³⁰ Roland Pourtier, "1997: les raisons d'une guerre 'incivile.'" *Afrique Contemporaine* (1998), 7-32.

³¹ Author interview with Ninja commander, Brazzaville, 12 July 2001, and Henri Ossebi, "De la galère à la guerre: jeunes et "Cobras" dans les quartiers Nord de Brazzaville." *Politique Africaine* (1998), 17-33. For civil wars and the security dilemma, see Barbara F. Walter and Jack L. Snyder (eds.), *Civil Wars, Insecurity and Intervention* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1999).

³² In 1993, Lissouba’s party was termed the “Mouvance Présidentielle,” including UPADS and five smaller factions.

³³ Englebert, 397.

³⁴ Pourtier.

³⁵ By the mid-1990s, according to a July 5, 2001 author interview with former chief of staff Jean-Marie Michel Mokoko in Brazzaville, the Cobras had recruited some 20,000

fighters, compared to 10,000 each for the Ninjas and Cocoyes. The army could muster 15,000.

³⁶ For democratization and violence, see Nancy Bermeo, "Myths of Moderation: Confrontation and Conflict During Democratic Transitions," *Comparative Politics*, 29/3 (1997), 302-322; Havard Hegre, Tanja Ellingsen, Scott Gates, and Nils Petter Gleditsch, "Towards a Democratic Civil Peace? Democracy, Political Change, and Civil War, 1816-1992," *American Political Science Review*, 95/1 (2001), 33-48; James Ron, "Ideology in Context: Sendero Luminoso's Tactical Escalation," *Journal of Peace Research*, 38/5 (2001), 569-592; and Jack Snyder, *From Voting to Violence* (New York, W.W. Norton, 2000).

³⁷ The Angolans intervened because of Sassou's Cold War-era ties to Dos Santos, and because Angolan UNITA rebels were using Lissouba-controlled territory to export diamonds. See *Africa Confidential*, 24 October 1997, 38(21), 1-3.

³⁸ Remy Bazenguissa-Ganga, "The Spread of Political Violence in Congo Brazzaville," *African Affairs*, 98 (1999), 37-54, and Florence Bernault, "Archaïsme colonial, modernité sorcière et territorialisation du politique à Brazzaville, 1959-1995," *Politique Africaine* (1998), 34-49.

³⁹ All southern combatants insisted they fought only after Angolan and Cobra persecution.

⁴⁰ Author interview with Western relief worker, Brazzaville, June 29, 2001.

⁴¹ Author interviews with Western diplomats in Brazzaville, July 2, 2001, and with former militia members, Brazzaville, July 6-12, 2001.

⁴² *Accord de cessation des hostilités en République du Congo*, Pointe-Noire, 16 November 1999; and *Accord de cessez-le-feu et de cessation des hostilités*, Brazzaville, 29 December 1999. Peter Wallensteen and Margareta Sollenberg, “Armed Conflict, 1989-99,” *Journal of Peace Research*, 37/5 (2000), 635-649, note that few 1990s’ wars ended with peace deals.

⁴³ See Bazenguissa, “The Spread of Political Violence,” for rural militia recruitment. The expression “ethno-parties” is from Yengo, 42.

⁴⁴ William Reno, “Shadow States and the Political Economy of Civil Wars,” in Mats Berdal and David M. Malone, eds.

⁴⁵ Yengo and author interview in Brazzaville with Abel Mokono, mayor of the capital’s Bakongo suburb, July 13, 2001.

⁴⁶ Ossebi.

⁴⁷ Author interview with Congolese relief worker, Brazzaville, July 6, 2001.

⁴⁸ Author interview with *Le Commissaire*, Brazzaville, July 8, 2001.

⁴⁹ Author interview with Colonel Mboundou-Mboundou, Brazzaville, July 3, 2001.

