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Religion, Politics and Conflict Resolution in the Democratic Republic of Congo: An Ethnographic Study of the Role of Christian Clergy in the Ethnic Identity Conflicts in Eastern Congo 1990 - 2023.

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Statement of Originality

I declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree. Except where states otherwise by reference or acknowledgment, the work presented is entirely my own.

Date: 30th January 2024

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Abstract

This study explores the role of local Christian clergy in resolving or exacerbating violence related to indigeneity and ethnic identity in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). It focuses on understanding the interactions of religious elites with politics, power and ethnicity and analyses their actions, personal rationales, practices, behaviours, and responses. The thesis draws on over six months of ethnographic fieldwork conducted between October 2020 and February 2022, mainly in the DRC, Belgium and Rwanda. It adopts a qualitative and interpretive methodology involving fieldwork, semi structured interviews, focus groups, observations, and archival research. The study draws from a five-dimensional model of religion in peace and conflict by Fraser and Owen. It also makes use of original metaphors based on Congolese house and village plans, to elucidate the hidden meanings and multifaceted modes of Congolese thought. The insider position of the researcher is used to explain the relevance of the religious in peacebuilding within an existing secular approach. The use of specifically Congolese metaphors also contributes to an understanding of the DRC society, the mindsets of peacemakers and their interactions with an environment of ethnic conflict. The research findings demonstrate, firstly, that the symbiotic relationship between politics and religion presents a fundamental obstacle to peacebuilding. The thesis also demonstrates that ethnicity and tribal loyalties frequently take precedence over fundamental religious tenets and the claimed religious values of peace. It observes that cultural belonging is often more important to people's identity than their religious affiliation. Finally, the thesis strongly suggest that Christian clergy have been ambiguous, silent, complicit, or complacent concerning violence against Tutsi communities, particularly throughout the ethnic identity crises of the 1990s and in more recent violence in North and South Kivu. The findings contribute to existing literature by arguing that the role of religious leaders in peace and conflict is essential but also multifaceted and contradictory. This finding suggests clergy's pluralistic positions in conflict, which extend from existing scholarship that highlights the ambivalent roles of religious leaders in peace making. The thesis claims that clergy could play a pivotal, constructive role in creating an environment that enables peaceful coexistence if they were able to act independently of allegiance to ethnicity, politics, and power.

Acknowledgments

Acronyms

AFDL	Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo
ATR	African Traditional Religion
CCV	Church at the centre of a village
CJP	Justice and Peace Commission
CEPAC	*Communaute des Eglises Pentecotiste au Congo*
CENCO	National Episcopal Conference of the Congo
CAR	Central African Republic
CNS	National Sovereign Conference
CENI	National Electoral Commission
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
ECC	*Eglise du Christ au Congo*
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
EJCSK	*Eglise de Jesus Christ sur la Terre par le Prophete Simon Kimbangu*
ETD	*Entités Territoriales Décentralisées* (Decentralised Territorial Entities)
HCR-PT	*Haut Conseil de la République- Parlement de Transition*
FARDC	Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo
HSM	Holy Spirit Movement
INGO	International Non-Government Organisation
IIC	Indigenous Initiated Church
LRA	*Lord's Resistance Army*
MPR	*Mouvement Populaire de la Revolution*
M23	Movement of 23rd March
MONUSCO	The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC
RPF	Rwanda Patriotic Front
RCC	Roman Catholic Church
RCD	Congolese Rally of Democracy
RIO	*Réseau d'Innovation Organisationnelle*
RTNC	*Radio Télévision Nationale Congolaise*
SENSS	Southeast Network for Social Sciences
TR	Truth and Reconciliation
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UN	The United Nations

Table Of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter 1: Introduction

Over the past three decades, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has been the scene of one of the world's deadliest and longest-running armed conflicts (Barera, 2015; Autesserre, 2008, 2010). The mineral-rich eastern region remains the battleground in which over one hundred national and foreign armed groups operate.[1] The negative impact of this armed conflict has not been confined only to the African central and Great Lakes regions. It has led to tensions between countries across the continent and internationally (Curtis & Dzinesa, 2012; Prunier, 2008). In the search to establish and consolidate peace, the crises have attracted the involvement of various actors at national, regional, and international levels (Sweet, 2020). The conflicts have generated what remains the world's largest international peacebuilding intervention and the most expensive[2] deployment of United Nations (UN) peacekeeping and peacebuilding missions – the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO) (Autesserre, 2010). However, firstly, these efforts have failed to end ethnic violence (Muchikiwa, 2015; Autesserre, 2017). Secondly, the existing research on the practice of peacebuilding and understanding the DRC conflict seems to reflect a secularist perspective: prevailing secular scholarship appears to ignore the implications of the core significance of Christian religion to the lives of the vast majority of Congolese people (Uzodike & Whetho, 2009). The scholarly contributions do not address the particularities of religious contexts in peace and conflict in the DRC.

This thesis addresses this question: What role that religious leaders play in peacebuilding? And, specifically, what is the role (if any) that the Catholic and Protestant clergy play in resolving or exacerbating ethnic identity conflicts in the Eastern region of the DRC? The thesis seeks to examine their actions, concerns, personal rationales, and behaviours in response to the politics of indigeneity claims and ethnic identity conflict[3] in eastern Congo. It also intends to explore how they express their concerns about ethnic violence and the nature of their attitudes and motivations as they respond to this specific conflict. Do they contribute to deterring ethnic violence or exacerbate it along politics of identity lines?

Religious peacebuilding is increasingly recognised in issues surrounding conflict resolution (Hertog, 2010; Sandal, 2017, Appleby, 2005; Phillpotts, 2007). It is also gaining more interest and attention in social science scholarship (Abu-Nimer, 2001; Sandal, 2011) with an

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[1] Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (R2P). Risk level: Current Crisis, available online at [https://www.globalr2p.org/countries/democratic-republic-of-the-congo/] accessed on 12th November 2023
[2] The UN spends over one billion per year to support the MONUSCO operation in the DRC (Curtis & Dzinesa, 2012).
[3] I do provide explanation and understanding of the nature of this conflict later in this chapter and in reflect on this in the literature review (chapter two).

emphasis placed on the role of religion in politics (Ellis & Ter Haar, 2001) and international relations (Haynes, 2021). In Africa, churches are proliferating (Meyer, 2004), and specifically in the DRC religious practice continues to influence people's everyday lives (Uzodike and Whetho, 2009). The clergy are equally significantly influential (Little, 2007). Faith-based practice is potentially at the cutting edge of debate on religious peacebuilding. Despite this tradition of religiosity, the rapid growth of Christianity in Africa (Ter Haar, 2005) and the role of Christian churches in public life in the DRC, the engagement of religious leaders in conflict remains under-researched (Ande, 2010; Alfani, 2019; Botiveau & Eggers, 2013; Jordhus-Lier & Braathen, 2013;, 2021). Specifically, a significant research gap exists in understanding the role of the Christian clergy in the ethnic identity crisis (Prunier, 2001; Longman, 2001) in eastern Congo.

This introductory chapter describes the gap in the literature, outlines the inquiry puzzle as well as the aims and objectives of this research, the methodological approach, the scope of the study and the rationale and significance. Finally, this chapter discusses the contextual background to the study and outlines the structure of the thesis.

1.1   Research problem – gap in the existing literature

The main objectives of this research and analysis are to, firstly, contribute to the new scholarship and literature surrounding religion with a comprehensive and grounded examination of the historical and cultural roots of past and present conflict in eastern DRC. Secondly, to explore whether locally rooted approaches, such as faith-based inspired peacebuilding, might complement existing efforts to resolve conflict. Thirdly, to explore the role the clergy play in resolving or exacerbating conflict along ethnic lines. The thesis intends to enhance an understanding of the DRC crisis. In defining the research problem, I start with acknowledgement of existing scholarly contribution and will then move on to provide a brief overview of the limitations of existing literature in peacebuilding and conflict.

There is a significant history of scholarship on the role of religion in conflict. A wide range of academics in peacebuilding and conflict studies have demonstrated the role of religious identities as one of the major contributing factors to violence in regions such as the Middle East, Kashmir and Northern Ireland. Current and recent events such as 'the troubles' in Northern Ireland and the attacks of 11th September 2001[4] are often cited to demonstrate the role of religion in conflict. The work of Appleby (2000, 2006) has however provided a

nuanced theoretical argument about the ambivalent nature of religion in war and peace. This view has shaped some of the most recent scholarly work in religious peacebuilding. Gopin (2000) and Lederach (1997) largely accepted Appleby's perhaps, equivocal position concerning religion in peace making. Omer, (2015) and Hertog, (2010) also refer to the often-paradoxical role of religion. They argue that religion can both fuel violence and act as a resource for transformation of antagonistic interactions and eventually build peaceful and inclusive societies. Appleby (2000:7) advocate for this binary view of the role of the religious, suggesting that:

> *I refute the notion that religion, having so often inspired, legitimated, and exacerbated deadly conflicts, cannot be expected to contribute consistently to their peaceful resolution. I argue to the contrary, that a new form of conflict transformation – "religious peacebuilding" – is taking shape on the ground, in and across local communities plagued by violence.*

A recognition of the constructive role of religion peace is developing. In recent decades, there academic contributions have emerged that consider the constructive influence of religion in peace building through reference to its spiritual resources, and its potential to clarify and demonstrate social and moral values (Appleby, 2000; 2006; Appleby *et al* 2015). This approach has been developed further by being directly applied to theoretical arguments and policy (Gopin, 2002; Little, 2007; Smock 2006; Hertog, 2010; Sandal, 2017). Consequently, there has evolved a greater recognition that peace is a central aim of most faiths. Arguably there is increasing consideration of religious organisations and their leaders in shaping efforts toward global peace and security (King and Owen, 2020).

Religious leaders have progressively been seen as key players in politics and international relations in the majority world. Often more trusted than political leaders they are viewed as persuasive mediators, cultural agents and interpretivists with resources and influence to hold leaders accountable in applying humanitarian law and human rights (Cismas 2014; Philipott, 2017; Sandal, 2017). A wide range of literature argues that religious actors have the potential to mobilise their communities towards better ways of living together (Sandal, 2017). In parts of the world where religion is still highly dominant, these leaders exert a significant degree of moral and spiritual influence over both national and local political actors (Little, 2007; Sandal, 2017). Philpott (2007) assessed two ways in which religion and authority in politics are expressed in every situation, and in political theology. He illustrates how religious organisations, often in the context of the politics of liberal theology, can assist a country towards a democratic process through championing non-violent actions, whereas those with more materialistic aims may help government institutions sustain environments of violence and autocracy.

Conflict, both internal and external is a central concept of religion and the religious. Gopin (2000 and Hertog, 2010) have argued that government and international policymakers ought to actively promote the potential of religions to mitigate violent actions and overcome conflict. They suggest that the potential role of religion as a resource to develop a shared vision of commitment to a common responsibility cannot be ignored. They also propose that an in-depth study of religious value systems may enable us to understand better the drivers of conflict within and between religions. Eventually, these drivers could become a resource to promote peace. There is unfortunately an assumption in Gopin and Hertog's arguments that religious leaders are a homogeneous community with similar understandings of the concept of peace. They do not fully address the circumstances where efforts of the religious contradict their scriptures or claimed values of peace. This thesis questions the idea of a transcendent religious identity and demonstrates the possibility of a multifaceted response within and between these religious leaders.

Religion can sustain conflict. Some of the most recent studies, (for example Haynes, 2020) evaluate the significant relationships between politics, peace and religion. Haynes argues that it is mistaken to assume that religious ideas or religious differences have caused conflict and violence – something more material and selfish is involved. He contends that conflict develops, because of underlying factors often linked to economical aspirations and different social and interpretations. Conflict simply becomes more complex when religious features are added to largely worldly disputes.

The field of religious peacebuilding is a relatively new discipline. Its major focus has been in what has been perceived to be religiously induced conflict, but its focus has mainly involved a rather binary approach to peace or violence. Hertog (2010) noted what she saw as a significant lack of coherence and systematisation in religious peacebuilding. His call for more research in this field has been echoed by the most recent studies (Philipotts, Toft, Shah, 2011; Alfani, 2019; Kitata; 2020). My study aligns with Hertog's (2010:39) argument that the existing conceptualisation and theoretical approaches put forward so far are too narrow and ought to be based on systematic study rather than drawing on existing policy and practice.

This thesis is situated within an emerging scholarship on religious peacebuilding via the disciplines of international conflict analysis and international relations based on my ethnographic study of the role of Christian clergy in the ethnic identity conflicts in Eastern Congo. As stated above, the role of religion is without doubt significant and influential in many ways in today's world. However, following the review of existing research and evaluation of dominant analytical models, I maintain that existing theories in religious peace

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building do not fully explain the role of the clergy in conflicts of ethnic identity. In general, in the light of the major significance of religion, particularly various forms of Christianity, the role of the clergy in peace making in the DRC remains under-researched. It does not appear to be an overriding theory as to how peace and religion might intersect.

Literature on scholarism appear to have influenced the role of religion in everyday life. Many colonial Western commentators assume that religion is emotional, lacks rationality (Cummins & Stille, 2021), and is an arbitrary aspect and a sphere of social reality doomed to disappear through the worldwide growth of science and secularism (Ellis & Har Teer, 2005). Religious knowledge and the public activities of church leaders in the global north may appear to follow the Weberian idea of value-based action (Kalberg, 2004) or Foucault's post-modern epistemic dynamics that promote a spiritual dimension while recognising progress in scientific knowledge (Schreiber, 2012). This interpretation is countered by strong evidence of a perhaps transitional phase, evident in much of sub-Saharan Africa, between traditional and modern religious practice. It recognises that religious ideas and individuals – particularly the clergy – are integral to modern politics in this region.

The relationship between religion and peace has been given little attention (Glazier, 2018). Yet, there are diverse reasons to claim that religion or religious leaders could potentially be a vital resource for peacebuilding (Appleby, 2000, Hertog, 2010). It is even more necessary in places like the DRC where religious ideas are not a primary factor in conflict. Some qualitative studies, for example in the cases of Colombia and Mozambique, have shown that religious leaders have been credible forces in deterring violence because of the high respect in which they are held in communities (Little, 2007; Glazier, 2018). A wide range of scholarly contributors suggest that religion plays a crucial role in influencing or preventing conflict (Appleby, 2000; Gopin, 2000; Little, 2007). Determination to ethical systems, as demonstrated in religious characteristics, can be the main drivers for peace (Appleby (2000).

The above view is underpinned by concrete and specific religious teachings that encourage believers to sue for peace and provide time-honoured strategies to address obstacles to religion and conflict resolution. The existing academic literature rarely explores the constructive side of religion (i.e., bringing about peace) or the ways it addresses societal barriers (Ter Haar, 2005). The duality of religion as source of both peace and violence is acknowledged but its positive aspects are fundamentally undeveloped in the research, generally, and specifically in DRC context.

The destructive side of religion is a far more common topic in the existing scholarship. In the last thirty years, there have been a wide range of scholarly contributors connecting religion with violence (Omer, 2015) and conflict, these theoretical framing emphasises religious influence on terrorism and fundamentalism as well as ethnic conflict in Africa (Hertog, 2010). Such framing has led many scholars especially in the West to adopt the wholesale view that religion is connected intrinsically to violence (Mayall and Silvestri, 2015). The rapid growth of extremist and fundamentalist movements across many (mainly developing) countries has led to the assumption that religion has a major role in promoting extremism and violence.

There is, however, a growing interest in the constructive side of religion too. Besides having a role in fuelling violence, religion also has an important dimension in international politics and conflict resolution (Bartoszewicz, 2013). One argument considers that, since religion has contributed to conflicts then it must also have the potential to build peace (Bartoszewicz, 2013). Concepts of dialogue, reconciliation or forgiveness have relevance in both the religious and the secular world, becoming important aspects for general discourse on peace and security. Certain scholarships use some successful examples to argue for the positive role of religious actors in peacebuilding. There is a need to apply a wider analytical perspective while also learning from those not identified as successful cases - where the role of religion in ending violence was not effective.

The interplay between religion, politics and peacebuilding is not well documented. This limitation may partly be caused by over-dependence on specific examples (Brewer et al., 2010) that are difficult to generalise. These analyses easily lead to essentialist conclusions but have so far not proven to be generalisable (Hertog, 2010). Brewer et al. (2010) argued that opportunities to form deeper general theories are missed when research depends only on specific illustrations of religion as a resource for reconciliation (Coward & Smith, 2004). Religion may have the potential to build peace, but this idea has not been developed (Gopin, 2000).

Scholarly contributions differ in their methodological approaches. Many, as suggested by Mayall and Sylvestri (2015), have been inspired by universalist thoughts,[5] examining the links created by religion across societies and throughout history. Other publications have been written from a religious perspective, or by individuals affected by a strongly religious background. Some common themes of such scholars include a focus on religious institutions

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[5] Universalists believe in salvation of everyone through God or goodness in all. Universalism argues about the impossibility for a God of love to offer salvation to a certain part of humankind and punish others. The basis of this theory is about expectations of universal religious normative principles.

(Appleby, 2005), the Abrahamic religious traditions, and faith-based interventions in the peace process. Others focus on constructive dialogue between different faith groups. This study takes a different angle by attempting to bridge the gap in knowledge – the role of the clergy in ethnic identity conflict, examining their rationales, concerns and how they are expressed through public and political statements.

A wide range of literature argues that the clergy are influential leaders in their communities (Sandal, 2017). They exert a significant degree of moral and spiritual influence over both national and local political actors (Little, 2007; Sandal, 2017). In case of the DRC, they make political speeches and influence both congregations and political leaders through sermons, prayers and personal interpretations of religious scriptures, teachings and prophecies. But while the religious elite talk about restoring souls, fostering human dignity or improving people's welfare and ensuring human rights, there is little evidence to suggest that they play a constructive role in countering inter-community conflict beyond their involvement as stakeholders in national political processes (Jordhus-Lier & Braathen, 2013; Eggers, 2013).

In principle churches might be expected to provide a framework of agreement, concord, and cohesion between people from different backgrounds (Gatwa, 2005). Congregations and their leaders are active important segments of civil society in the DRC. They are moral and social 'heavy weights' in influence and capacity of spiritual, human and social mobilisation. The force of their oratory abilities is empowered by unchallenged pastoral, dogmatic and biblical authority, and a general commitment to faith. Church leaders are assumed by many therefore to be apolitical. It might be assumed that the church would play a pivotal role in peace making and, in the spirit of the New Testament, assure justice for all and be the voice of the voiceless, bringing hope to the hopeless.

Understanding the disparity between Christian religious norms[6] and religious leaders' practices in everyday reality is of interest in this study. As shown above, many studies suggest that religious leaders can play both a destructive and constructive role in peacebuilding. Religion observably involves destructive and constructive actions and outcomes (Appleby, 2000). However, it is not clear whether the DRC clergy fits this ambivalent phenomenon suggested by Appleby and established in the scholarship of peace and conflict. While religious ideas and references to biblical texts are used to sustain and conduct ethnic violent attacks, there is little evidence linking these religious leaders' activism in violence and peace to publicly declared support.

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[6] Guiding people's behaviours and evaluating good actions, love your neighbour, love your enemies, do good to those that hurt you.

In many parts of Africa, a religious normative system is generally considered one of the elements of peacebuilding (Harpviken & Roislien, 2005). In an absence of trust in state institutions and religious leaders are generally expected to play an important role in maintaining and regulating social harmony (Suprapto, 2015). Umubyeyi and Mtapuri (2019:417) suggested that, in Africa "Church leaders are considered as the most trusted individuals whose prime role is to preach the gospel with the central focus on building the communities through the Word of God." The clergy, and those dedicated to religious leadership, represent symbolically the ritual and concept of salvation. Values of prejudice, partiality and neutrality in situations of injustice, together with complicity in conflict and manipulating the truth, are considered by the core Christians foundations as against the 'mystical body of Christ' (the church). In theory, the church as a significant part of people's lives is expected to exemplify a community of committed witnesses to the conflict, by speaking against hatred.

Despite the high 'respect' given to religious leaders, the DRC remains affected by recurring wars and perpetual ethnic violence, often with the connivance or at least uncritical knowledge of some church leaders. A divisive political ideology of ethnic exclusion is endemic. Despite an anthropological and common African traditional religious point of view, which views all human beings as being created equally, there are expectations of ethnic and political 'brotherhood' between certain ethnic groups but not between others. In zones of armed conflict and genocide the apparent neutrality and complicity of religious leaders is highly significant because of their role in influencing the social and spiritual lives of the general population and political actors (Ellis and Ter Haar, 1998). These paradoxes have not been sufficiently explored in the existing literature. Therefore, the thesis examines the obstacles (if any) faced by church leadership in resolving conflicts in eastern Congo.

The thesis examines the disconnect between the ethos of peace expressed by the Church's leaders, and their central or integral role in racial and ethnic politics (Kroesbergen, 2019). There has been limited studies confronting the seeming contradiction of Christian churches involvement in politics versus their tacit role in conflict (Longman, 1998). The conflict between religious ideals and day-to-day violent reality inevitably results in words and actions that seem unrelated and irreconcilable. This study endeavours, by focusing on the clergy, to understand the links between the claimed Congolese gospel Christianity and the universal ideal of peaceful cohabitation. It is therefore the question of religious influence and the social and political challenges faced by national religious leaders in the context of tribally based violence that this thesis addresses and seeks to analyse. The contradiction of a religion of

peace being involved in violent aggression is often ignored. Existing theories of religious peacebuilding do not fully explain the phenomenon of religiously condoned violence.

Religion in the DRC is neither the underlying causes of the conflict in the eastern Congo nor the conflict itself appear to be religiously initiated (Autessere, 2010). While at state level there is a sense of 'adopting' secularism, Congolese society seems strongly dominated by beliefs in a modern form of Christianity, which acts as a regulator of social and political spheres.

This study cases are religious leaders representing two religious' groups in eastern Congo. And a phenomenon of sociological or political interest is the nature of their actions in response to the ethnic identity conflict in eastern Congo. The context is to understand their actual and potential roles in either peace or conflict. To answer the main research question, these sub-questions have been considered:

i. *What role (if any) do Catholic and Protestant clergy play in ethnic identity conflict in eastern Congo?*

ii. *Do these leaders play a role in deterring violence and edifying a peace that elevates shared religious identity over the dominant nationalistic narratives where the ethnic identity and citizenship rights of the Banyarwanda and Banyamulenge are contested? If they do not, why not?*

iii. *What have been the actions of Catholic bishops and Protestant church leaders as they engage with issues of indigeneity and ethnic identity politics in eastern Congo, and how are their actions manifested? What is the nature of their responses (for example, sermons, symbolism and political statements) and how do these contribute to deter, or sustain ethnic violence?*

This research considers two interrelated approaches in answering these questions. Firstly, it uses empirical qualitative data to explore and analyse the role of the church elite in peace and conflict. In doing so it attempts to offer a conceptual framework to explain the attitudes, behaviours and practices of religious leaders in an environment of inter-ethnic conflict. Secondly, the thesis situates these phenomena within the broader context of the interplay between religion, power, and ethnic identity in the DRC.

1.2   Why Congo – research relevance

The idea to embark on this study's journey started with my experience participating in peace talks in the DRC in 2012/2013. My involvement in this process included informal observations of the influence of religious leaders and their religious practices. My enhanced awareness galvanised an interest in further investigating whether, and if so how, Christian religious leaders might contribute more constructively to resolving the longstanding and contested issue of the citizenship and ethnic identity of the Banyarwanda and Banyamulenge in the DRC.

This study was also prompted by Eggers and Bitiveau's (2003:79) observation of a significant problem regarding a lack of literature on the role of Christian churches in conflicts in the DRC. There is a growing interest from Congolese scholars to understand the potential of the clergy in deterring violence or obstacles to their direct involvement in the peacebuilding. In the deeply divided societies of the DRC, and in an environment where state authorities have failed to regulate social relations between people from different backgrounds (Feta, 2009), these churches may provide the only chance of survival for the Congolese nation. The thesis argues that religion as potential driver of peace is often overlooked by Western scholarship. This is an original approach on the relationship between religious leaders/practitioners and politics. I want to expand briefly and outline gap in religious peacebuilding in the DRC.

The DRC is a similar size to the whole of western Europe (Kearney, 2016) and home to over two hundred distinct ethnic groups (Longman, 2000; Zengarini, 2023), each with its own culture, traditions, and language. It is one of the African continents most Christianised nations: over 90% of the country's population practice Christian religious beliefs (Alfani, 2019; Prunier, 2001). The Congolese people identify themselves as Catholics or Protestants. While there are still some who practice indigenous religious beliefs officially, their number has dropped significantly (Longman, 1998). Church practices are an essential part of Congolese society and Christianity is the most significant cross-cultural feature and contributes to a national identity already shaped by pre-Christian traditions of religiosity. The evangelical and other church movements across the DRC and the rest of sub-Saharan Africa is a fast-growing modern phenomenon (Mayer, 2004). However, paradoxically, despite these religious and cultural capitals, the role of religion and religious in the inter-ethnic strife and the perpetuation of socio-political situations that continue to foster conflict. The country continues to experience the world's worst humanitarian crisis and deadliest

conflict since World War II (Coglhan, 2007). It is not known in what ways, if any, the Christian clergy contribute to or fail to deter the underlying factors that lead to the ongoing violence on rights of citizenship of the Congolese Tutsis. There is a gap in the understanding of why a strongly shared national identity remains lacking (Gilpin, Bekoe & Siggle, 2016).

The country remains affected by recurring wars and perpetual ethnic violence, often with the connivance or at least uncritical knowledge of some church leaders. A divisive political ideology of ethnic exclusion is endemic. Despite an anthropological and common African traditional religious point of view, which views all human beings as being created equally, there are expectations of ethnic and political 'brotherhood' between certain ethnic groups but not between others. In zones of armed conflict and genocide the apparent neutrality and complicity of religious leaders is highly significant because of their role in influencing the social and spiritual lives of the general population and political actors (Mutumbo-Mukendi, 2011). Most of those engaged in conflict and violence mainly belong to the Christian faith, even to the same denomination. Many of these actors involved in conflict situations claim to be acting according to biblical principles. However, churches and their members have been targeted in conflicts (Jänsch, 2023). The thesis questions the nature of this profound inconsistency and how it manifests in every aspect of DRC society.

The second paradox that inspires this study relates to the authority the Church has as an institution on state and political power (Ande, 2010; Oyatambwe, 1997). The Christian church through the clergy influences politics and communities nationwide and is highly influential, respected and engaged through their public statements, with people from all backgrounds (Kitata, 2020). Roman Catholic Church (RCC) leaders became prominent in the internal political vacuum (Prunier, 2001) in the 1990s, driven by its continued oversight of some of the largest Christian congregations in the world (Pew Research Centre, 2016). In Africa, churches and religious-based civil societies have played a significant role in applying pressure on post-colonial regimes to develop a new kind of leadership that moves from a single political party to pluralistic party systems (Oyatambwe, 1997) to allow the beginning of the democratisation process. Religious leaders, for example in Kenya, Benin, Malawi and the DRC, stood against autocratic regimes (Longman, 1998) or the apartheid system in South Africa (Maxwell, 1999). In the DRC (then Zaire) and Gabon, the clergy spearheaded national peace dialogues and conferences to unite opposing political actors (Longman, 1998). Congolese churches constituted a framework for political consultation and collective action to support people in their grievances against secular state actors and institutions

(Feta, 2009). Churches in the DRC gained legitimacy through their perceived moral[7] and spiritual stances[8] (Eneflo, 2019) and their ability to provide a wide range of public services. Working with civil society representatives, both the RCC and the Network of Protestant Churches (ECC) have been at the forefront in advocating for political change and transitions (Seay, 2013). The RCC remains the most legitimate political opposition force capable of toppling the government (Callaghan, 2023; Shepherd, 2016) and can use this position to impose pressure on the national ruling class. Generally, the Christian clergy can mobilise thousands of people during political demonstrations in ways that political parties are not easily able to. Despite such influence and authority held by church and clergy in the DRC, ethnic-based violence remains one of the major threats to peace and stability, and interaction between church leadership and conflict is unknown. This is a research puzzle as it is generally expected in Congolese society that the universal church mission is essentially of a religious nature (Gatwa, 2005) and, consequently, would refrain from being subservient to state institutions (Mutombo-Mukendi, 2011).

In summarise the above, the assumption underpinning the interest in conducting this research is that, firstly, to recognise that the clergy act as significant political players and there is a need to examine the socio/political obstacles for them in achieving peace. Secondly, widespread religious trends have political significance and could have a role in resolving ethnicity and indigeneity conflicts in eastern Congo. Religiously, Christians often claim that they should be the 'light' and 'salt' of the world (Gatwa, 2005). This metaphor symbolises their constructive role in societies and their expected functions to expose social injustice, deepen social cohesion and promote peaceful cohabitation (Rukundwa, 2006). There is a belief that conflict resolution is an important manifestation of their Christian faith (Lemu, 2012). Those claims reinforce the need to shun indifference to antagonism and violence by denouncing and protesting the causes of obstacles to peace. These paradoxes have not been sufficiently explored in the existing literature. Therefore, the thesis examines the obstacles (if any) faced by church leadership in resolving conflicts in eastern Congo.

In the DRC, there is a general understanding that the clergy should provide a clear framework and appropriate boundaries to inspire values of peace and point out when societies and political actors fail to promote peace (Kitata, 2020). While religious leaders have no direct responsibility to design political programmes, people tend to expect that the clergy would speak out when such policies encourage conflict, exclusion, and dehumanisation. These qualities offer clergy with enormous potential as peacemakers and

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[7] Regulating what is ethical and acceptable in a society.
[8] This stand has not always been moral or spiritual.

may allow them to produce resolutions to conflict (Ajayi, 2015) or deter violence through religious messages. Yet, their role in context of the ethnic violence remains under-developed in scholarship.

Several scholars have either explored specific local examples (Autessere, 2015) of spiritual peacebuilding mechanisms within a tribe (Autesserre, 2015), or the role of church-initiated public services (Jordhus-Lier & Braathen, 2021; Seay, 2013), or focused on conflict transformation (Kighoma, 2021; Alfani, 2019) projects undertaken by a specific a church organisation and civil society and peace process (Bihuzo, 2020). Not only do their studies seem limited, but none appear to focus specifically on the clergy's response to ethnic identity conflict.

It is difficult to comprehend politics throughout Africa without considering religious influence.[9] Religion is a way of life, rooted in the social, cultural, sociological and anthropological identities of people in the DRC. It encompasses a broad variety of beliefs, doctrines, practices, rituals and values (Lawrence et al., 2017) and combined with modern materialist lifestyles results in a multifaceted system contrary to perceptions of 'pre-modernity'. Focusing on Christianity as a religion, it is part and parcel of modern global change in Africa. Christianity represents a spiritual and cultural "language" that appears to be shared by most Congolese people. In relation to the number of those belonging to the Christian faith, the DRC is considered one of the most Christian countries in Africa (Ande, 2010; Prunier, 2001), and therefore, it can be argued that, inasmuch as it does exist, any form of national identity in the DRC is shaped by a culture based mainly on Christian beliefs. It has indeed been argued that Christian values, ethics, ideals, practice and leaders might offer an alternative avenue to addressing conflict (Sandal, 2017). The claim is made that these established and respected sources of societal and policy-related knowledge – *if held to the core values of their faith* – are critical in efforts to achieve peace and deter violent conflict.

There is extensive literature that demonstrate limitations and challenges faced by national and international actors and leaders of traditional institutions. What is not known is the nature of Christian clergy/religious elites in resolving or exacerbating conflicts. A sustainable peace is possible through collaboration between state and non-state stakeholders and realities as means to address the underlying factors of conflicts.

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[9] It is an important component of social life in the DRC. Religious ideas are embedded in the local culture, tradition, and society as they affect the worldview of the Congolese people. It is integrated in all dimensions of life.

1.3 Methodological approach and theoretical framework

The thesis draws on over six months of ethnographic fieldwork conducted between October 2020 and August 2021, mainly in the DRC, Belgium and Rwanda. It adopts a qualitative and interpretive methodology involving fieldwork, semi structured interviews, focus groups, observations and archival research. These approaches enabled the generation of rich data and the production of an analytical framework to understand the role of the clergy in peace and conflict. Ethnography helped with a development of themes, categories, and patterns from qualitative data. It supported the design of an approach to the organisation and description of the data and provided a rich theoretical explanation and translation of the meaning and significance of religious leaders in DRC society. The ethnographical approach involved overt participant observations through engagements with various stakeholders including senior political and religious leaders and local community leaders, to whom, through my own history in the DRC, I have some degree of access as I speak five local languages. Data was systematically obtained from religious leaders belonging to two Christian groups in the DRC, these are:

- Clergy from the Roman Catholic Church (RCC): RCC Bishops are brought together via the National Episcopal Conference of the Congo (CENCO). CENCO also operates a commission for peace and justice at each diocese.

- *Religious leaders of Eglise Du Christ au Congo (ECC):* this is a network of all Protestant Churches in the DRC. While ECC expresses itself less than RCC, its leaders at provincial and national levels are influential in political sphere.

These two religious practices are the most accessible and have the greatest political relevance. While other religious groups seem less visible, and vocal, in formal and national political and peacebuilding affairs, they are also active members of the civil society. Where relevant some religious leaders were included in the interviews.

This thesis uses a combination of two analytical/theoretical frameworks. Firstly, it draws from a five-dimensional model of religion in peace and conflict by Fraser and Owen (2018). Secondly, it uses an original metaphor, conceived as a house plan, to establish the significance of a multifaceted mode of thoughts and the relevance of religious peacebuilding within an existing secular approach. This metaphor also contributes to an understanding of DRC society, the mindsets of the clergy and their interactions with an environment of ethnic violence. It also sheds light on existing debates on whether peace should be built from the bottom up, the top down, or be multi-directional.

The study develops an analytical model based on research participants' own view of reality. It involves two stages of analysis: emic and etic modes of interpretation. Following these two stages of interpretation, I translate the symbolic language of data on religious ideas in response to peace and conflict into the secular language of social science. The model addresses the issue of existing general views in a secular world that stigmatises religious thoughts, practice, and its relationship with modern politics. The next section provides a short outline of the literature review, briefly explains the research significance and provides a rationale on why a study on religious peacebuilding in the DRC is important.

1.3.1   Scope and specific context of the study

I will describe the main concepts used in this thesis later in chapter two. However, to ensure clarity and scope, it is important to clarify two specific key terms here in the introductions and demonstrate how they are informed by other case studies. These terms are *peacebuilding and religious peacebuilding*.

Peacebuilding

The concept of peacebuilding initially intended to support nations and communities recover from conflict contexts. However, the discipline of conflict and peace studies has evolved with a proliferation of literature that provides various interpretations of the term peacebuilding. Interpreted to mean the construction of a setting, community, region or country where peace reigns, peacebuilding has recently been understood to include conflict prevention and conflict management in weak and fragile States (Autessere, 2010). The Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies[10] sees peacebuilding as aiming to resolve injustice and to transform the structural conditions that generate deadly conflict. Whereas *Conciliation Recourse* sees the concept as involving offering ways to help people to resolve their differences peacefully and lay the foundations to prevent future violence[11]. Cravo (2018:4) defines peacebuilding as directed towards the addressing of the underlying factors of violence and is essential a multidimensional action that involves a wide range of practices such as political, legal, economic, security, social and cultural organisations, which are understood mutually reinforcing.

Based on the above conceptualisations, the notion can be summarised as a process involving efforts to address the root causes of conflict as means to establish a durable non-violent future (Blagojevuc, 2007). In the context of ethnic identity-based violence, ethnically

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[10] Kroc IIPS, Peacebuilding. Available online https://kroc.nd.edu/about-us/what-is-peace-studies/what-is-strategic-peacebuilding/ accessible on 15th July 2024
[11] Reconciliation resources: available online at https://www.c-r.org/who-we-are/why-peacebuilding/what-peacebuilding accessed on 16th July 2024

centred animosity can be found at the heart of all dimensions and consequences of the conflict. In the cases of Bosnia, Rwanda, Siri Lanka and Iraq for example, historical memories of ethnic grievances were anchored in long past social, political and economic factors as well as contemporary grievances (Hertog, 2010; Longman, 2001). When the underlying of conflicts were not addressed, other peacebuilding efforts became unsustainable and led to a continuation of inter-ethnic antagonism and long-term forms of intolerance.

In the case of the DRC a wide range of forms of violence have prevented peace. Verbal, legal, military, communal and interpersonal conflict and political oppression, have been used to foster strategies of political control. These forms of violence have important social dimensions. However, the dynamics of conflict are often interpreted simplistically, and conveying the complexity of the situation is rarely considered. In the DRC context, even scholars often fail to recognise some of the causal factors of conflict (Mamdani, 2001; Autessere, 2010). Consequently, peace-building initiatives become ineffectual. Examining the various ways the term peacebuilding is used, it is apparent that the approaches applied by the different academic and policy actors who lead international interventions often appear catch-all actions. This thesis focuses on what can be seen as an initial approach in conflict resolution, which involves creating the social, spiritual and moral environments that sustain the conditions for peace to thrive.

Peacebuilding involves a combination of approaches, from short-term conciliations to longer processes of conflict transformation. The latter examines deeply the trends and pattern of interactions between antagonistic groups and the various stages and context of conflicts. The focus of this thesis is on local mechanisms and resources to diffuse tensions and deter violence. It argues to start with a short-term intervention to enable the right political conditions and climate for any peace process, reconciliation, and conflict transformation to thrive. This stage of conflict resolution has been defined by Mayer (2000) as an attempt to achieve an outcome where actors in a conflict refrain from using violent actions. It also expresses an understanding that to sustain such a peace requires wholesale societal change and that the churches offer the main means that could affect it. While this research is inter-disciplinary, it responds expressly to the role of the religious elite in divided societies, modern politics, and international affairs and the need for academics to produce culturally sensitised concepts and theoretical principles with which to interpret the religious dimension in the resolution of ethnic conflict.

In the case of the eastern DRC, the thesis is thus a short term and pragmatic responses to ethnic violence using Christian church leaders as the intermediaries. My approach to conflict resolution is aimed at ending the dominant rhetoric and narratives of conflict and attempting to establish a degree of non-violence in a relatively short time. The thesis examines the role of both Catholic and Protestant churches in response to a specific set of conflicts relating to ethnic identity. The prominence of ethnic identity politics in eastern Congo and its generation of inter-communal violence is closely linked to the long-term practice of ethnically based competition for political power in the DRC (Verweijen, 2015). These notions are often exploited as a resource for popularity among particular political and civil society leaders (Mugabe & Mukwiza, 2022) who wish to manipulate public narratives and views in their direction. The nature of these discourses is usually expressed in the form of an ethno-nationalistic, xenophobic, and anti-Tutsi/Rwandophone discourse in the DRC (Jackson, 2006), sometimes involving violent attacks on communities.

Christian churches are highly prominent in the DRC. This thesis recognises their significant role in influencing political power, issuing public and political statements in response to both violence and the management of public services. These functions have remained with and been developed by the churches since the 19th century and offer the only source of continuity and relative stability in a disintegrating State and the so-called ethnic identity crisis also referred to as 'dubious nationality'[12]. Such politics have pushed the church to the centre of the country's political struggle (Prunier, 2001). I will argue that the above clergy roles involve key economic and political incentives and aspirations, and question whether appropriate frameworks exist to evaluate these leaders' roles in conflict resolution. The analytical chapters will show that the actions and values exhibited by many church leaders are applied inconsistently. In particular, I will demonstrate that some church leaders have been involved in supporting, condoning or ignoring violence and ethnic hatred. The concept of peacebuilding in this context is evaluated specifically to examine what has been, is or could be the role of the Christian Church religious leaders with specific reference to interethnic conflict: the contested citizenship of Banyarwanda and Banyamulenge and related politics of autochthony and indigenousness. A focus on this underlying problem is one of the key elements in building peace in the DRC.

This thesis centres on interrogating the attitudes and behaviours of church leaders within conflict in the DRC. It describes and analyses important differences from conflicts beyond the borders of the DRC which are characterised by either ethno-territorial and cultural

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[12] A dominant narrative in the DRC to refer to the status of those who speak Kinyarwanda or the Congolese Tutsis, a minority ethnic group in eastern Congo.

identities. The role of religious leaders in response to these underlying issues is crucial. Galtung (1969) argued that religion is often the basis of 'cultural violence', a form of violence which is applied to legitimise other types of violence. He maintained how different factors such as symbols, myths, religion, ideology, language and ethnicity become interlinked to shape ways of thinking and behaviours that can exclude and produce situations of marginalisation, discrimination and eventually also physical violence. Peacebuilding in this context involves a wide range of non-violent activities and programs that edify the political actors and communities to address the injustices and identity crises which so often form the foundations of ethnic violence.