⁵⁰ See Ross, “Does Oil Hinder Democracy?” for lootable-versus-non-lootable resources, and *Africa Confidential*, 21 October 1997, and Pourtier, for Lissouba’s wartime use of oil revenues.

⁵¹ Data for this section comes from Political Risk Service, and author interviews in Congo-Brazzaville.

⁵² *Africa South of the Sahara 2001* (London: Europa Publications, 2000), 405, and *Africa Confidential*, 43/17, (30 August 2002), 6.

⁵³ Pourtier, 29, and Political Risk Service, 26-27.

⁵⁴ Hodges and Le Billon, “Angola’s Political Economy of War,” 71.

⁵⁵ Clark, “Petro-Politics in Congo,” 70. For barriers to secession, see Lawrence S. Eastwood Jr., “Secession: State Practice and International Law After the Dissolution of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, *Duke Journal of Comparative and International Law*, 3/2 (1993), 299-349, and David Strang, “Anomaly and Commonplace in European Political Expansion: Realist and Institutional Accounts,” *International Organization*, 45/2 (1991), 143-62.

⁵⁶ Author interview with Col. Mboungou-Mboungou.

⁵⁷ Author interview with Sadat, Brazzaville, July 6, 2001.

⁵⁸ Author interview with Stéphane Rostiaux, Brazzaville, July 5, 2001.

⁵⁹ Author interview with senior Western diplomat, Brazzaville, July 2, 2001.

⁶⁰ See below for more details on the actual peace process.

⁶¹ Author interview with Jean-François Guembo, Dolisie, July 9, 2001.

⁶² Author interview with CNR delegation, Brazzaville, July 5, 2001.

⁶³ For militias, see Bazenguissa; Yengo; and Pourtier.

⁶⁴ Author interview with the *Japonais*, Brazzaville, July 6, 2001.

⁶⁵ Author interview.

⁶⁶ Author interview with Colonel Bougouanza, Mossendjo, July 10, 2001.

⁶⁷ Author interview with Maurice M’Bobi, Dolisie, July 11, 2001.

⁶⁸ Author interview with four leaders of the CNR members, Brazzaville, July 5, 2001.

⁶⁹ Author interview with Maurice M’Bobi.

⁷⁰ Author interview with senior Western diplomat, Brazzaville, July 2, 2001.

⁷¹ International Office of Migration and United Nations, “Programme de Réinsertion des Ex-Miliciens et de Ramassage des Armes Légères,” *La Réinsertion en Images* (Brazzaville, United Nations, no date).

⁷² Spyros Demetriou, Robert Muggah and Ian Biddle, *Small Arms Availability, Trade and Impacts in the Republic of Congo* (Geneva: Small Arms Survey Special Report, April 2002). See also *Africa Research Bulletin (Political, Social and Cultural Series)*, November 1-30th 2001, 14647. The authors were taken to see a number of undeclared weapons caches hidden in the family compounds of former militiamen.

⁷³ Observatoire de la Démocratie en Afrique [democraf.com], 16 April 2002.

⁷⁴ Jean-René Kule. “Le Pasteur Ntoumi exige le grade de général d’armée,” *Congo Portal News* (congoportal.com), 21 March 2002.

⁷⁵ Abdi I. Samatar. *An African Miracle* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1999).

⁷⁶ See Daloz and Quantin.

⁷⁷ Hodges and Le Billon, “Angola’s Political Economy of War.”

⁷⁸ Reno, “Corruption and State Politics in Sierra Leone.”

⁷⁹ Gerard Prunier, *The Rwandan Crisis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

⁸⁰ For “democratic deepening” see Kenneth M. Roberts, *Deepening Democracy? The Modern Left and Social Movements in Chile and Peru* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998).

⁸¹ For civil wars and democratic deepening, see Elisabeth Jean Wood, *Forging Democracy from Below: Insurgent Traditions in South Africa and El Salvador* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁸² James Ron, “Stop Looking the Other Way,” *Globe and Mail*, 10 August, 2001.