Conflict involves opposing sets of inspirations, incentives and their connections. Analysis of the dynamics of conflict cannot therefore be restricted to only one of these factors, and their traditional, religious, political, historical, or economic backgrounds (see Mayall 1990; Toft 2007, Hertog, 2010). Therefore, I will argue that the approach to conflict resolution/peacebuilding in the DRC is to examine more closely RCC and ECC religious leaders' role in conflict. If it is possible or probable that their actions are among the root causes of continuing violence, re-examining their fundamental values and attitudes and taking them back to the core principles of their spiritual understandings may provide the most sustainable route towards peace.

This approach to peacebuilding is not unique. In the post-conflict Rwanda, efforts to move from the difficult past of a genocide considered peacebuilding actions through a critical examination of the Rwanda journey and society's history (ancient, contemporary and recent), the cultural values and education system that shaped evolving Rwandan institutions over time, and the decline of leadership and governance that led the country almost to extinction (Gatwa, 2005). In South Africa, efforts to rebuild the country, post-Apartheid have focused on reconciliation. In Northern Ireland, peacebuilding actions focused on progressive stages of intervention including forgiveness, compromise and the suspension of certain demands for justice - a peace process that led to political transition (Jarman, 2016).

Religious peacebuilding

I use the terms conflict resolution and peacebuilding interchangeably. However, as stated earlier, this study is situated within the field of *religious* peacebuilding, which is a relatively a new but rapidly growing concept. Both religion and peacebuilding are a subfield of peace and conflict resolution (PCR). The latter itself can be seen as a discipline within international relations. Appleby (2000) defines *religious peacebuilding* as the diverse

contributions and inputs of religions or religious leaders to making peace. His definition is often contested among the related academic community because of the well-established narrative involving the destructive aspects of religion and religious communities (Hertog, 2010). Scholars exploring the interplay between religion, peace and conflict are divided on the binary view of the constructive and negative functions of religion. This thesis establishes a more multi-facetted, sometimes consciously contradictory approach that recognises the interchanging and complex roles of religion in conflict and peace. By religious peacebuilding, the thesis suggests that the well-recognised influence and political significance of the clergy in the DRC needs to result in a much more significant role in peacebuilding there. But the clergy themselves need a degree of retraining, refocus and re-energising and to be taken back to the roots of their original vocation.

It has been extensively demonstrated that every religion has an external shell and internal core (Orellana, 2009). The internal aspect comprises of different ways of expressing religious ideas: rites, rituals, religious ceremonies, beliefs, myths, stories and dogmas. These tend to be different from one set of religious groups to another. However, the core of the core can be argued to be common to most religions (Orellana, 2009). These consist of teachings about good will, compassion, love, harmony, tolerance and often common concepts of moral behaviour. The ongoing conversation on what these inclusive values should look like in daily life is key to the spiritual life of communities across the world.

Religious peacebuilding in this context explores the potential of these shared values. Religious leaders can use the conversation about fundamental values to lead to increasing clarity on what constitutes the best of human behaviour and thereby influence political actors and themselves to edify peace in the DRC. Religious peacebuilding in this perspective is neither about inter-faith dialogues nor concerned with civil society actions by the churches. Instead, the focus is on religious leaders' actions, behaviours, interests, motivations and values (for example, empathy, compassion, peace-making), and their role in peacebuilding.

The literature on religion in peace building (for example Appleby, 2005, Gopin, 2000; Hertog, 2010; and Haar, 2004 and 2005) often claims that all world religions have a potential to enable religious peacebuilding. This view offers positive interpretations of non-violent and inclusive values, social realities, myths, symbols, texts and images. These, the writers argue, can be integrated into peace narratives via religious leaders who attempt to mobilise people towards a dialogue of peace. They observe that rituals and fostering various aspects of justice based on a shared spiritual and humanitarian values. All these can be powerful resources for communication, offer alternative interpretations and through collective

memories support a process of firmer commitment to values in times of crisis. These are the core basis of the religious peacebuilding which forms the basis and aims of this study. The clergy in the DRC possess the capacity to inspire both the culture and the value of peace.

A wide range of religious peacebuilding studies (See Alfani, 2020, Hertog, 2010, Haynes, 2020; King and Owen, 2020; Sandal, 2017) use the term to refer to conflict transformation and interreligious peacebuilding initiatives between and/or within religious groups. Some other types of peacebuilding involving religious actors focus on development work (Bussutil and Ter Haar, 2005), aid relief or other types of post-war humanitarian responses in support of faith organisations affected by conflict. Here, religious peacebuilding is defined by the religious actors involved and the nature of the activities. I now want to define the geographical boundaries.

The geographical focus is the region of eastern Congo. It is at the heart of a large part of conflict and atrocities in the DRC, and has undergone a cycle of violent conflict involving a wide range of state and non-state actors. The ongoing conflict has a regional dimension that extends beyond the borders of the DRC and is influenced by, and influences, struggles in a number of neighbouring countries (Bussy & Gallo, 2016). Violence in eastern Congo has had a severe impact on the local communities' ability to cope and overcome various social and economic challenges. My analysis draws on case studies from the specific region of South Kivu. However, considering that there is a similarity in the underlying causes of conflict, the study has also drawn on related experiences in North Kivu. While the thesis focuses on the clergy of both RCC and ECC, in some cases, other influential Christian religious leaders are considered when relevant.

This study covers the period 1990 to 2023. From 1990, external and internal events collided. Zaire (today DRC) was an African country that provided the platform for some of the most intensive proxy wars between the political West and East during the Cold War. These struggles ended in 1991 after the reunification of Germany, and President Mobutu's power started declining significantly. Successive waves of democratisation rolled across sub-Saharan Africa. Internal political pressure for multipartyism in the capital city Kinshasa led to a political debate that turned on ethnic identity politics. Neighbouring countries Rwanda and Burundi were involved in a civil war that led to massacre and genocide, and mass displacements toward eastern Congo. In 1996, Laurent Desiré Kabila ousted President Mobutu Sese Seko, which led to his yielding of power in 1997. Between 1998-2003, the so-called 1st African World War started, involving several neighbouring countries and many armed groups in the east. United Nations' interventions attempted to bring peace. Since then

until today, conflict has shifted from a national arena to various smaller, localised conflicts focused on the eastern region of the DRC and centred on issues of ethnic identity conflict. Hence why the period of 1990 – 2023 is crucial for this study.

History is important in the Great Lakes Region of Africa. While the study focuses on the above period, the research acknowledges that Christian clergy engagement in social action, politics, conflict, or peace extends beyond the chosen time frame. Bihuzo (2020:318) noted "we cannot understand the role of the church in peace without situating it in the political history of in the DRC." The involvement of religious actors in each crisis is inseparable from the politics of conflict and political instability. While I have briefly mentioned about the nature of conflict that this thesis focuses on, in the next paragraph, I want to extend briefly the boundaries concerning the specific type of conflict that this study is concerned with.

In the DRC, there are several violent conflicts. There is a conflict over political power between national political elites and other political coalitions. Conflicts like this deepen insecurity in eastern parts of the country (Schouten, 2021) and have often led to a peace process involving the RCC. There is a range of geopolitical conflicts with specific reference to regional security (Prunier, 2011) between the DRC and neighbouring countries. There are environmental conflicts linked to (mis)management of natural livelihoods and access to agricultural lands are a common feature (Muzuri, 2007). Finally, there is an ethnic, identity-based conflict which has affected much of the eastern part of the DRC (Ndahinda, 2016; Muchikiwa, 2020). This thesis focuses on this final and most devastating of conflicts and asks how and why ethnic conflict in DRC has become so dominant.

As mentioned above, the conflict of ethnicity and indigeneity remains at the heart of violence in the North and South Kivu provinces (Mathys, 2017). In the last 30 years, the regions have undergone a sequence of deadly conflicts arising from disputes around who is indigenous and a 'true' national of the DRC and who has rights to land and customary power (Heuning, 2013). Political elites exploit these notions to mobilise popular support and incite conflict involving a wide range of state and local actors (Prunier, 2008). Currently, in the absence of state authority to regulate social relations and equitably apply the law, the trilogy of ethnic identity, land and customary power are often used by armed groups and civil society organisations (Jackson, 2007) to construct popular narratives that define Congolese citizenship through the notion of autochthony politics (Mamdani, 2001). Conflicts between social cultural groups are mainly mobilised around these issues. Rhetoric, myths, and conspiracy theories on a sense of belonging remains the main popular narrative affecting the country's stability (Jackson, 2007). There is a prevalence of ethnonationalist ideas in the

politics of DRC with limited reference to the notion of class and religion. While these ideas have origins in the colonialism of the past (Mathys, 2017) and were exacerbated by the political crises in Burundi and Rwanda in the early 1990s (Prunier, 2011), the existing and potential role of religious actors in edifying or deterring this type of conflict and related violence is unknown.

The conflict remains complex in its intensity, spread across the country and disseminating, sustaining, and consolidating hatred in a wider and more sophisticated way (Ndahinda & Mugabe, 2022). This revulsion, like in other cases, has caused a circle of violence involving internal actors: the national army, political-military movements, tribal militias, national and foreign armed groups, and sometimes regional armies, especially from Uganda and Rwanda (Ntung, 2019). This environment of ongoing instability has reinforced animosity and produced violent responses that have a far wider impact than simply terrorising the Tutsi population in the DRC (Ndahinda, 2022). While there is an ongoing generalised state of violence, the polarised nature of violence against Tutsi specifically requires a particular attention, which is the focus of this study.

I want to introduce the context of this conflict and demonstrate its particularity and why it has been considered as the basis of understanding the role of religious leaders in conflict and peace in the DRC.

1.3.2 A brief overview of the case study

The following outline is a brief synopsis of the identity crisis in the DRC. As demonstrated above, many authors, including Ndahinda (2016), Mamdani (2001) have suggested that the politicisation of ethnic identity has resulted in the erosion of citizenship rights of Kinyarwanda speakers (Banyarwanda in North Kivu and Banyamulenge in South Kivu) and has led to a rift between those claiming "autochthonous" (indigenous) rights and those perceived as migrants (Brabant & Verweijen, 2017; Hoffman et al., 2020). Indeed, the notion of ethnic identities shapes the ongoing political conflict in the eastern part of the DRC. This crisis has reinforced the role of violence in politics and led to a fragmentation of armed groups that plague the country.

Land, ethnic identity and customary power are the resources that cause and perpetuate conflict. The idea of land as a marker of belonging is used by political and religious elites

and armed groups as a resource to manipulate local tribes[13] claiming to be autochthones, against those perceived as invaders or migrants, meaning the Banyarwanda and Banyamulenge, but mainly the Tutsi within these two groups (Buzard, 2021, Heuning, 2013). While the idea of pitting autochthones against allochthones originated in colonial times, the pre-colonial society was not necessarily free from conflict[14]. This division between peoples was exacerbated for their own gain by the post-colonial governance authorities in Rwanda, Burundi and the DRC (Autesserre, 2010; Prunier, 2001). Political transitions led by Mobutu at a national level failed to promote national unity and the fallout from the 1994 Rwanda genocide (Mamdani, 1997) and other geopolitical events resulted in the progressive racialisation of attitudes towards the Tutsi people. Indeed, you can argue that the Tutsi became seen as representatives of a privileged but untrusted social status rather than ethnicity (Hintjens, 2001).

The identity crisis in this region results from the intersection of three issues. Firstly, the colonial and post-colonial authorities' manipulation of citizenship through the notation[15] of ethnicity and indigeneity, which resulted in marginalisation of Congolese tribes referred to as Banyarwanda (which consisted of both Hutu and Tutsi people) and the Banyamulenge (seen as wholly Tutsi).[16] Secondly, influx of Burundian refugees who fled to South Kivu following the political and ethnic violence in Burundi in 1993–1998 that involved a military putsch and assassination of the first democratically elected president, Melchior Ndadaye. Thirdly, the civil war in Rwanda between 1990 and 1994, which ended with genocide. In the DRC (then Zaire), President Mobutu exploited the arrival of over a million Rwandan refugees, by inflaming existing animosity and violence against native Congolese Hutu and Tutsi (Longman, 2001). The post-Rwanda genocide government invasion under an idea of pursuing the former genocide perpetrators (Gatwa, 2005). This event coincided with a series of persecutions of the Congolese Tutsi by the Zarian government (Clark, 2002). Their

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[13] In South Kivu, these tribes are Babembe, Befuliru, Banyindu, Bavira, Bashi. Whereas in North Kivu, the main ethnic groups are Banande, Bahunde, Batembo and Banyanga.

[14] Various communities inhabit the province of South Kivu. On the one hand, there are Bashi, Barega, Bafuliru, Babembe and Bavira, who claim to be indigenous. Their language is related to Kinyarwanda of Rwanda. On the other hand, there are Banyamulenge (Tutsi) and Barundi (Hutu and Tutsi), perceived by the former as 'other' or 'non-indigenous' or 'foreigners' or 'economic migrants. Banyamulenge are generally cattle herders and descendants of Tutsi of Rwanda and Burundi. During the pre-colonial period, the Tutsi Kingdom in Rwanda dominated the Kingdom of Bashi. As a result, considering the shared clans between the Bashi and ancient Tutsi of Rwanda, there is historical animosity and antipathy against Tutsi in general.

[15] The colonial administrators ruled through a system devised by the British, known as indirect rule, which had a purpose to prevent potential resistance from the colonised people. As result, they created two types of citizenship: the national (civic) and ethnic (customary) (Mamdani, 2001). The former was racialised whereas the latter was ethnicised (Mamdani, 2001). Both racialisation and ethicising refer to the process of ascribing ethnic or racial identities to a relationship, social practice, or group that did not identify itself as such.

[16] See Commission des droits de l'homme des Nations Unies, rapport sur la situation des droits de l'homme au Zaïre E/CNA/1997/6/Add.1 du 16 septembre 1996. There is an emergence of literature that describes the violence relating to the politics of identity in the DRC as a genocide (see Genocide Watch, 2021; Amor, 2002; Ndahinda and Mugabe, 2022).

predicament was exacerbated by Rwanda's support for a Congolese rebellion. The alliance of the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo (AFDL), led by Laurent Kabila, was supported by many Congolese including young Tutsi from eastern Congo, who joined the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) in the 1990s. The RPF was a Rwandan rebellion movement supported by the Ugandan government. RPF was fighting against the former Rwandan Hutu regime that committed the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. In 1998, the DRC plunged into another armed conflict under the banner of the Congolese Rally of Democracy (RCD). These two wars resulted in massacres among many populations in eastern Congo. Government forces and members of various ethnic groups in eastern Congo committed massacres of Banyamulenge in Nganja, Baraka and Lweba (Ruhimbika, 2001; Mokelwa, 2022) and the killing of other Tutsi groups in Kinshasa, Lubumbashi, Kalemie and Kamina in the government-controlled areas during the RCD rebellion. There were also massacres of non-Tutsi ethnic groups in Makobola, Kasika, Katogota and Remera (during the RCD rebellion), in widespread actions of various armed groups. These repeated wars and related massacres created a state of psychosis and mistrust among a range of ethnic groups and exacerbated existing hatred against the Congolese Tutsi. Initially, the AFDL benefited from overwhelming popular support,[17] both regionally and internationally. However, soon after the AFDL overthrew Mobutu, it became unpopular in western DRC because of their restrictions of freedom of expression and their rigorous measures against the opposition, the churches, and civil society activism (Clark, 2002).

In the collective consciousness of many Congolese, the AFDL represented the humiliation of the people of the DRC.[18] A widely held narrative is that the RPF from Rwanda, a small neighbour, worked with the Congolese Tutsi people, took control of enormous Zaire via its capital city, changed political power, dismantled institutions, and installed someone of their choice as president (Roessler & Verhoeven, 2016). In practice, the RPF ran the country for just over one year (Clark, 2002). In the second war, between 1998 and 2003, sentiments of humiliation and hatred against Rwanda and people of Rwandan culture and linguistic heritage worsened.

The political contestations of the Banyarwanda and Banyamulenge's citizenship rights are historical. The xenophobic and ethnonationalistic rhetoric against the Congolese Tutsi existed prior to the Rwandan invasion of Zaire (Mamdani, 1996; Buzard, 2021). Xenophobia

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[17] Laurent Kabila and AFDL movement were given significant recognition as generally the international community was relieved to see an end to the autocratic regime of Mobutu and the closure of the Hutu refugee camps in North Kivu.
[18] During the field study, I overheard and observed expressions of such sentiments and views from both prominent religious and political leaders and the general population.

and ethnonationalism are sometimes applied to the Congolese Hutu too. For example, thousands of Hutu people have been marginalised and persecuted in North Kivu (Willame, 1997) due to their identity being associated with Rwanda (Jackson, 2007).

The current and ongoing violence has resulted from a combination of the consequences of the aforementioned conflict, the continual use of the identity politics national politics[19] (Buzard, 2021) to fuel animosity for political expediency and unresolved internal governance issues (Este, 2022). The recent violence manifested itself in interethnic raids, the looting of cattle, the destruction of entire villages, mass displacements and forced exile and massacres of many people, lynching[20] and cannibalism (Ndahinda & Mugabe, 2022)

Using the earlier outlined framework, the thesis analyses the role of clergy in ethnic identity conflict by considering the functions of ethnicity loyalty as a multifaceted phenomenon of political instrument in aspiration to power struggles. For the churches and clergy, I assess how competition for access to political, religious, and economic power or fear of relinquishing may establish an environment that prevents them from playing a constructive role in conflict resolution. The thesis demonstrates that holding power provides religious leaders with various social and economic advantages, management of resources and spiritual guidance to church followers. The framework enables an understanding of the role of church power as a sphere of influence that may require the use of a wide variety of different strategies to manage and maintain it. I evaluate how allegiance to the politics of ethnicity may be one of these tactics where the clergy integrate ethnonationalism politics into their practice to avoid social and political isolation.

1.4   A summary of the findings

This thesis revealed three critical obstacles to the Christian clergy's role in peacebuilding.

    i.   A symbiotic relationship between clergy and political power
    ii. An interplay between ethnicity, power and church leadership in peace and conflict
    iii. An ambiguous and destructive response in conflicts of indigeneity

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[19] It serves as mobilising factor during elections. Nationally, national political candidates tend to compete based on their degree of hate against Tutsis (De Lorenzo, 2004; Johnson, 2004) or plan to forcibly remove them from the DRC.

[20] For more on the recent incidents of lynching and cannibalism, see Human Rights Watch report of 4th December 2023. Available at https://www.hrw.org/fr/news/2023/12/04/rd-congo-lynchage-dun-soldat-dans-un-cas-de-crime-de-haine accessed on 4th December 2023.

In the next three paragraphs, I want to provide a brief explanation to these dynamic limitations. Firstly, an interchanging and symbiotic interplay between church and state officials presents an essential challenge to the clergy's role in deterring, equitably, ethnic violence. The clergy tends to be entangled with the Congolese state and is, to an extent, sometimes extensively, compromised by being associated with it. In cases where clergy collaborate with senior state leaders, the former tend to lose their independence and impartiality in conflict resolution as they avoid losing shared material wealth interests. In other case, religious leaders tend to avoid compromising their views by confronting politics of identity, which act as a popular mobilising factor. Furthermore, on the one hand, these religious leaders also act as brokers of political dialogues. On the other hand, clergy are antagonistic to the government when other functions are unavailable. The dynamic of political and religious positions held by many priests, pastors and bishops has resulted in the absence of their constructive role in Congolese conflicts of ethnicity and indigeneity. Because they tend to embody ethno-nationalistic stances, they rarely act as independent or impartial in ethnic identity crises. Consequently, the clergy have failed to maximise their credibility in Congolese society. Their desire for material wealth through politics hinders an independent role in conflict resolution. However, the findings also show that the clergy could play a constructive role in creating an environment that enables peaceful coexistence if they can act independently from allegiances to ethnicity, politics, and power.

Secondly, this research shows that ethnicity and tribalism are more important, even though they overlap with religion. Faith indeed plays a role in mobilising antagonistic groups around shared beliefs to instigate violence or unify. Members of both Protestant and Catholic churches share the same faith, same Bible, culture, and sometimes, language. Nonetheless, they align themselves according to opinions developed by their ethnic group instead of building upon their shared religious identity. The clergy compete for adherents, power, and influence. These rivalries tend to inspire individuals' desires to address their personal needs and struggles rather than to establish a community with a shared sense of religious identity. The clergy, overall, establish a service-based relationship between themselves and church members. The tendency to tolerate ethnic violence serves the purpose of assure a particular tribal loyalty.

Finally, this thesis shows that the RCC and ECC clergy regularly produce messages about political crises, conflict, and peace at both the national and local level. They have been ambiguous, silent, complicit or complacent with inciting violence against Tutsi communities, particularly throughout the 1990s and the more recent violence in North and South Kivu. The

Catholic clergy has also engaged in dog-whistling[21] practices in recent years. Evidence in this thesis shows their reticence to speak publicly against targeted violent events against the Banyarwanda and Banyamulenge. This avoidance may result from a particular inclination towards or tacet legitimisation of populist public declarations by religious leaders. While there are some exceptions, many clergy tend to embody the racial and xenophobic ethnic prejudices of their respective communities. There is a tendency to represent and replicate the ideology of ethnic and social divides that originate from the existing politics of populism that contests citizenship of Banyamulenge in South Kivu and Tutsi in North Kivu. In other cases, RCC and ECC leaders might display internal divisions in relation to conflict issues that become apparent in their public response to violence – this compromises any impression of unity. By keeping to a relatively safe position, the clergy effectively could be understood to have endorsed the ethnic identity crisis, and this is evidenced in the numerous quotations used in this thesis. The discussion chapter provides the meanings of these various categories within militancy in peace and violence. The pluralistic positions defined in this research extend from the work of Appleby (2000), who highlighted the ambivalent roles of religious leaders in peace. This thesis proposes a different conclusion suggesting that the clergy in the DRC operate different categories of both ambiguities and destructiveness.

This thesis develops a theoretical argument to suggest that the Christian clergy are in a strong position to play a major role in deterring violence. They have unmatched potential to edify society towards peaceful coexistence through their public and political statements and are potentially equipped with rational and ethical approaches to peace building. Conclusively, if clergy could maintain independence from their current multiple allegiances to tribal, power (political, economic, and religious), the state and the politics of ethnonationalism, they would be able to provide lived examples of both traditional and Christian values of peace. The thesis proposes an original conceptual framework to understand the multifaceted and contradictory mindset of clergy peace and conflict – a multiple allegiances framework. It argues that an understanding of the layers of a, sometimes, contradictory consciousness in the minds of the clergy is essential to comprehending the dynamics of politics and ethnicity in religious words and actions in the DRC. The Christian religious elite are often multifaceted in their allegiances and use of

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[21] In politics, the expression of a 'dog whistle' statement relates to communication that uses coded messages or suggestive terms to communicate to all but aimed towards a specific audience. Such a strategy aims to mobilise support from such a group but ensures that it does not create reactions outside the targeted group. The technique is not neutral and tends to indirectly convey a message that should not be understood literally. Such a message and its audience are often ideological and controversial. The communicator seeks to mobilise those with similar beliefs in such ideas or ideologies, or maybe for the purpose of populism politics. The concept originated from ultrasonic dog whistles, heard by dogs but not humans.

power. This original framework enables to establish concealed expectations, interests and positions of Congolese peacebuilding stakeholders.

1.5 **Structure of the thesis**

This thesis comprises nine chapters. Each of these sections contribute in addressing specific interrelated research questions.

The next chapter systematically reviews existing scholarly contributions in disciplines related to this thesis and the type of themes developed in line with this study. It critically reflects on past literature that has addressed religion, peacebuilding, and conflict, including research on the impact of previous approaches and the conflict resolution methods associated with them. It will also identify, discuss, and analyse apparent gaps in scholarly contributions. A strategic focus in this chapter will be to structure the most relevant literature in areas of religious peacebuilding along with the interplay between religion, conflict, and conflict resolution, and thus situate this thesis within specific disciplines.

Chapter three introduces a theoretical framework and demonstrates how and why the chosen models are relevant in evaluating the church leaders' role (if any) in ethnic identity conflict in eastern Congo. It reviews the relevant theories that serve as a basis for the critical arguments that I will apply to elucidate phenomena, identify connections, and make predictions. It defines the research context, discusses and occasionally combines selected theoretical ideas used as a foundation to connect existing knowledge with the finding of this study.

Chapter four discusses the research design, methodological techniques and strategies used in conducting this research, with a rationale of the chosen methods. The chapter introduces an interpretative design and process considered in generating data (informed by theoretical assumptions) through observations and related ethnographical methods.

Chapter five analyses the ethnic-religious nexus and their related societal barriers, attitudes, and behaviours that elucidate clergy inefficiency in religious peacebuilding. It shows that ethnicity loyalty and tribalism is more important for the clergy even though it overlaps with Christian religious belief – this context affects clergy independence and their potential to play a constructive role in conflict resolution. The chapter examines the prevalence of a culture of Christian religiosity in the DRC, which could potentially act as a resource for religious

peacebuilding but at present appears rather superficial – I refer to this as epidermic[22] religiosity. The chapter shows that a dynamic phenomenon originating from the Christian evangelisation and colonial period involving a construction of ethno-religious territories persists and serves as mobilising resource for religious power base. It argues that understanding this context enables us to explain clergy obstacles in incidents of conflict resolution.

Chapter six analyses a symbiotic relationship between church and state officials as an obstacle to the clergy's effective role in addressing the politics of identity conflict. It argues that the religious elite of the RCC and Council for Protestant Churches (ECC) in the DRC have, historically, been subservient to and assimilated into the prevailing political power, or in opposition to it. These interactions create a situation where religious leaders sacrifice their independence and impartiality in situation of conflict resolution.

Chapter seven critically analyses the interactions between the clergy and the dynamics of politics of identity, and how they have publicly expressed their concerns about the contestation of Congolese Tutsi citizenship rights. It examines the nature of public and political statements issued by the clergy of both the RCC and ECC in response to ethnic identity crises. It focuses on their reactions to specific events relevant to this study, whether in deterring or sustaining conflict.

Chapter eight discusses and interprets the findings presented in the previous three analytical chapters. Using this study's framework and lens, described in Chapter Three, the chapter critically evaluates how this thesis has addressed its objectives, and discusses how its results confirm, contrast with, or challenge some of the key existing and relevant literature. Furthermore, it introduces an original analytical model, which I refer to as *Militancy in Peace and Violence*, of rationales, behaviours, motivations, and practices. The model informs a development of a framework referred to as '*multiple allegiances*', illustrated by the structure of an onion, evoking a familiar African metaphor to convey the idea of "religious syncretism". It is defined as an expression of the compartmentalisation of multiple identities, interests, and allegiances in the lives and minds of religious leaders in the DRC. The framework is presented to explain the limitations and absence of impartiality among the religious actors involved in the conflicts in eastern DRC.

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[22] In the English dictionary (www.dictionary.com), the adjective "epidermic" relates to the epidermis in the discipline of *anatomy*: it is the outer, thinner, nonvascular, non-sensitive layer of the skin, protective of the actual skin or corium. It is composed of stratified epithelial tissue. In *zoology*, it is an outer protective layer of cells of an invertebrate. I use the term epidermic as a metaphor for the superficial nature of peacebuilding in much Congolese religious life.

Finally, the overall conclusion chapter of this thesis reflects on the initial assumptions, discusses limitations and generalisation of the results, examines the original contribution to existing knowledge and recommends potential areas for further research.

Having outlined the main foundation for this thesis, I now move to the next chapter, which focuses on the theoretical perspective and review of existing scholarly contributions in disciplines related to this thesis and the type of themes developed in line with this study.

Chapter 2: Literature review

The introductory chapter established the aims of this thesis by justifying the problem, setting up the contextual background, and providing a brief case analysis. This chapter aims to systematically review existing scholarly contributions in disciplines related to this thesis and the type of themes developed in line with this study. It critically reflects on past literature that has addressed religion, peacebuilding, and conflict, including research on the impact of previous approaches and the conflict resolution methods associated with them. It will also identify, discuss, and analyse apparent gaps in scholarly contributions. A strategic focus in this chapter will be to structure the most relevant literature in areas of religious peacebuilding along with the interplay between religion, conflict, and conflict resolution, and thus situate this thesis within specific disciplines. The chapter also rationalises the importance and relevance of this research versus past and current debates on the role of the clergy in fuelling conflict or deterring violence and edifying peace. This review starts by defining key concepts and terms applied in this thesis. Of course, it is important to provide conceptual clarity by defining what meanings I ascribe to the main concepts used throughout the study. Throughout this thesis I use the following terms: religion, church, religious leaders/clergy, ethnic identity, tribe/ethnic group, ethnicity and conflict. Before I engage with the literature review, I want to start by defining these concepts.

2.1   Definition of key concepts

2.1.1   Religion

Religion, religious beliefs, and the church itself are all different terms used extensively in the literature. However, the interviewees used these notions interchangeably during this study's field work. Indeed, no clear definition encompasses all the meanings herein, as these depend on various cultural interpretations and connotations.

This thesis concerns the role of the clergy of the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) and Protestant Churches (ECC) in either addressing conflict or promoting violence. Christianity is, therefore, at the heart of this research interest. However, African Traditional Religion's (ATR) beliefs consistently overlap with Christianity in the African context and within the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). In this perspective, some reference to ATRs will be made where relevant, especially in discussing the concept of power and its link with traditional African societies.

Some define 'religion' itself as a system of beliefs associated with particular kinds of social organisation (Mayall and Sylvestri, 2015). This concept is often used in the context of the institutions established by 'established' religions, like Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism or Judaism. The discipline of sociology defines religion as a set of beliefs, rituals, symbols and practices focusing on and establishing the 'sacred'. Sociological sciences leave it to each religion to provide an accurate definition of what precisely is defined as the sacred. However, what is sacred may not necessarily involve the concept of God (Brewer, Higgins and Teens, 2010). This focus on the sacred in sociology enables us to compare and acknowledge different religions without emphasising their differences, such as the organisations, institutions, sub-groups, symbols and practices that define the different world 'religions'.

2.1.2 Church

The term 'Church' with a capital c, singular and without further details, refers in this thesis to the universal Christian community of believers. Where the term 'Church' precedes a qualifying description, it is a reference to a specific Christian communion such as the Roman Catholic Church. In contrast, 'churches' with small c and in plural refer to a group or a network of Christian communions within the wider Christian religion – for example, the evangelical Protestant churches found in eastern Congo linked to the mainline Protestant churches in the west. In other contexts, references to the church with small c, and singular, refer to a body of Christian worshipers.

I want to reflect on the original concept and meanings of Church. The word comes from the Greek term Ekklesia[23] (Chia, 2021). The biblical definition suggests instead a gathering of believers to worship in a religious assembly (Romans 12: 4–5). In French and in the general context of Latin languages, the Church has a political meaning that was transferred to a group of Christians and their communities (Valadier, 2008). A 'church' can also be understood as a type of building. People view such a place as sacred and holy, known in Swahili as *Kanisa la bwana* (God's house or temple) or *mahali patakatifu* (holy place), *hekalu (*God's palace*).* There are other localised terms to sanctify a church, such as *Kisima cya Maji* (a well), *Madhabahu* (altar). However, in many Christian traditions any physical place, such as a home, a school hall or outdoors in the field, can be a church or God's house. Throughout these translations, the importance of the word Ekklesia (Caudle, 2020)

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[23] Which means an invited audience/assembly or congregation. In the Biblical New Testament, the word is translated as 'church' (Nicola, 2014).

appears to reduce its initial meaning and broader definitions. The notion of Ekklesia is rather more significant than simply what we understand by 'church' today. It concerns the summoning of the body of Christian believers to contribute to the common good and participate actively in all areas of their world societies (Claudle, 2020:1). A closer translation of the word Ekklesia in English refers to a gathering of people, an assembly, or a summoning of a group of believers. However, the responsibility of this unity of believers to aspire for the common good is essential for understanding a general view of what society perceives as the Church in the DRC.

In studying the Christian clergy/religious elites like Bishops, Cardinals and other ordained opinion formers[24] from two types of churches, I make a distinction between the institutional church and the church as a body of Christians. These distinctions help to exclude the differences in the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) and the Council of Protestant churches (ECC) through different institutional historical developments, doctrines, dogmas, teaching principles, demographic influence and leadership structures and operations. There are noticeably significant differences in terms of style within the Protestant churches, as every church has its own particularities regarding ethos and theological approaches.

Among the Protestant churches, the 'church' as one inclusive and well-defined institution and body does not exist in the DRC. The church seems to be plural and constitutes a group of local churches and diverse theological lines. While they all emerge through a shared understanding of the teachings of Jesus, these are applied and interpreted differently and are shaped by local cultures, traditions, and historical perspectives.

2.1.3 Religious leaders/clergy

In this thesis, I use the terms clergy and religious leaders or religious actors interchangeably. In international relations, religious actors can refer to both individual leaders and institutions. The word clergy refers mainly to ordained religious leaders such as RCC priests, Bishops and Cardinals. However, the research includes significantly influential and senior Christian religious leaders of the ECC.

The words clergy and religious leaders refer to ecclesiastic elites who head the RCC and ECC. They oversee the establishments that advance the Christian gospel following what they believe to be Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension. These leaders oversee

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[24] The study also includes religious leaders who are highly influential at the provincial, national, and international levels or across different members of church congregations.

religious services and structures and generally ensure the welfare of their church members. They lead sermons in large congregations and issue statements in response to political or conflict events of public interest. There is an expectation from general society that such leaders must live the values of peace, reconciliation, and non-violence between people from all backgrounds. In theory, they ought to promote principles of high ethics, compassion, and love for all human beings, in line with guidance throughout the New Testament. All these features measure their actions by high standards in terms of social behaviour, and how well they abide by religious institutions' doctrines, customs, and laws.

2.1.4 Tribe/Ethnic group

In this thesis, the terms 'tribe' and 'ethnic group' are used interchangeably, but there is a preference for the phrase 'ethnic group' over 'tribe'. The concept of 'tribe' connotes a broader context than ethnicity. It refers to a mode of political organisation between social groups, state and acephalous societies (Calderon and Englebert, 2019) that bears an organised social-cultural identity. The term 'tribe' also has many negative historical connotations, especially in Western eyes. It was used by Western anthropologists in their ethnographical studies of 'natives' inhabiting the areas of Africa being explored throughout the 19th century. The use of this word often involved associations with words such as primitive or even barbaric, savage, 'uncivilised', the pagan 'other' and other derogatory meanings associated with them. There was an assumption of the privileged position of Western civilisation in comparison to life in the rest of the world. Indeed, some scholars suggest that the word is fundamentally discriminatory and used only to refer to Africans, while in other societies there is more reference to 'nations' (Anderson, 1983). It was assumed that tribes were naturally born predisposed to barbaric behaviours. It was used to draw a difference between a 'primitive' group of people and 'civilised' ethnic groups. In an anthropological context, such concepts do indeed impose interpretation and influence political action for them (Calderon and Jene, 2018). Due to such a historical context, the word has been avoided more recently in western scholarship, but it appears to have been brought back more recently in popular narratives.

According to Edgar (2004), etymologically the word is relatively neutral, related to the Latin *tribus* or, in French, *tribus*, meaning a group of people with a society or 'community' organised on the basis of patrilineal descent. As with other parts of Africa, in the DRC, it is associated with a certain degree of political power (Ellis and Ter Haar, 2004). In both North and South Kivu, people refer to themselves as belonging to a 'tribe' to define their identities. These claims are often exclusive in a sense that for one to have such a right, someone else

has to be deprived of it. They also talk about 'tribalism' when speaking about hatred towards another ethnic group, although what is meant here is the ethnic dimensions of their cultural, social and political lives. Therefore, in this thesis, the word 'tribe' may be used interchangeably with the term 'ethnic group' in eastern Congo.

Contrary to Edgar's argument discussed above, the notion of tribe is, understandably, contentious in the DRC. It is often subject to political interpretation and manipulation, using the colonial era as a barometer of social relations and an understanding of Congolese society as an assortment of nations. Yet, the colonial data is contested, incomplete, unreliable and does not reflect the realities of either the past or the present (Mokelwa, 2022). For example, Calderon and Englebert (2019) suggested that, today, there is still no official demographic information on the number of tribes or ethnic groups that live in the DRC. Indeed, the DRC constitution (article 10, point 3) makes a general statement that "a DRC native refers to every individual belonging to ethnic groups whose members and territories were part of what became the DRC from the independence period". To provide an estimate figure, in the literature some make a reference to there being over three hundreds (Longman, 2013). The idea of tribe is, therefore, controversial and continues to create spaces for conflict due to claims concerning precedence as a means of occupying the country's land or justifying migratory movements. Such phenomena continue to serve as the basis for defining rights to citizenship despite the existence of a constitution that suggests differently. This thesis recognises that the basic ideas of 'tribe' and ethnic groups are socially constructed and have various local and external meanings in the DRC. They carry different meanings depending on the country. It encompasses a way of life: language, customs, and behaviour relating to every living being (Stewart, 2009: p10). It is therefore important to avoid their imported connotations.

In this study, the term 'ethnic group' will be favoured. This refers to a group of people or a population with a shared common cultural or traditional background. Such a community may also perceive itself as having a shared descent, though I will use it to refer to a community consisting of people with shared cultural, traditional and linguistic backgrounds. However, the words 'tribalism' and 'tribalisation' in association with the characteristics of division provide the closest term for such practices. Near equivalent words like 'ethnicism' or 'ethnicisation' do not fully convey the subjective feelings generated by tribalism. In the DRC, tribalism manifests itself as behaviours, attitudes and practices that embed a robust attachment and loyalty to a specific tribe while simultaneously inspiring an extreme feeling that excludes and dehumanises or demonises another group. Sentiments of tribalism tend to hold, on one hand, positive solidarity towards those who are perceived as connected (by

language, culture, kinship, or preference) to an individual. On the other hand, a negative and radical attitude towards those perceived as not having a connection. In some contexts, 'tribalism' can also accurately be used to describe situations of black-on-black racism. Where such a meaning applies, I will use the word 'racism'. At times I will also use the word 'tribality', which is different to tribalism. The former means one's social link to an ethnic group. It determines the social, religious and economic relations within the ethnic group and with others (Ka Mana, 2014). In this case, tribality is the opposite of tribalism.

2.1.5 Ethnic conflict

In this study, I consider ethnicity as a mobilising resource in aspiration to access or control power. Therefore, it is a socially constructed notion.

There are three dominant schools of thought regarding ethnic conflict: constructivist, instrumentalist and primordialist (Chandra, 2012). These theoretical views provide structures for attempting to understand general perceptions about social mobilisations across the African continent. According to primordialism, ethnicity is perhaps the true basis of identity for every individual. It defines a sense of belonging to a specific and unique social group and kinship (Otayek, 2001). This school of thought makes fine cultural, linguistic and tradition distinctions between one group and another, and acts as an essential factor to achieve integration within a group and as an identifying feature for outsiders. Some protagonists of the primordial approach suggest that ethnicity-based conflict inexorably emerges from these differences between groups (Vanhanen, 1999).

According to the instrumentalist view, differences do not produce conflict: instead, other factors lead to inter-ethnic conflict. One of these may be when ethnicity is subject to manipulation and politicisation for the sake of attaining political and economic power (Che, 2016) in as much as certain ethnic groups are favoured and others excluded. While there is some relevance to this perspective, there is an assumption that ethnic identity remains passive in conflict situations. An example of an instrumentalist argument is Che's (2016) analysis of the Hutu/Tutsi conflicts in Rwanda and Burundi. In other contexts, however, instrumentalist positions can appear contradictory. Ethnicity is seen by instrumentalists as a form of social capital and political resource and as a potential mobiliser of cohesive societies (when assessed positively). It is can also be a generator of community solidarity and a traditional source of peacebuilding strategies through the implementation of 'blood pacts' (Autessere, 2016) and *Ubgwira* (friendship) (Rukundwa, 2006) in traditional societies in the

DRC or in the case of the central and southern African philosophy of Ubuntu[25]. A significant body of literature demonstrates how the philosophical concept of the ethnic group functions as a source of resilience and resource in conflict transformation and reconciliation.

Constructivists, on the other hand, argue that ethnic identities are a social construction (Smaje, 1997). They are dynamic, evolutive and fluid, and do not necessarily transmit ethnic identity to subsequent generations (Otayek, 2001), nor do they come from a static heritage. Ethnicity is instead part of a historical narrative that can be researched in specific settings. Any expectation that ethnic groups are culturally homogeneous is misleading. Constructivists argue that the contemporary forms ethnicities have taken in Africa originated in the colonial era but stem ultimately from the character of pre-colonial societies that were significantly influenced by the social, economic, cultural, and political power of colonialism (Berman, 1998). Through a constructivist lens, ethnicity is neither built in a vacuum of other pluralistic micro versions of identity, such as culture or custom, nor via divergent interests between different generations or gender, clans, sub-clans, and other competing social groups influenced by a legacy of colonial or rapidly changing classes (Berman, 1998). Ethnic identities can be observed constantly evolving to accommodate the needs and demands levied by globalisation and climate change. I therefore argue that ethnicities are not impervious to other forms of dynamic and active allegiance involved in conflict.

In the case of the DRC, my understanding of ethnicity and ethnonationalist conflict is based on a constructivist framing. Starting with the issue of identity politics, as demonstrated in Chapter One, ethnic contentions ere actively provoked by the colonial power, and subsequently manipulated by a weakened post-colonial government (Mamdani, 2001). They manifest today through perceptions, myths about the other and psychological sequels linked to the violent past (Mathys, 2017). Some political and tribal leaders use violence to mobilise people to address their interpretations of injustices of 'difficult' pasts. Crises of identity like these are neither necessarily as complex as some scholars present them, nor have they originated from a distant and ancestral period. I argue that they are not predetermined, but they do continue to play a significant role in post-colonial violence. The contested citizenship of the Rwandophone people (Tutsis mainly) in the DRC serves as an instrument for political elites to gather local and national popular support based on the imagined social meanings of differences and the exclusion of others. In this context, ethnicity is clearly historically evolving, influenced, and manipulated by different forces (internal, regional, and external) for

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[25] Ubuntu is a central and southern African philosophy that promotes the ideas of common humanity and inclusive values of peace. It relies on several principles: 'All human beings are interconnected'. 'I am who I am because of other people'. 'Every action I make has implications for those around us'.

the sake of political goals (Stewart, 2009) that are heterogeneous, unbound, dynamic and adaptive in interaction with the external world (Hoffman et al., 2020). The original dynamism of subaltern ethnicity usually depended on the political interests of the colonisers, which structured and maintained secular coexistence. Therefore, it is argued by these researchers that ethnic identities need not been seen as self-made but as sets of categories whose differences may be decided by third parties who aim to control and maintain privilege. Consequently, the notion of ethnicity, ethnic commonalities and differences can change drastically over time.

Based on the constructivist stance, such a notion should not be understood as being merely the way people perceive themselves versus others in situations of conflict. Along with Mamdani and Hoffman, I argue that conflict is not ethnic but rather ethnicised in the eastern DRC (Mamdani, 2001; Ntung, 2019; Hoffman et al., 2020. In the past this ethnicisation was affected by colonialists, today it is put forward by insecure political and military leaders. Through this process, ethnicised groups are manipulated to construct a perceived shared identity in order to generate fanatical behaviour and activate a certain protective or aggressive attitude towards others.

This thesis is concerned with the role of Christian clergy in ethnic identity crisis. Ethnic identity conflict relates to a political practice in the DRC that defines citizenship through the nexus of ethnicity, land and customary rights. It is a conflicting policy where one can be recognised legally as a Congolese citizen but excluded as non-Congolese due to ethnicity. Consequently, throughout history in the DRC, the citizenship status of those speaking a language similar to Kinyarwanda (a language of Rwanda) has been contested. The right to ethnic identity of the Banyarwanda[26] and Banyamulenge[27] has become a contentious issue as it is used to define whether someone is a Congolese national or not. As demonstrated in the introductory chapter, such ethnic-based citizenship is one of major causes of violence in eastern Congo. While all Rwandophones (Congolese Hutu and Tutsi) are concerned by this practice, the Tutsi people in both North and South Kivu are mostly affected by this legal system (Jackson, 2007).

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[26] Banyarwanda are in North Kivu. They are Hutu and Tutsi and have established themselves in this region long before the colonial era. Some are located in the territory of Bwisha in Rutchuru. Others inhabit the territory of Masisi in the traditional authority of Bashali. Within this group, there those referred as settlers. They were settled in this area by the Belgian colonial authority to bridge gap in labour market (mainly agricultural economy). They speak a type of Kinyarwanda spoken in Northern Rwanda.

[27] The Banyamulenge are pastoralists people. They are inhabitants of South Kivu province and are virtually all Tutsi. Due to contestation of their political rights in the DRC, the Banyamulenge played different roles in the 1960s war against the Mulelist rebels, the 1996 War, the 1998 "Second" War. Linguistically, they speak a language related to Kinyarwanda and Kirundi, the languages of Rwanda and Burundi respectively. Rwandans think it sounds more like Kirundi with antique features, and Burundians think it is a difficult and funny sort of Kinyarwanda (Rukundwa, 2006).

I want now to review the literature relating to the contributions of religion, religious beliefs, religious actors and institutions in conflict and peace.

2.2   Religious peacebuilding – an emerging discipline

This thesis is situated within an emerging scholarship on religious peacebuilding via the disciplines of international conflict analysis and international relations. The role of religion is without doubt significant and influential in multifarious ways in today's world. It started to emerge more clearly as an academic interest in the 2000s following the commitments of several scholars (Appleby, 2000, 2005; Ter Haar, 2005; Gopin, 2000; Little, 2007) who played a key role in further inquiries and triggered the debate through multiple publications, newly established research centres and related curricula in their universities (Hertog, 2010). The novelty of this area of study is unsurprising, considering the previous dismissal of religion as a phenomenon of the past.

In the present literature, there is growing interest among International Relations and Conflict scholars in exploring the role religious actors play in peacebuilding. This shift is a response to the growing recognition, among policy makers and practitioners, that religious actors are a significant but underutilised resource in pursuing peace processes. Gapin (2000) criticised Western diplomacy's lack of understanding of religious values, rituals and practices. He argued that religion, religious ideas and values should be combined with existing traditional Western models and policies of conflict resolution. A Finland-based International Non-Government Organisation (INGO), *the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers*, recently emerged as a leading peace-making research centre dedicated to approaches involving grassroots and international peacemakers (among them, religious and traditional leaders) in order to strengthen efforts towards sustainable peace. Many INGOs use Lederach's (1997) *peacebuilding pyramid*[28] approach as an entry point to bring antagonistic groups together (Muchikiwa, 2015). Importantly in this model there is an emphasis on inter-religious, inter-faith negotiations as providing cultural links to influence peacebuilding processes. Again, such approaches respond to religiously motivated conflicts, which is, as stated already in Chapter One, not the case of the DRC.

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[28] A three-level pyramid of stakeholders and models to peacebuilding was designed by Lederach: the first level of the pyramid involves key military, political, and religious leaders who occupy the highest level of leadership. The middle range involves leaders from a category of NGOs, academic researchers, artists, ethnic and religious leaders. The lowest level of the pyramid involves grassroots leadership

On the whole, an important body of literature has begun to abandon scepticism of non-secular ideas (Mayall and Sylvestri, 2015). There is an increasing recognition of religious peacebuilding (Hertog, 2010). Religious leaders are more often invited to be involved in international affairs, partly as a result of increased understanding of their domestic prominence and potential contribution to addressing war, conflict and other issues relating to violence (Bartoszewicz, 2013). This development may be a response to criticism (see Gopin, 2000) concerning previous scholarly ignorance of and condescension towards religion, religious actors and practices within Western diplomats and peace-makers. Although there are signs of increasing awareness of the need to merge religious values and personnel with Western models of conflict resolution, achieving such ambitions requires an inclusive understanding of the multifaceted features of religious leaders and their values. Specifically, knowledge of the ways in which religious leaders have historically and traditionally engaged with questions of power, politics, peace and conflict has risen up the peacemakers' agenda (see Mayall and Sylvestri, 2015 for example). Approaches will inevitably vary depending on context, place and the actors in peace or conflict, but this thesis addresses these gaps in understanding of the behaviour and influence of the clergy in their responses to conflicts of ethnic identity in the DRC.

Having located my thesis in this developing area of study, in the following section I reflect on the nature and diversity of recent contributions to the field, the issues therein raised, the approaches used by various authors and, most notably, the clear establishment of the present gaps in knowledge, taking into consideration the DRC as a case study. In the next section, I want to reflect on the links between religion, conflict and peace.

2.2.1 The nexus of religion, conflict, and peace – a contested ground

Religion can be seen as both a source of violent conflict and of peace (Appleby, 2000; Busuttil and Ter Haar, 2005; Gopin, 2005). Starting with activism in violence, since the 1990s (and particularly after the crisis of 9/11[29] there has been a proliferation of theories connecting religion with violence (Omer, 2015). Scholarly views mainly focus on the relationships between religion and conflict, emphasising its influence on terrorism and fundamentalism as well as ethnic conflict in Africa (Hertog, 2010). The widespread emergence of groups using violence inspired by interpretations of religious ideas has led

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[29] Crisis of 9/11 refers to one of the deadliest terrorist attacks in the United States. It was executed by radical Islamist members of al-Qaeda who hijacked airliners and crashed them into two famous buildings in New York City, the Pentagon building around Washington, DC, and in a rural area of Pennsylvania. These attacks killed almost 3,000 people. The event marked a beginning of a new era in the global security agenda.

many scholars in the West to adopt the wholesale view that religion is connected intrinsically to violence (Mayall and Silvestri, 2015). Other studies have focused on religion and public risks, with particular emphasis on Islam, the (mis)use of Islamic texts and preaching to promote terrorism. Links between violent extremism and religion are suggested in two ways: a) religious organisations or groups that use religion in political ambitions; and b) secular organisations that use religion to achieve political outcomes (Brewer, Higgins and Teens, 2010). The counterargument to the above narrative, which paints religion as a source of peace, relates to this study's assumption that Christianity and religious leaders ought to deter violence and edify peace. The claim supporting such a view is rooted in the assumption that many religions claim to adhere to values of peace (Little, 2007; Philipots, 2012). The latter framing is underpinned by concrete and specific religious teachings that encourage believers to sue for peace and provide time-honoured strategies to address obstacles to religion and conflict resolution. The existing academic literature rarely explores the constructive side of religion (i.e., bringing about peace) or the ways it addresses societal barriers (Hertog, 2010). The destructive side of religion is a far more common topic. The duality of religion as source of both peace and violence is acknowledged but its positive aspects are fundamentally underdeveloped in research.

Religion and religious organisations have indeed fuelled this unbalanced view. There is a general agreement in the existing literature about religion's role in most conflicts: mainly those involving ethnic and nationalist-based tensions, antagonism, and violence. This consensus refers to religious actors' functions in mobilising people, condoning, justifying, catalysing, sustaining and subtly supporting existing dynamics of ethnic conflicts (Hertog, 2010). This framing of religion is of course highly relevant to a thesis that examines the responses of the Christian clergy in the autochthony/indigeneity conflicts in the DRC – but it is too simplistic. Churches have rallied the masses in support of certain political leaders in their ambitions to remain in control of power, and in this way served to prolong situations of conflict (Den Berg, 2016). This manipulation of people and power has indeed served to deepen fears and suspicions between communities and highlighted ethnic, religious and cultural differences.

Religion offers certain foundations with potential to resolve conflict. Despite the spiritual/religious resources for peace, existing approaches to resolving conflict and peacebuilding in the Congo remain primarily secular. These models have mainly been generated in Western scholarship and diplomacy, influenced by an understanding of the separation between church and state (Hertog, 2010). Secular ideas have shaped existing theories of peacebuilding. Though some theoretical developments have acknowledged

religion's role in peace and conflict (see Little, 2007; Appleby, 2000), generally religion has either been viewed as provoking social conflict or dismissed as being irrational and irrelevant (Mbiti, 2010) and, according to the dominant western viewpoint, doomed to disappear. I claim in this thesis that examining the significance of religion in conflict demands an in-depth understanding that acknowledges these realities and involves religious elements in its analysis and peacebuilding interventions (Hertog, 2010). In the case of the DRC, I will focus on the role the clergy plays in the politics of identity conflict[30] with the aim of elucidating future analyses.

In examining the influence of religious ideas and organisations on peace and conflict, Philpott (2007) assessed two variables: the ways in which religion and authority in politics are expressed in a given situation; and political theology. He illustrated how religious organisations, often in the context of the politics of liberal theology, can assist a country towards a democratic process through non-violent action, rather than sustain environments of violence and autocracy.

Indeed, religion can equally be a source of peace. Some parts of social science see religion as a human construct, developed among people and communities and used to serve human interests, which can often fall into conflict (Ter Haar, 2005). Therefore, it can be used as an instrument of 'good and evil' or for destructive and constructive benefits (Bartoszewicz, 2013). As Bartoszewicz argued, it is possible for religion to be used to mobilise the masses towards peace and the moralisation of the peace process. Concepts of dialogue, reconciliation or forgiveness are fundamental to Christianity and Islam and of course have relevance in both the religious and the secular world. This discourse has become an important feature in the construction of peace and security, and religion can powerfully provide and sustain motivations towards a secular peace. In the secular DRC, a society dominated by beliefs in modern forms of Christianity, religion is an important means of regulating social and political spheres.

Busuttil and Ter Haar (2005) explored this transformative function of religion. They considered both the positive and negative sides of religious actors and assessed the ways in which religion(s) may contribute to any transformation of conflict into peace. Busuttil and Ter Haar (2005: p9) questioned the modern tendency to link religion with conflict without substantive critical evidence, specifically in the West. Such an approach is mainly influenced, Busuttil and Ter Haar argued, by the historical journey that separated the church

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[30] Conflict of autochthony and indigenousness rights

and the state, and the secular and spiritual powers within society. Their analytical model focuses on the perspective of Abrahamic religious traditions. The constructive role of religion situates a vision of peace in the much wider context of human security. They observed that religion is under-used as a resource by policy makers and state actors and therefore it is crucial to investigate its resources that promote social and conflict resolutions.

Scholarly contributions that emphasise the ambivalence of religion in conflict and peace are common (Coward and Smith, 2004; Little, 2007; Mayall and Sylvestri, 2015; Omer, 2015). These studies have been generated, directly and indirectly, by the argument of R. Scott Appleby (2000) in *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence and Reconciliation.* Appleby used a phenomenological method to study religion. He drew from theological discourse and argued that religion or sacred experience can produce contradictory phenomena or concepts which fall between non-violent and violent actions. Appleby's work aims to understand why and under what circumstances some actors in religious institutions choose to use violence and why others prefer to search for justice through peaceful actions and to work towards reconciling antagonistic groups.

Appleby provided a values-based insight into the role of religion in peace. One of his key arguments recognises that the determination to follow normative ethics or ethical systems, as demonstrated in religious characteristics, can be one of the main drivers for peace. In acknowledging the constructive side of religion, he analysed aspects of the major world religious traditions (Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism and Sikhism). He demonstrated that these religions provide moral principles and peace-related values, such as friendship, compassion, humility, forgiveness, repentance, etc. His arguments were inspired by theological perspectives rather than being grounded in traditional religious values and influences themselves, which is the case in the DRC (Covington-Ward, 2016).

Appleby's framework has been tested by others. In their study 'The "*Ambivalence of the Sacred" in Africa: The impact of religion on peace and conflict in sub-Saharan Africa',* Basedau and De Juan (2008) explored the role of religions in sub-Saharan civil conflicts and tested the religious characteristics that may influence either peace or further conflict. The study concluded that individual religious identities and ideas have a very specific impact on conflict: while in the past religion might have been a secondary factor in conflict resolution compared to other 'risk factors', the results of this study suggest that religious factors should be central when analysing civil conflicts in Africa.

Basedau and De Juan's study drew its data from 28 violent conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa. While the region covered was vast, I contend that the results are still not generalisable. The study's approach helps map and evaluate the conditions under which religious characteristics influence peace or conflict. However, the factors involved in their study do not necessarily apply to religious societies where, firstly, conflicts are not founded on religious differences; secondly, religious identities have less relevance; and thirdly, theological teachings and religious institutions have historically had little influence on either peace or conflict. It should also be noted that Basedau and De Juan's study raises the need for further inquiry into what religious factors sustain or restrain Africa's civil conflicts.

Basedau and De Juan (2008: 5) referred to the religious value of peace itself as well as the aim of peacebuilding initiatives by religious actors, though Appleby (2000) and Philpott (2007) confirmed the dichotomy of the religious influence on both peace and violence. Appleby's contention that religious actors can produce ambivalent actions involving militantism in violence or as activists in peace-making is clearly observable. I argue, however, that this binary does not necessarily explain the DRC religious leaders' behaviours and attitudes. Beyond the arguments in this thesis, Basedau and De Juan (2008) challenged Appleby by showing that questions remain as to which features of religiosity and what specific conditions lead religion to influence action in one direction or the other.

The cases of Libera and Sierra Leone support the above Appleby's argument. During and after the civil wars in the two countries, non-state actors (including religious leaders) were involved in both the conflict and the brokering of peace through interfaith dialogues. Regarding Sierra Leone, Conteh (2011), among many others, agreed that antagonistic groups used religion as a resource through which to instigate and justify violence, but also respected its place in the process of reconciliation. In the aftermath of conflict, religious groups played a role in humanitarian responses to war casualties and, using interfaith collaboration, were successful in facilitating peace between the government and the rebel group's leaders. Whereas in the case of Liberia, Ellis (2006) showed how religious beliefs, rituals and magic powers played a defining role in intensifying violence and war. Again, non-state actors, including religious and diaspora leaders, played a key role during the conflict but also had an impact upon peace processes (Afolabi, 2017). Both Liberia and Sierra Leone's civil wars also involved intra-state actors and conflicts and were of an ethno-religious nature (Christian and Muslim) embedded within the ideas of 'settlers' and 'natives' (in case of Liberia).

Significant examples support the theoretical arguments toward religious peace building, but they raise questions too. For example, in his illustrations of the constructive role of religion, Appleby (2005) used the Mennonite peacebuilding approach and told the triumphant story of the St. Egidio peace process in Mozambique. Colombia's peace process effectively involved the Catholic Church (Powers, 2021) and in Northern Ireland where international actors had failed peace was eventually negotiated between local but opposing religious sides (Sandal, 2017).

Appleby based his analysis on the idea of an ambivalence between the nature of religion and that of pluralism. His evaluation of religious peace and violence stands on the premise that both are derived from a similar religious dynamic. He referred to the concept of 'militance', which he regarded as the willingness regardless of any condition to sacrifice one's self, one's family, and one's loved one in the service of what is considered to be a noble cause. Within this argument, he sees the suicide bomber as no different a 'religious' person to the one who, like Mahatma Gandhi, decides to renounce violence and pursue peaceful means to address conflict. The problem with this ambivalent perspective is that it assumes the interchangeable nature of the different religions.

Thought it must be acknowledged that Appleby's study offers a very helpful framework for the analysis of religion's role in peace making. He proposed three types of religious-based conflict transformation: crisis mobilisation mode; saturation mode; and interventionist mode. Crisis mobilisation involves charismatic leaders who activate religious resources that marshal social movements in resistance and thus provide support to wider political issues. Saturation mode aims to provide an all-inclusive, multidimensional strategy to end violence and reach a sustainable peace. This mode also includes directives on the long-term efforts to build peace after a truce by working progressively with people affected by conflict. The interventionist mode is perhaps the most promising approach to frame this study. This mode involves bringing outsider religious and cultural actors into an area of conflict.

Despite the various contributors in religious peacebuilding, the interplay between religion, politics and peacebuilding remains not well documented. This limitation may partly be caused by over-dependence on specific examples (Brewer et al., 2010) with limited potential for generalisation. The nature of these analyses easily leads to essentialist conclusions but have so far not proven to be generalisable (Hertog, 2010). Brewer et al. (2010) also argued that opportunities to form deeper general theories are missed when research depends only on specific examples of religion as a resource for reconciliation (Coward and Smith, 2004). Religion may have the potential to build peace, but this idea has not been developed (Gopin,

2005). Others, like Little (2007), examined the role of often charismatic, religious individuals in making peace, for example the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* led by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, or an interfaith approach like that which brough an end to 'the troubles' in Northern Ireland (Appleby, 2000; Power, 2007). A singular focus on case studies may be relevant in societies where religion or religious beliefs exist independent of the struggle, but if religious leaders are part of the problem, it is all the more challenging to make them part of the solution (Little, 2007; Brewer et al., 2010).

Brewer et al. (2010) argued the case for more theory. They proposed that in exploring the link between religion and peace-making, it is important to theorise within a nexus of religion and civil society-state relations. While an understanding of the role of religion is crucial in building peace, this role depends on effective interactions between conflict actors and civil society. Though such critiques may be well-founded, what defines civil society, its roles and influence may be understood differently by different observers. Sontoso (2010) argued that civil society (in this case local NGOs) is not necessarily 'close' to local society and does not always represent their political and social interests. This is well-illustrated in the DRC and other conflict-affected countries, where civil society is often supported financially by international community agencies that back political and social programmes based on liberal peace themes. Consequently, their role in civil society-state relations may not necessarily be neutral or representative of those most deeply affected by conflicts. In strengthening this concept, with reference to the DRC this study argues that the religious perspective is an essential requirement if the consciences and actions of ordinary people are to be changed in the direction of a lasting peace.

An important scholarship examines the role of religion across societies and throughout history. Other literatures were developed from a religious perspective, or by individuals with a strong religious background (Mutombo-Mukendi, 2011). A common interest, among these contributors, is a focus on religious institutions (Appleby, 2005), the Abrahamic religious traditions, and faith-based interventions in the peace process. Others focus on constructive dialogue between different faith groups. As mentioned earlier, this study takes a different angle by attempting to bridge the gap in knowledge – the role of the clergy in ethnic identity conflict, examining their rationales, concerns and how they are expressed through public and political statements.

Other researchers (Berman, 2003; Chapman, 2022; Pratt, 2021) have focused on the role of religion in 'radical' and 'extremist' violence. With specific reference to sub-Saharan countries, an emphasis has been placed on the Central African Republic (CAR) with

reference to ethno-religious violence involving *Seleka* and *Anti-Balaka* warring factions; *Bokohoram* in Nigeria, Cameron, Niger and Chad; *Ansar Dine* in Northern Mali; Northern Uganda with its infamous *Lord's Resistance Army* (LRA) of General Joseph Kony; *El Shabab* in Kenya and Somalia, and other rebel groups which claim alliance with Islamic State (ISIS). In all these cases, religion has been used to inspire, instigate and justify radicalism and violence (Ensign and Karegeye, 2019). Religious peacebuilding engagements have been more well-documented in the cases of Nigeria and the CAR given their inter-faith context.

Similarities of religious involvement in peacebuilding are evident in the cases of Rwanda, South Africa and Northern Uganda. Conflict in these countries also involved ethnic and racial identities. The 1994 genocide against Tutsis in Rwanda led to the loss of nearly a million lives in just 100 days (Melvern, 2006). Some of the killings happened in places of worship, and many religious actors became both perpetrators and victims. It is well-evidenced that religion was used to manipulate popular sentiments against Tutsi people (Olov, 2019). The Ten Commandments were wilfully misinterpreted[31] and other biblical references were used to incite and legitimise killings (Ensign and Keregeye, 2019). In South Africa, during apartheid, established Christian-based churches, like the Dutch Reformed Church, used religious beliefs and theological writings to justify separation between black and white people (Brewer et al, 2010). In Northern Uganda, for over 20 years the LRA committed countless heinous killings against civilians, including rape, torture, abduction of large numbers of local people, and enslavement of thousands of children into child soldiering or sexual slavery (Allen, 2007). The phenomenon of the 'mystical weapon' (i.e., the use of religious beliefs to wage war) was also reported in Liberia's civil war (Ellis, 2001) and Zimbabwe's war of liberation (Fontein, 2006). In Northern Uganda, prior to Kony's leadership, Alice Lakwena (the former LRA leader) used what was called a *Holy Spirit Movement* (HSM). They responded to their heavy losses by inventing a medicine that they claimed rendered people bulletproof (Behrend, 1999: 81). While each case here is different, their similarities lie in their tradition and religious beliefs.

The interplay between religion, conflict and peace-making is multifaceted. We have seen that this interaction involves various factors and actors. It interlinks religious, social, cultural, value-based, economic, political, security, ethical considerations, and depends on the participation of the clergy (Lederach, 1997). This multi-dimensional approach is ignored, or

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[31] Drawing from the Biblical ten commandments, in December 1990 an anti-Tutsi propaganda document, known as Hutu Ten Commandments, was published in a new paper called Kangura (Gatwa, 2005). The document is infamously cited in its role in the construction of a genocide ideology (HRW, 1999). It provides rules that criminalise and dehumanise Tutsis and those associated with them.

unconsidered, by framing the analysis in what Hertog called an "either/or"[32] kind of discourse (Hertog, 2010: XIV). Binary views rely on simplistic understandings of the trilogy of religion, conflict, and peace, but in the lives of the people of the DRC religion embodies and interacts with deeply seated social, political, economic, cultural, historical, and physiological factors, generating multifaceted and often unpredictable dynamics (Hertog, 2010). Among existing scholars in religion and conflict or religious peacebuilding, Gopin (2000) showed how these interactions shape religious experiences and political systems. He suggested that an analysis of religion as a particular aspect of social life ought to consider the complex and evolving ways in which religion interplays with the world. These arguments are particularly relevant to understanding interactions of church elites with processes of conflict and peace in the DRC – a gap that this thesis hopes to fill. There has not yet been a comprehensive study seeking to understand the role of the clergy, religious actors and their practices in supporting peacebuilding or fuelling conflict. Though Basedau and De Juan (2008) and Appleby (2005) raised important issues on the subject, I argue that there is a need to understand, through qualitative methods, the specific interplay between the clergy, ethnicity, politics and power and the cultural and local dynamics of conflict and peace. To bring this literature review much closer to the specific issue under investigation, the next section discusses the role of Christian church leaders and resolution of conflict.

2.2.2 *Christian clergy and conflict resolution*

The role of the clergy in peacebuilding remains underdeveloped within the discipline of conflict studies (Hertog, 2010). It is, therefore, necessary to develop approaches that enable us to understand these actors, as Sandal argued.

The work of Little (2007) is helpful here. He collected the stories of religious leaders (men and women) engaged in peacebuilding and, like this thesis, he focused research attention on individuals motivated by their faiths rather than their institutions. Though he acknowledged the destructive role of religion he elevated the positive role of religion in peace-making. Little argued that religion can inspire and generate unique resources for conflict resolution, such as the involvement of sacred discourses (sermons and Biblical texts) and spiritual/religious traditions, rituals and beliefs. As demonstrated earlier, many other studies either take an inconclusive role regarding religion or only loosely connect religion with the causes or sustenance of war. Little's research however provides examples of determined positive religious peacebuilding actors and their potential to change conflict

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[32] Religion as a source of peace or violence

situations constructively. His interpretive framework refers to '*the hermeneutics of peace*' and is grounded in:

> the conviction that the pursuit of justice and peace by peaceful means is a sacred priority, and it is employed as a way of examining the texts, traditions, and practices of one religion or another for their contribution to the promotion of justice and peace (Little, 2007: 439).

The religious beliefs held by the leaders analysed in Little's work provided not simply the foundation of their daily lives but sustained the commitment and resilience needed for their mission. The religious actors (men and women) involved in Little's work used religious texts and traditions as a resource of motivation and inspiration in addressing conflict. However, these were a mixture of faiths. Each leader demonstrated the centrality of theological practice and custom from which, in different ways, they drew influence and understanding. They also shared a sense of accountability, in relation to what they saw as their sacred goal – the ending of conflict by peaceful means.

Little's theoretical view provides a relevant foundation to this thesis. It demonstrates the potential for the clergy's constructive role in bridging positive relationships between antagonistic communities. However, there are some limitations. Firstly, it was generated from subjects representing three Abrahamic religions (Islam, Christianity, and Judaism) and their relationship to religious peacebuilding in religion-induced conflict. Furthermore, each of these three religions have considerable differences within them. Within Christianity, there are different denominations where the only common ground is the words and life of Christ. There are also differences in the concept of salvation, a relationship with God and interpretation of aspects of the Bible (literally true or open to the mores of the time). While this study places an emphasis on Christian clergy in the DRC, the main cause of conflict is generally not religious. Secondly, Little's analysis is based on records of the experiences of 16 peace-making religious leaders (from Israel-Palestine to Northern Ireland, the Balkans, Sudan, South Africa, El Salvador, Indonesia) who stood at the frontline in some of the world's most protracted conflicts. Scripture and the cultural traditions of these male and female fighters for peace were claimed as the sources of their motivation and inspiration and became a resource for the implementation of their goals. The ideas discussed in Little's analysis are drawn from specific religious actors whose experiences appear not to be generalisable to the DRC or other divided societies. While Biblical texts and Christian religious traditions are used in public and political statements by the clergy, this thesis will acknowledge in Chapter Seven examples of deviations from the core Christian value of

peace on Earth (Gopin, 2000). Nevertheless, Little's arguments on the nexus between religious convictions and peace are essential. They enlighten a significant inquiry in my research into the responses of religious leaders to specific conflict events. His research shows how the pursuit of peace by the religious was a sacred priority but also acknowledges the obstacles faced by the clergy as they used religious texts to promote social cohesion and peaceful coexistence beyond divisive issues in local politics.

The influence of the clergy is not just an Africa phenomenon. Gopin (2000) pointed to the crucial role of authoritative clergy, who hold influence in communities and political affairs and can shape their followers' views across the world. Similarly, Jelen (1995) suggested the existence of an influential political culture in US politics wielded by religious leaders of the RCC and ECC. More recently, Sandal (2017) wrote of the influential role of religious leaders' and placed religious actors and their networks within their communities as a substantial source of expertise and social and diplomatic capital. Her approach focuses on conflict transformation. She made a case too for the recognition of the religious as potential leaders of epistemic communities in conflict research. She uses this concept to elucidate the influence of scientific researchers on policy decision-making during the Cold War, but Sandal (2011) argued that it also provides a helpful framework to explain the influence of the clergy in present day peacebuilding.

The concept of religious actors as epistemic communities fits the case of the DRC surprisingly well. DRC clergy are often high-profile individuals capable of playing an impartial role in any form of autochthony/indigeneity identity politics. Throughout the post-colonial era, the RCC and ECC have been significant in influencing political and institutional spheres (Prunier, 2001). During democratisation, the RCC was centrally involved in the opposition to stir change towards a new form of governance. Both the RCC and ECC and national level governments published joint public and political statements expressing concern about human rights abuses and the rule of law (Oyatambwe, 1997). Christian responses to conflicts in the DRC have also been remarkably selective and this discrimination is also a concern in this thesis. As one of the aims of this study is to search for locally rooted approaches to peacebuilding, in the next section, I want to briefly discuss a review on the critiques of international peacebuilding approaches.

Locally rooted and unsecular approaches to address conflict remains under-researched. This failure is unfortunate when considering responses to conflict-ridden regions like eastern Congo (Jordhus-Lier and Braathen, 2013). The work Autesserre (2014) conducted in eastern Congo led her to conclude that the UN approach has undermined locally-rooted

mechanisms of conflict resolution. Existing conflict resolution models using solely rational, unspiritual and normative policy resources. They do not recognise that conflict may not involve one group versus another, but that the causal factors of conflict can be multifaceted, irrational and complex. If the many-sided nature of these conflicts goes unrecognised by the UN or other peace-making bodies, the chances of peace are weakened. So, a deeper understanding of the dynamics of each conflict, including an understanding of locally rooted practices and the building of sustainable social infrastructures for peace, is needed.

There are many limitations to a locally rooted peace. Firstly, there may not be a clear idea of what peace might look like. Since there is no comprehensive research to demonstrate that religious approaches to peace-making might be effective, it is still unclear what would enable peacebuilding to flourish and be sustained at the local level (Autessere, 2017). Furthermore, external interventionists in local conflicts can easily misconstrue local perspectives and motives. Simple sub-cultural misunderstandings can become another obstacle (Autesserre, 2014) to achieving peace. For example, international attempts to use a bottom-up approach, using civil society or grassroots representatives, may resort to using the bureaucratic means of the dominant culture and these foreign attitudes may seem incompatible with local norms (Autesserre 2014). Through this thesis, I attempt to contribute to the debate to search for locally rooted resources in peacebuilding with particular emphasis on church elites. The next section reflects on the existing debate on the church involvement in politics and social actions.

2.3   Church and social political engagement

The socio-political engagement of the Church straddles the disciplines of sociology and theology (Kitata, 2020). The Church's political mission remains controversial, affecting the unity of Protestant church denominations (evangelical and liberal) and the reputation of the RCC. For some, the Church's social mission is merely to disseminate the word of God, but for others the Church must also play a secular role and free people from poverty and conflict (Bihuzo, 2020).

Those advocating for a positive role for churches use normative and religious ethical views to argue that Christian religious leaders ought to be a model of social cohesion. The opposite outcome – social exclusion – appears to be uncommon in religious peacebuilding (Hertog, 2010; Alfani, 2019). Ethnicity-related violence in Africa continues to occupy the heart of theological inquiry (Mutombo-Mukendi, 2011); wherever society is fragmented, the Christian church only tends to reflect this fragmentation.

Rwanda represents one of many examples of social fragmentation. Several academic authors, including Gatwa (2005) and Longman (2001), have written extensively on the church's role in the 1994 Rwandan genocide. They agree on the responsibility of some European Christian missionaries for a theology that generated genocide. These contributors argue that the clergy failed to confront the issue of ethnicism and to provide a Christian response to problem of tribalism. They suggest that the close relationship between church and state was one of the significant causes of this failure.

Indeed, religious organisations in Africa are an important partner of the states. Patterson (2014) claimed that religious institutions are probably the most powerful form of civil society in Sub-Saharan Africa. This is demonstrably true in the DRC, where state building and institutional operations almost always involve negotiating governance between non-state actors and the state, and power relations between grassroots actors' influence policy (De Herdt, Titeca and Wagemakers, 2013).

The involvement of the clergy in politics is significant on many levels. Their role in facilitating social and political mobilisation in support of particular causes is well-known (Ellis and Ter Haar, 1998). Today, for example, the president of the provincial assembly in South Kivu is a local influential pastor. Religious leaders elsewhere frequently exploit their moral legitimacy to seek and access political power at the national level (Jordhus-Lier and Braathen, 2013). This thesis shows that the church has not capitalised on its public position in society. Although it has moral legitimacy, religious values/discourse and political influence it has failed to build an effective peace in eastern Congo.

It is important to recognise that religious leaders in the DRC have been involved in peace processes. During what is known as the 'Second War' in the DRC between 1998 and 2003 religious leaders created an environment that allowed for a transitional peace process (Whetho and Uzodike, 2009). Similarly, in 2016, the leadership of the RCC facilitated political dialogues between a ruling party and the opposition (Alfani, 2019). However, Prunier demonstrated in 1996 that the same Catholic Church also had a role in the conflict itself, in as much as it helped sustain the autocratic regimes threatened by the conflict.

This thesis addresses and attempts to explain these contradictory and complex positions of the RCC. The responses of both Catholic and other Christian clergy to both ethnicity and to conflict remains unclear in the existing literature and must be clarified if progress is to be made in establishing any lasting peace.

2.3.1 Christianity faith and peacebuilding

Congolese theologist Professor Ka Mana[33] (1993, 1994, 2000) argued that the Christian worldview and Biblical New Testament's teachings should be the fundamental ethical foundation for peacebuilding in Africa. Kä Mana proposed a new iteration of Christianity founded on the immediate needs of human beings. His analysis outlines the complex theological issues faced by African Christianity, which he called the "Christianity of catastrophe and death" (Ka Mana, 2002). He searched for a Christological model for Africa's contemporary issues and claimed that searching for the meaning of existence and the salvation of humanity has always been a priority for Africans. As confirmed in this review of the literature, there is a sense that the countries of the North have Christianised Africa rather than Africanised Christianity. Kä Mana proposed the need to depart from the spiritual aspects of Christianity, formerly the main focus of religious and theological studies. Instead, he was concerned with a liberation theology that focused on understanding the relationship between humanity and God as a partnership to address Africa's problems. As I will argue too throughout this thesis, Kä Mana suggested that Christianity can potentially transform, constructively, the socio-political, socio-economic and cultural dimensions of life. His emphasis was set on drawing from the best of African traditions and his ideals are highly relevant in the context of conflict resolution.

Kä Mana's theoretical contribution also contains some limitations. His theoretical approach lacks a diagnosis of the complexity and multifaceted allegiances that dominate the religious and political elites battling for power in Congolese society. He failed to suggest a process for moving away from the nexus of ethnicity, power and religion, or the focus on 'shopping' for private and personal benefits, towards one based on collective responsibility and humanity. I propose that this thesis can serve to bridge Ka Mana's idea with the realities on the ground in Eastern DRC.

While the work of Kä Mana is situated in the disciplines of theology and sociology, it has retained my attention as it debates the critical issues of Christianity in both its ecumenical and global contexts. He called for religious leaders to engage with a Christianity that embeds concrete and responsible actions in the many questions that face the continent. The Christianisation of life, he argued, must be rooted in traditional African practices, which

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[33] Professor Ka Mana is probably one of the leading thinkers in the field of theology. I had the privilege to interview him during this research two months before he passed away in July 2021.

require committed and persuasive church leaders who live values of shared humanity. Indeed, in pre-colonial times the evidence suggests that communities had their own traditional mechanisms for resolving conflict and that some models transcended different ethnic groups. To regulate societal life and assure peace and understanding between people, there were, for example, traditional mechanisms like the '*palabra*' (the metaphor of sitting under a large tree to resolve conflict). As former president of Tanzania Julius Nyerere put it: "elders sit under the big trees, and talk until they agree" (Werudu, 1997). It is uncontroversial to say that missionaries destroyed the cultural temples of the unconverted in order to eradicate 'pagan' traditions (Mbiti, 1969, 2010). The colonial administration for its part replaced the 'African palabra' with modern tribunals as judicial power was taken away from traditional leaders.

2.3.2 *Religious beliefs and power*

We have seen the strong relationship between political power and religion in Africa. Ter Harr (2009) argued that, in sub-Saharan Africa, there are deeply rooted concepts of power which tend to merge the religious and political, and that such movements acquire a specific public role when institutions of state are weak. Political leaders in Africa take seriously various spiritual activities and practices that may be viewed by 'outsiders' as 'far removed from religious affairs' (Ellis and Ter Haar, 1998: 189). In this context, the words and advice of self-proclaimed prophets and pastors play a powerful and persuasive role among individuals of Christian beliefs in the DRC.

Political leaders have become accustomed to making use of the 'spiritual technology' of religious institutions to support their electoral aims (Ter Haar and Ellis, 1998). This ability to mobilise human faculties within a spiritual sphere is seen as a source of tangible and effective power. Whether those in the political leadership are praised or criticised, both views take account of religious and ethnicised forces as a source of power in common (Mayer, 1998).

When institutions of the state are weak or in crisis, the religious acquires a more public and powerful role (Patterson, 2014). In his book *L'Etat en Afrique: la politique du ventre* on the post-colonial African states, Bayart (1989) described how tribalism sustained rivalry and struggle over the search for wealth, power, and social and political status. He explained the concept of "*la politique du ventre*" (politics of the belly) by detailing mechanisms set up to manage state institutions, as well as corrupt practices that value nepotism over meritocracy and accept the elite accumulation of economic wealth so common in many African

societies[34]. His analysis closely fits the DRC phenomenon. While Bayart's ideas relate to political economy, the religious landscape follows a similar trajectory.

There is nothing unique about African leaders seeking political support through religious organisations, Western political leaders do the same during elections or generally by visiting places of worship. What is different, Ellis and Ter Haar argued, is that the use of religion is not solely to gain more supporters, but "in many cases these politicians also believe that access to the spiritual world is a vital resource in the constant struggle to secure advantage over their rivals in political in-fighting" (1998: 188).

2.4   Conclusion and summary of the gap in the literature

This research focuses on the role of religion in conflict and peacebuilding with specific focus on religious leaders in the DRC. The assumptions underpinning this thesis is that religious leaders are influential, widespread religious trends have political significance and could and should have a role in peacebuilding in the DRC.

This chapter has analysed scholarly contributions that address religious peace-making. It includes research on the impact of previous approaches to peacebuilding. It has identified, discussed, and analysed apparent gaps in knowledge. The review shows that religious peacebuilding is an emerging area of study. This new and rich body of knowledge is, for some, situated in the context of the 'resurgence' of religion and the recognition of religious actors as an essential resource in policymaking at local, national, and international levels of decision-making. While this field of religious peacebuilding is rapidly developing, a standard conceptual analysis and set of practices still needs to be developed (Hertog, 2010; Sandal, 2017). While the field continues to expand, the relevant scholarly knowledge and reflection still need to be improved.

So far, reflecting on the aforementioned studies on religion in peace and conflict, there are noticeable gaps in knowledge and approaches. Most researchers take the perspective that African conflicts are 'ethno-religious'. These refer to societies where religion is strongly part of social and cultural identity and the experience of the everyday life and central to conflict. In this context, religious organisations have a role and authority for representation, reinforce moral legitimacy and can bring groups together. Some related studies focus on conflicts where religious leaders belonging to communities or groups in dispute attempt to mobilise

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[34] This phenomenon is not only an African problem. It exists, perhaps to a lesser extent, in Western democracies, including the UK.

key actors in the conflict and facilitate peace processes. Other scholarly contributions to understanding the role of religion in peace and conflict respond to conflicts where the drivers of violent struggle between two communal religious groups (e.g., Islam and Christianity) are deep-rooted and are of a cross-border nature. I argue that none of the scholarly contributions considered in this review is applicable to the DRC.

There is a significant gap in the literature and research methods that this study specifically addresses. Other studies focus on religious-inspired violence, like ethnic cleansing and suicide bombing, with the actors in such incidents becoming 'legitimised' by religious language, teaching, texts and images. Currently these analyses respond to major global religions, especially Islam and Hinduism (Omerlia, 2015) but also in the past to militant Christianity and Judaism. There is evidently a gap in representing the role of the much less understood African form of Christianity in the conflicts in the eastern DRC.

In the context of the DRC, this review brings together a wide range of contributions concerning the role of church leaders in conflict transformation (Alfani, 2019; Gatwa, 2005, Muke, 2016, Muchukiwa, 2015; Lederach, 1997). Existing studies have focused on the implications of Church involvement in socio-political engagements (Kitata, 2020; Oyatambwe, 1997), the peace process between political opposition and the ruling party (Whether and Uzodike, 2009), and within the actions of civil society (Seay, 2013). None of the studies cited consider the potential for a short-term peacebuilding phase to deter conflict and violence based on ethnic identity politics.

This chapter has focused on the literature that identifies and evaluates the role of religion in fuelling and deterring conflict. It has also shown how the clergy and religious institutions have and could contribute to peacebuilding. Most existing studies have been shaped and influenced by Appleby's (2000) concept of the dual character (peace and violence) of religious leaders and their interpretations of theological texts. He showed how religion is capable of producing both militantism in violence and in peace. Appleby's work has thus influenced many scholars in related fields to frame the role of religion in peacebuilding restrictively. This research challenges the exclusionary framing of religious actors either in conflict or peace. The findings and conclusions contradict this dualistic approach by arguing that framing religion as responsible for both conflict and peace-making does not reflect the case of the DRC. Analysis of the relevant literature shows that the issues are much more complex and require a deeper understanding of multifaceted factors.

This chapter has also shown that most of the existing literature and analyses on religious peacebuilding has not only used ungeneralisable approaches, but that these examples have been drawn from religion-induced conflicts. While this thesis is a single case study, it focuses on the nature of conflict that is considered a root cause of significant political and ethnic violence in the DRC and involves a diverse research participant, representing different categories. On the literature responding to conflict in the DRC specifically, none addresses the nature and role of the clergy in the autochthony/indigeneity conflicts in eastern Congo. While this literature review shows that the church and religion are influential in DRC society and as an influential non-state actor, or epistemic community, as Sandal (2017) suggested there is still a need to develop adequate, locally rooted and generalisable qualitative studies that focus on the role of the clergy in the politics of identity conflict and potential peace in the DRC.

Composing this literature review has highlighted the issue of establishing the role that religious leaders play in matters of peace and conflict in eastern Congo. This thesis enables to explain existing and potential links between religion, religious adherents and acts of violence in the region. The intention here is to bridge this gap in knowledge by evaluating the role of the clergy in peace or conflict. This thesis will offer an original contribution to existing analyses of the role of religious actors in conflict or peace. It is aimed at triggering different and locally rooted perspectives in existing academic debates. Most of all, this study extends the discussion on religious peacebuilding, generates new knowledge and offers a new direction in the field. I move now onto the next chapter that describes key theoretical frameworks and strategies in order to elucidate the questions, assumptions and objectives of this thesis.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

The literature review has acknowledged existing studies relevant to this research and identified gaps in knowledge. While this study is inductive by nature, I have developed a theoretical framework to guide this thesis. This chapter introduces and reviews the relevant theories that serve as a basis for the critical arguments that I will apply to elucidate phenomena, identify connections, and make predictions. The chapter defines the research context, discusses and occasionally combines selected theoretical ideas used as a foundation to connect existing knowledge with the finding of this study. It will describe theoretical models, strategies and processes designed to throw light on this proposition. I start by acknowledging existing models of analysis and outline their key arguments. I then develop the thesis by introducing the critical theories that support my analysis and proceed to present an original interdisciplinary theoretical framework that I believe enhances those theories.

As discussed in Chapter One, this study seeks to understand and explain the role (if any) of Christian religious leaders in peacebuilding, specifically in response to ethnic identity conflict. An initial fundamental assumption of this study is, firstly, considering Christian church leaders' influence in Congolese society, they can potentially contribute constructively to deterring violence. Secondly, widespread religious trends have political significance in the DRC and could play a much more significant role in peacebuilding.

The main approaches to religious peacebuilding at present can be summarised under several categories described by Omer (2015). She suggested four approaches: the 'good', where religion is assumed to contain reconciliatory ethics; the 'theatrical', where religion is expressed in theatrics during the peacebuilding process; the 'spiritual identity', where peace practitioners cast religious leaders as instruments in diplomacy or in effecting a change in societal attitudes; and finally, the 'exotic', where religion is seen as a strange and mysterious component in the peacebuilding process. To ensure academic rigour, Omer suggested that religious peacebuilding:

> should move beyond the exotic, the theatrical, and the good and the kinds of limitations they impose on the analysis of religion, conflict, and peacebuilding (Omer, 2015: 4).

Omer's critique of the limitations of the religious peacebuilding field relates, firstly, to the secularist concept of religion as a belief separate from other aspects of life (Omer, 2015: 6).

Her critique is that religion is often regarded as an empirical manifestation, whose analysis generally lacks historical perspective and any cross-cultural understanding (Omer, 2015: 6). Secondly, there is a tendency to describe religion as involved in a one-way, confirmatory process of positive influence. Omer's critique occurs within the context of theories of conflict transformation generally and uses an approach to the established religions whereby peacebuilding efforts draw on historical theology and practice. Omer's recommendation is for researchers to avoid conceptual traps and simplistic observations in considering religious matters and ethics, and instead attempt to recognise the potential of religions to become dynamically involved in making peace.

Appleby's phenomenological approach to the study of religion, peace and conflict continues to influence the field significantly. Appleby's arguments (Appleby, 2000) are characterised by what might be described as an uncertain response to the role of religion and sacred experience. The concept of the sacred as ambivalent sees the religious response as potentially involving activism in either violence or peace. However, this framing has little relevance to either conflict or peacebuilding in the DRC. As demonstrated in the literature review, the main drivers of political and ethnic crises in the DRC are not necessarily religious. Autesserre (2010), Mamdani (1996, 2001) and Vlassenroot and Raeymaekers (2004) suggested that conflict dynamics almost always relate to ethnicity, citizenship, land, and generalised political crises. However, my introductory and literature review sections acknowledged that religious ideas sometimes sustain rebellions (Stephen, 2006) and are implicated in the launching of violent attacks in eastern Congo. I also argue in this thesis that Appleby's theory does not seem to explain the DRC's religious phenomena.

Appleby's conceptual analysis, however, remains important to acknowledge. He suggested that one of the key shared characteristics of all religious peacebuilding efforts is an interest in using normative religious structures, such as moral conduct and the religious ethos. The latter implies links between religion and morality by comparing the patterns of behaviour of both religious and sceptical individuals (Middleton and Putney, 1962). The moral status of religious leaders, and perceptions of their neutrality in engaging with issues of ethnic violence, is therefore a primary interest of this study. The religious factors of Congolese life in the context of ethnic identity conflict seem, for the most part, to have been ignored in analyses of the modern post-colonial state in sub-Saharan Africa. The next section introduces the analytical frameworks that I find most directly addresses these concerns.

3.1 Introducing an inter-disciplinary theoretical framework for analysis

This thesis uses a combination of two analytical/theoretical frameworks. Firstly, it draws from a five-dimensional model of religion in peace and conflict by Fraser and Owen (2018). Secondly, it uses an original metaphor, which I have conceived of as a house plan, to establish the significance of a multifaceted mode of thoughts and the relevance of religious peacebuilding within an existing secular approach. This metaphor also contributes to an understanding of the DRC's society, the mindsets of peacemakers and their interactions with an environment of ethnic conflict. It also sheds light on the existing debate on whether peace should be built from the bottom up, the top down, or be multi-directional.

These two models are here combined into an interdisciplinary analytical framework, complementing each other to enhance an understanding of clergy-related phenomena in the DRC's divided societies. The proposed models serve as the tools with which to understand the data and explain the behaviours and actions of the clergy in conflict or peace in the DRC. The next section explores how they function, their interconnectedness, if and how they have been applied before, their relevance to this thesis, and their main challenges.

Each example of religious peacebuilding invites a contrasting model to examine it. Every conflict has its own local context, while human motivations, especially in the tense and mistrustful settings of conflict, are complex, diverse and difficult to predict or frame within a single approach. Indeed, Haynes argued:

> There is no single, elegant theoretical model enabling us to deal adequately with all relevant cases of religious involvement in religion, conflict, peacemaking and peacebuilding (2013: 1).

Indeed, Hertog (2017) argued that, considering that the discipline of religious peacebuilding is still relatively new, there has yet to be a comprehensive theoretical model to fully explain the phenomenon of the nexus of religion, conflict and peace.

3.1.1 A five-dimensional model – Fraser and Owen

I will start with Fraser and Owen's (2018) five-dimensional model of the role of religion in peace and conflict. This framework enables us to understand the religious dimensions of conflict and take them into consideration in conflict resolution. In the DRC case, I use this model to comprehend the paradoxical phenomenon whereby clergy are made significantly

important and influential in Congolese society but remain indifferent in the application of their moral and ethical positions as they interact with political actors and edify society so as to deter such violence.

Fraser and Owen (2018: 8) suggested five inter-connected dimensions of "religion as a set of ideas: religion as a community, religion as a set of symbols, religion as a series of practices, religion as an institution and religion as spirituality". Of these five dimensions, three feature outstandingly in the context of the DRC: namely, religion as a set of ideas, religion as a community, and religion as an institution.

Religion as a set of ideas. Here, the model's theorists explain religion as a set of dogmatic principles – types of shared Christian teachings, ethical norms, values, religious interpretations, stories, myths, cultural accounts, and a 'Weltanschauung'[35] that enables one to understand, respond and act in a society and conflict situation (Kadayifci-Orellana, Kollontai and Schliesser, 2020: 54). The interpretation of this dimension by Fraser and Owen emphasises the diversity of beliefs and explains how contrasting thoughts about what may be right or wrong can lead to violence. Their rationale here assumes that conflicts can be induced by ideological differences based on religious beliefs, as in cases such as Nigeria or Sri Lanka, where two or more religions are, or were, central to historic conflicts.

Although conflict in the DRC is not about religious difference, this dimension remains an important one to apply to the citizenship and ethnic identity conflict in eastern Congo. It is essential to recognise how the language of ethnic conflict is employed by some religious leaders. To ensure loyalty to the local population and political leadership, ideas (religious or not) of exclusion based upon ethnic identity are often employed in religious settings. In other cases, the clergy may use public statements that politicise indigeneity.

Religion as a community. Fraser and Owen defined this dimension as being a community of adherents, believers and followers that offers people a sense of identity and belonging to a much bigger life beyond themselves. This model is used to explain how religious identities reinforce differences among ethnicities, leading specific communities to become targets of violence due to their religion. They illustrated an example of conflict between Christians and Muslims in violent conflicts in the Central African Republic (Fraser and Owen, 2018: 10). I adapt this dimension to understand and question the idea of the (non)transcendence of

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[35] Denotes a perspective and interpretation of the universe and its events held in a sustained way by an individual or by a group (Ashmore, 1966: 215)

Christianity as a shared identity in the DRC – despite which, Christians have persistently persecuted Christians.

Religion as an institution: This concept encompasses sets of formalised and hierarchical structures, including leadership (clergy) and other forms of organisation associated with the churches or parishes. Fraser and Owen interpreted this in the way of diverse structures, denominations, and organisations within a specific religion. Religion as an institution function through a system of governance, rules, and leadership roles within an environment in which social and political actors operate. These players have their own aspirations, interests and resources that sometimes influence them to act as both dividers and peace agents in a particular situation. This thesis considers the aspect of religious leadership in the dimension that seems most relevant, but the overall idea proffered is generally pertinent to an analysis of clergy in the context of peace and conflict. This dimension is strengthened by recognising that, in some cases, as in the DRC, religious leaders as individuals are often more influential than the institutions, they are a part of (Callaghan, 2023).

To clearly convey the role of the clergy in ongoing ethnic identity politics and related violence, enhancing this dimension of Fraser and Owen, it is important to consider the interplay between state and church leaders in the DRC. The clergy have multifaceted relationships with the state power: as partner, opposition, subservient and as a 'moral' authority in political conflicts involving a ruling political party and oppositions (Prunier, 2001; Longman, 2002). The Roman Catholic Church (RCC) enabled colonial power by providing vital public services, especially health and education. These services, provided on behalf of the colonial powers, acted to legitimise their administrators (Cline, 1963). Protestant missionaries were more independent of the colonial state and were not generally favoured by the administration (Prunier, 2001), but as they shared whiteness with the colonisers, they were still close to colonial power and were protected from any likely local resistance (Pavalkis, 2015). The first Congolese intellectuals in the post-colonial era were trained by the churches (Mukendi-Mutombo, 2011). Any association with church institutions was viewed as a form of privilege and a breaking of the cycle of poverty.

Fraser and Owen's (2018) five-dimensional model has been used previously in scholarly and policy analysis. In *On the Significance of Religion in Conflict and Conflict Resolution* by, Kadayifci-Orellana, Kollontai and Schliesser, (2020), the authors applied an adapted version of the Fraser and Owen framework to explain the role of Christian churches in Rwanda before the Rwandan genocide. The history of the interconnected relations of Christianity, state and politics in Rwanda and how church politics contributed to the Rwandan genocide in 1994 differ from the Congolese context. This thesis uses relevant features of the Fraser

and Owen model, but not necessarily in a similar way to Schliesser, Kadayifsci-Orellana and Kollontai (2020). While this is not a comparative study, it is still important to note some similarities in both cases: in the DRC, as stated earlier, the Catholic Church has historically worked alongside the state power (colonial and post-colonial) or in opposition. As will be analysed later, these interchanging positions tend to produce an ambiguous position and a lack of independence and impartiality in ethnic identity conflict resolution. Finally, the sociology of conflict in eastern Congo mirrors the ethnic dimension and ideology in the competition for political power in the pre-genocide era in Rwanda (Verweijen and Wakenge, 2015).

I continue now to the second analytical framework, and offer here my own conception of the metaphor of the house plan, which may help us to understand the mindsets of current religious and political leaders in the region. Such an understanding might enable the development of a conflict resolution approach rooted in an awareness of social reality. The description will also be enlightened by a personal history.

3.1.2   Using Metaphor in research

A metaphor is defined as an analogy which helps us to understand one experience in terms of another and thus to facilitate an understanding of complex matters or new situations (Vosniadou and Ortony, 1989). Moser (2000: 5), taking a psychological perspective, suggested that the use of a metaphor facilitates a multidimensional research perspective that supports the processing of, and reflection upon, complex information. A metaphor provides a comprehensible interpretation of tacit knowledge, whilst considering holistic representations of knowledge and understanding. Jensen (2006) and Aita et al. (2003) investigated metaphor-based analysis and its epistemological legitimacy as a viable analytical strategy for qualitative social science inquiry. The use of the metaphor to aid understanding is indeed probably a universal human characteristic (Brown, 1976).

The 'house-plan metaphor' seems like an especially useful tool in conjunction with analytical approaches as it should enable us to capture the experiences, thoughts and imagination of the society under research. Asimaki and Koustourakis (2014) suggested that people's views and understandings of the world are always mediated through the lens of specific traditions and culture and are experienced by individuals as personal 'knowledge'. This knowledge is expressed in the ways we shape and appreciate the places around us, including the artefacts that surround us – in particular our houses (Beck, 2011). In my approach, a house (especially the house where one was raised and lived) is used as a metaphorical framework

with which to understand Congolese society in terms of people's values, beliefs, feelings and memories, and how these may shape their worldview, behaviours and attitudes.

I hope to show how the relationship between religion and politics may be more easily understood, and may also aid the understanding of a wide range of social phenomena, with many subsequent potential benefits to researchers. I have chosen the design, plan and contents of a house as both 'actual evidence' and as a metaphor for the mindsets of key religious and political actors in the DRC. The religious and secular spheres are closely interlinked with African Traditional Religions (ATR) (Muyingi, 2014), and the various symbols and special features within a house usually contain some traditional significance in mirroring the rituals, images and significance of holy places: the 'House of the Lord' (church halls or room), prayer places upon a mountain, or a traditional tent.

The house as a metaphor is used here to illustrate the multiple layers of thought and influence bearing down on religious conflict and political actors. Two types of house building and design, both common in today's DRC, will be chosen to represent religious systems still in existence today despite the significance of church culture and the role of clergy in Congolese society. These two styles will be used to represent the spectrum of beliefs in the minds of members of the Congolese societal/political and religious elite (who may also be actors in conflict), many of whom have moved from a life dominated by age-old African traditions to ones that operate in modern political spaces. These actors' actions and thoughts have generally been formed in traditional settings, and they currently live lives as politicians or religious leaders in modern societies within these same systems. Tabar (2010) made a similar point that many sub-Saharan Africans are neither Christian/Muslim nor atheist but embrace multifaceted religious beliefs including Christianity and ATR – producing a hybrid of religions. This symbiosis of the traditional and the modern is best explained, I suggest, through metaphor. This medium connects rationality and imagination (Ayiran, 2011) and captures the values of the transition between two such different lifestyles.

3.1.3 *Using aspects of personal history to elucidate investigations.*

My personal history, and the design of the traditional African round house,[36] are used here to explore religiously and spiritually based traditions in the DRC and their place in and contribution to the peace context. This unique approach will enable a more culturally sensitive reflection and privileged insight into the multifaceted religious identities evident in the country.

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[36] I prefer to use a 'traditional house' as the word 'hut' still has a pejorative or negative 'primitive' connotation in English.

I unapologetically use my privileged position as a Congolese national to provide some reflexive insight into Congolese cultural background. Though this research study will not use autoethnographic methods, the personal and experiential will inevitably affect the aims, analysis and conclusions of this research. This is not something to avoid but rather offers unique and highly relevant insights into the research questions. There is an established precedent for this approach. Georges (2005: 55) argued that an effective theoretical framework should provide opportunities for researchers to "discover their own voices, along with the intellectual resources to construct theories that seek to emancipate, rather than control". Additionally, Zita (1998: 207) suggested that theory can emerge from lived experiences. The use of personal knowledge will thus provide opportunities to identify and examine a few of the tacit understandings in the minds of those involved in peacebuilding. A view of my own history is therefore necessary for the reader to understand the assumptions, experiences and values I bring to this research.
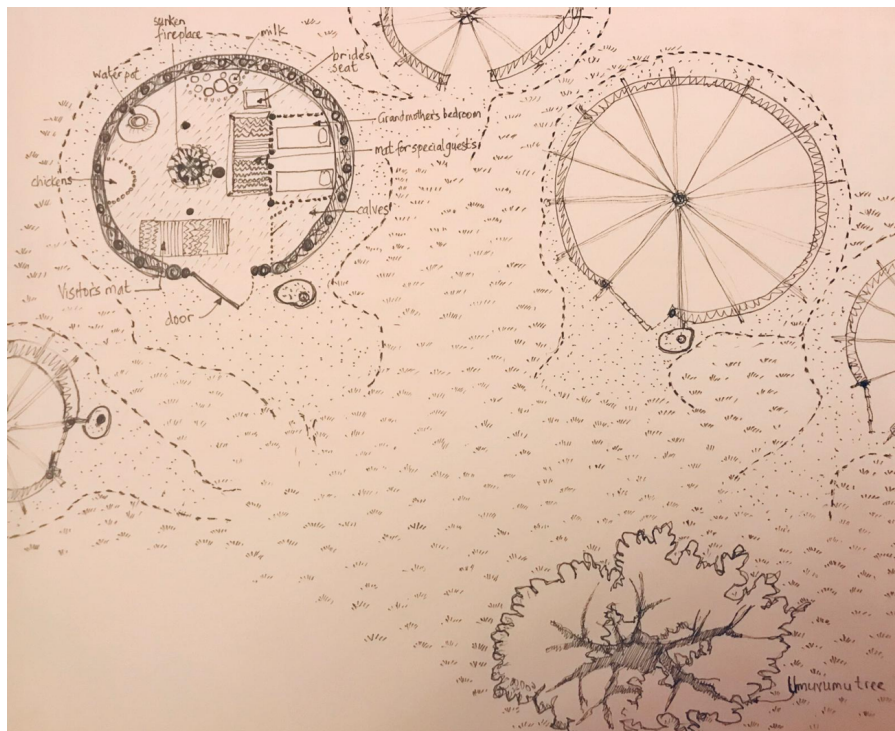
Figure 3-1: My grandmother's house.

My grandmother's traditional house was a hut, with a door which was never closed, and a circular frame with no window. It was not considered a house by the local community, unless she was there. In the night, after all outdoor activities were finished, the children would head to their grandmothers' huts (all older women, often widows, were our 'grandmothers'). They would tell us powerful stories that often left enduring and valuable moral messages. The traditional community rituals also conveyed strong messages that firmly placed people above the materials and animals that surrounded us. They reinforced the understanding that

the immediate material world should empower humanity and serve the community's livelihood. Such a traditional house then generally represented the pivotal point of our community's wellbeing.

The house was not simply a shelter. Even when it was empty, it showed what was considered important about how we lived, what we valued and how we organised our lives. The traditional house, though small, was used as a cultural synonym for the family, and it contained different areas of important cultural, traditional and religious significance. Each of these places can be used as a metaphor too. The mat (ikirambi) was seen as a metaphor for welcome, the pen for the baby cows a symbol of collective care for animals, and the fireplace a metaphor for communal life. The roof of the house was held by several literal 'pillars' (selected pieces of wood) but there is a famous concept of *'Inkingi imwe ntifata inzu'* (one pillar cannot hold a house). The pillar is used in the structure of every traditional house to illustrate the importance of teamwork/unity in sustaining a house/family – unity being not a choice but a necessity. The metaphor of the four pillars reinforces the ongoing efforts of each individual to play a distinct role in maintaining the unity of the family/community (house) in a proactive way.

In the house plan above there are designated areas for different kinds of artistically-designed milk pots (*inkongoro* or *Igisabo*). The area is referred to as '*uruhimbi*'. It is considered as a place of honour (see the above drawing, around 'brides seat'). To damage pots, or this area as such, is taboo. Around this area (as shown on the plan) is an area referred to '*imbere*' (literally 'inside'). It is the most private area, reserved for the women/mother/grandmother. Several rituals and rites are celebrated here, including the traditional education for girls. It is also where a baby spends his/her first week after birth. Next to this area there is a special area designated for a bride (whether the family can boast one yet or not).

Around the village house is an area referred to as 'green field' – a special place. Here men will gather, discuss and re-tell the stories of the elders. The 'green field' is/was used for the adjudication of community justice, which they called 'justice amongst the grass'. In these sessions, leaders known and respected for their integrity, religious beliefs, wisdom and ability were given the task of communicating fair outcomes, as well as discussing and resolving conflicts between families, individuals and communities. It was through informal moments in the green field that many exchanges happened concerning the 'dos and don'ts' of community life. On an individual level, these responsibilities included being morally right, fair and acting in keeping with equality, impartiality and truthfulness.

Figure 3-2: DRC former president's palace plan

In contrast, the above is a house (the upper drawing is a cross-section and the lower picture is a pictorial representation) created from a photographic image of the private palace of the former DRC president, Mobutu Seseko Kukungwendo Wazabanga. As part of my pre-field research visits, I managed to access two political leaders' private houses. One of these belonged to the former president Mobutu, as shown. I also interviewed a civil engineer who is currently leading the large construction project of a palace for the current president, Felix Tshisekedi. Finally, I visited another former African leader's palace, that of President Juvenal Habyarimana. While this research of course focuses on the DRC, there do seem to be patterns in the internal features and expressions of these diverse leaders' private religious identities. Former President Mobutu's palaces seem to be a more relevant representative example. While I was unable to take photos of all his private rooms (as represented in the above drawing), I did acquire several photographs from Mobutu's palaces in Lisala (the former province of Equateur) which I visited in June 2018 and March 2020. Later, I have observed similar set up in other palaces belonging to important political leaders.

In the downstairs area, there is a large modern conference room with a plan recognisable in the West. This is where Mobutu received special guests, including foreign diplomats. The room could also have held important official and formal multilateral meetings. Upstairs, there is a private meeting room – a Catholic chapel where he used to receive visits from a priest (as part of his official religious identity). However, next to the chapel there is a traditional

67

room without chairs but just traditional special mats. It represents the village hut and here he would hold meetings with traditional or religious leaders about tribal or traditional religious matters. In case of illness there is a room destined for a traditional healer with traditional medicines. Above the conference room, there is a private room specially designed for guns and ammunition.

From both drawings, we can recognise that life in a traditional village (as presented in the hut house) appears to be significantly represented in the modern house plan. While such a luxurious life seems concealed from the public sphere, even here there is still an evident commitment and allegiance to cultural traditions and religious beliefs. The modern house plan and cross-section represent the multifaceted mindset of a political actor in the DRC: influenced by religious and traditional practices 'upstairs' but operating a publicly secular and Western life 'downstairs'. This physical representation of two worlds in the mind of a national leader expresses the complexity of the challenge facing supposedly 'rational' actors involved in peace-building initiatives. There is a tendency to focus one's analysis and intervention on observable dynamics leading to 'rational' outcomes which are not necessarily effective (Autesserre, 2010). As discussed above, such rationalist models may heavily underestimate the impact of the private religious identities of the stakeholders involved in any particular peace context. Western or Westernised peace builders in the downstairs and windowless conference room would have no idea of the presence or significance of the 'invisible worlds' – the world of ancestors or 'evil' or 'good spirits' represented above their heads.

Our failure to acknowledge the above is often based on universal standards of neo-liberal economic concepts that correspond to Western standards of modernity and rationality. Yet, conflict actors and political leaders in the DRC (as is often the case for elsewhere in Africa) operate in unbelievably multi-faceted systems. They are able to 'manipulate' African politics by effectively blending local traditional beliefs with 'enlightened Western values' (Ellis and Ter Haar, 2004). Power and leadership remain understood as existing solely between two spheres (secular and religious traditions). However, many engagements with peace stakeholders fail to consider the contextual roles of local knowledge, culture, and practices (Richmond, 2006).

3.1.4 Reflections on the house plan metaphor

It is easy to see the details of my grandmother's traditional round, thatched African house as a metaphor for a lifestyle that is rapidly disappearing from the continent, but the details of modern homes also represent their occupants' thoughts and priorities just as strongly. As

explained above, I am using these particular houses in the DRC both as metaphors and actual evidence with which to guide the analysis of the minds of their owners. I suggest that the plan, elevation and detail of these houses and their contents are not accidental or casual choices but represent cultural, political and personal mindsets fundamental to the understandings I seek to explore in this thesis. House plans, elevations and the details of contents will form an original framework for an initial analysis that will be tested against findings from interviews, case studies and other more conventional ethnographic approaches.

The metaphor of the house plan provides opportunities to explore the cultural and religious background of stakeholders in peacebuilding. The house is also representative in this scenario of a traditional venue used for conflict resolution. It can help deepen our understanding of clergy members' cultural backgrounds and the influence of stakeholders' identities, beliefs, and values in conflict resolution. A wide range of traditional values are represented in the grassroot community/house. Important characteristics can be examined through ceremonies, symbols and the religious traditions expressed regularly through the private rituals and practices of the house or village community. Therefore, detailed examination of the elevation, plan and furnishing of the traditional house can reveal an alternative image of the lives and minds of religious and political leaders that connects their traditional and modern lives.

The house also represents a venue for peace. In the context of the eastern Congo there is a traditional model of inter-community conflict resolution referred to as *Barza.* There have already been many previous studies of grassroots-level methods of peacebuilding, such as the Acholi rituals, *mato oput,*[37] of Northern Uganda, and the gacaca[38] model of Rwanda (Clark, 2018). But as Clark (2008) argued, despite its presence as an established traditional conflict resolution approach, little is known about Barza. The word Barza is known in Swahili as *Baraza*, meaning 'verandah' or 'elders' gathering place / venue / house'. Such meetings often happen in a compound of a traditional house (hut), under a tree, or on the green at the heart of the village. Like a village hall in the UK, Barza has a similar but much more ancient

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[37] It literally means "to drink a bitter potion made from the leaves of the 'oput' tree". It is a traditional ritual-based mechanism for truth, forgiveness and reconciliation among the Acholi people in Northern Uganda. The act of drinking this bitter juice from the 'Oput' tree means that the two parties in conflict agree on the bitterness of the journey they have both been through. By drinking the liquid of 'oput', they would declare their intention to leave the past behind and promise not to taste said bitterness again. The process also involves paying compensation. This ceremony is considered at peacebuilding restoration of relationships between antagonistic groups affected by either intentional or accidental killings.

[38] Gacaca, in Kinyarwanda means "justice on the grass", and is a traditional judicial process in which the Rwandan community tries and judges those who wish to confess or have been accused of genocide crimes (Joireman, 2004). However, the mechanism was used historically as part of promoting the healing and reconciliation of two or more conflicting parties.

cultural significance. Unlike a village hall though, Barza is known as a special traditional venue for elders' council meetings to address various disputes from family and community, and to achieve reconciliation between different tribes. It is owned and facilitated by people in their own cultural environment and context. The Barza house provides a space and authority for parties to offer moral and spiritual guidance relevant to conflict situations. For newcomers in the village, Barza is also where they are welcomed and set to receive the elders' blessing on their stay in the area. One aim of my research is to understand the cultural and religious significance of these traditional peacebuilding venues.

Similarly, the communities of Babembe, Bafulero and Banyamulenge in eastern Congo practise what is called "*lubunga*". This is a hut built right in the middle of the community. It serves as a *rendez-vous* point for religious rituals and as a sacred place where people gather to discuss social disputes (Muchukiwa, 2019). The Bashi and Bahavu ethnic groups have a similar place, referred to as '*Ngombe*', in which they organise the council of elders (*Ihano*) and any peace process between two or more parties.

As for the Banyamulenge, Bafuliru, Bavira and Babembe people, the Bashi and Bahavu recognise blood pacts (*Cihango*) and these have played a central role in resolving conflict and building peace for many years (Autesserre, 2016). Generally, in rural areas, among these communities there is a small hut designated for prayers and worship referred to "*Nyumba ya maombi*" or "*Amaombi".* Such a hut is considered as sacred, highly respected and honoured*.* In these communities, children are often given names that embody peace, such as *Ntambaka* (no disputes) and Bafunyembaka (end of conflict) (Globalethics.net, 2015). In the Ngombe houses, elders pass on the significance of these traditions to their children (Autesserre, 2016).

The concept of the house as a place of peace is not unique to the DRC. In Liberia, following many years of war, the idea of founding 'Peace Huts' was initiated in 2006 by the Liberian people. The hut was used as a framework for the homes and communities of the area. It became a safe place for men and women (especially) to engage in meaningful peacebuilding and conflict resolutions (Beoku-Betts and M'Cormack-Hale, 2015). The opening of a Peace Hut would start with religious ceremonies and rituals followed by a collective prayer for the Africanised Christianity God's blessing and direction during the meeting process.

Using several analytical approaches that systematically combine the house as a metaphor for the mind, a cross-examined personal history, various analysed semi-structured

conversations and scholarly reading, this research seeks to contribute new understandings to existing knowledge of locally-rooted peacebuilding. The theoretical model developed here does not depend upon the familiar categories arising from the intellectual history of the West, but instead emerges from a nuanced analysis of the mental world and real-life experience of the majority of Congolese people who live in the light of a belief in the existence of a spirit world.

3.2   Conclusion: The relationship between the proposed frameworks

In conclusion, I discuss briefly the relationship between the house plan metaphor and Fraser and Owen's dimensions of the role of religion in conflict and peace.

While these two analytical models are unrelated, I suggest that they may complement each other to provide what I believe to be an original approach to this study and the data analysis process. Combined, they have the potential to establish much greater clarity in understanding the roles of religious leaders in indigeneity politics and conflicts, as well as in deterring violence between the different parties involved in conflict. Most importantly, they inter-relate by their focus, on one hand, on the interaction between religion, state and society and, on the other, an understanding of religious and political actors' mindsets, to constitute a comprehensive approach in response to ethnic identity conflict in the DRC.

Fraser and Owen's (2018) dimensions provide a framework for explaining the role of religion or religious ideas in conflict and peace. The three dimensions described above as most relevant to guide an interpretation of this thesis findings – religion as a community, religion as sets of ideas and religion as an institution – together guide us to consider how religion can contribute to conflict resolution or deter violence, whether implemented by religious or secular individuals and even when a conflict is not necessarily induced by religion.

The house plan metaphor allows us a different way of seeing and observing the social reality being studied. It is firstly used to help us understand the place and significance of the religious and spiritual dimensions of Congolese society. Secondly, it explains the mental and cultural background to the relationships and interactions between peace, politics and religious belief within the minds and actions of different actors in conflict.

Considering the religiosity of Congolese people, the house plan metaphor helps to contextualise the analytical models proposed by Fraser and Owen. It demonstrates that despite the introduction of a different religious language – in this case, Christianity – which the Congolese people perceived as superior and more powerful, the initial mindset of their

traditional way of seeing the world was not erased. The cohabitation of these two concepts of religion creates among the local people – including political and religious elites – a combination of the old and the new belief systems, thus producing multiple forms of allegiances.

Finally, the influence of the traditional background of political and religious leaders is often undermined in any rationalistic model. Yet, elite-led structural processes are unlikely to succeed without a consideration of their cultural background and the influence of religion in Congolese society. The use of DRC house plans and elevations as metaphors or actual evidence establishes the research outside the minority world of Western, white interests and sets it in a specifically African cultural context.

In summary, the combination of these frameworks helps to establish a range of relationships, meanings, and interpretations that enable deeper reflection and wider discussion and reflection on both the complexity and the non-Western context of this research. The emphasis is then to establish a less Western-centric assessment of the political role of religious leaders and their rationales in conflict or conflict resolution. The next chapter introduces the research design and methodological approaches applied to conduct this study.

Chapter 4: Research Design And Methodology

The introductory chapter to this thesis defined its rationale, along with a description of the research context, aims and objectives. The literature review chapter critically assessed scholarly contributions to the topics of religious peacebuilding, conflict analysis and international relations. It examined the interplay between religion, power and politics and how, and whether, religious leaders can constructively impact peace-making in conflict-affected societies. The review of the existing literature also guides both the primary, empirical phase, and the building of a plausible theoretical framework. As stated, this study is situated in a short-term phase of conflict resolution, an attempt to end the conflict and achieve an outcome where actors in violence can refrain from using violent actions against each other or towards others (Mayer, 2000). I now turn to a discussion of the methodological techniques and strategies used in my research, with a rationale of the chosen methods.

The study considers two interrelated approaches in answering this question. Firstly, it uses empirical data to explore and analyse the role of the clergy in peace or conflict. In so doing it attempts to offer a theoretical perspective to explain the phenomenon of a religious society with influential religious leaders existing in an environment of inter-ethnic hatred or ethnic conflict. Secondly, the research situates these phenomena within the broader context of the interplay between religion, power and ethnic identity in the DRC.

This study is inductive and interdisciplinary by nature. It bridges peace studies, politics, international relations, anthropology, and sociological perspectives to offer an original, inclusive, empirically rich, and interdisciplinary approach. It borrows from the above disciplines and is enlightened by the way concepts and modes of theological thought justify and clarify analyses of ethical, political, social, economic, or ecological interactions (Mutombo-Mukendi, 2011). Before I engage with the analysis in this chapter, I want to recapitulate on the research questions.

The research explicitly examines the following questions:

i. *What role (if any) do Catholic and Protestant clergy play in ethnic identity conflict in eastern Congo?*
ii. *Do these leaders play a role in deterring violence and edifying a peace that elevates shared religious identity over the dominant nationalistic narratives where the ethnic identity and citizenship rights of the Banyarwanda and Banyamulenge are contested? If they do not, why not?*

iii.   What have been the actions of Catholic bishops and Protestant church leaders as they engage with issues of indigeneity and ethnic identity politics in eastern Congo, and how are their actions manifested? What is the nature of their responses (for example, sermons, symbolism and political statements) and how do these contribute to deter, or sustain ethnic violence?

4.1   Research approach and assumptions

As stated in the introductory chapter, this study is qualitative, uses an inductive approach and employs interpretative design that begins with generating data through observations (Babbie, 2008). This methodological design serves to observe and interact with certain aspects of social life in order to discover themes, meanings and patterns that help to build up principles that can be applied in a range of similar social and cultural settings (Babbie, 2008: p56). Unlike deductive approaches, it is generally considered that theories or hypotheses should not be applied to inductive studies at the start of the research process. Although I approach this study with pre-existing interest, prior knowledge, and experience, I needed to remain open to a range of different interpretations during the data collection process, remaining flexible in case my direction needs to be amended as the data begins to emerge. Conceptualisation and reconceptualisation are allowable until late in the process (Timone, Foley and Conlon, 2018). An inductive methodological approach does not imply a disregard of other theories and theoretical models that may inform the research questions and objectives. While existing literature informs the formulation of the relevant questions and the early stages of the research process, findings will be generated during later data analysis.

This thesis uses an interpretivist paradigm (Snape and Spencer, 2003) to generate in-depth knowledge of the research participants' social world in the way they interpret, see, understand, and experience it. The main objective is to study the world known and understood by the clergy and religious leaders and examine their views, opinions, behaviours, responses, and attitudes to ethnic identity conflict in the DRC.

An interpretive research design involving ethnography was proposed as the most appropriate method for this study in order to understand local people's perspectives. There was an aim to generate a conceptual framework to understand the clergy and influential religious leaders in conflict resolution. An analytical approach regarding relationships

between views, experience, explanations, and models enables the development of an explanation of the phenomenon being researched.

To gain in-depth and multi-layered understanding, I combine different data-generating methods. These include analysis of observations, documents and relevant literature alongside a large number of planned in-depth interviews with the clergy, religious leaders, and academic experts. Now, I now establish the ontological and epistemological dispositions of this thesis.

4.1.1 The ontological position

The study's ontological position is informed by interpretivism (Bryman, 2008; Schwartz and Yanow, 2012) which acknowledges that realities are multiple and relative. There is a range of different ways of understanding and seeing the world. This stance on the nature of reality (Brayman, 2008) postulates that there is no one universal 'truth' and that there is no single and defined meaning which can be an uncontested function of time and space. Instead, reality will be taken to be socially constructed (Berger and Luckman, 1966) or negotiated within the mind and experience of people being researched at any given period and place. The social world 'out there' does not exist without the inclusion of those in the study and those doing the study. I consider that the research participants have their own ideas, interpretations and meanings of the phenomenon under investigation.

The approach considers meanings and motivations behind religious leaders' actions as well as concerning itself with how they behave, what their concerns are with regard to the ethnic identity conflict and how these concerns are expressed. Taking an interpretivist approach means that the research is not only looking for the presence and absence of causal relationships but also analysing how and in what ways these are manifested (Chowdhury, 2014).

The phenomenon under investigation – that is, of the role of the clergy's in the politics of identity and their related conflict – is dynamic and embedded in society. Diverse realities are recognised within different individuals experiencing those realities in different ways at different times and places. People actively construct the meanings of everyday experience and situations, and their constituent features, in an intersubjective world. Societies, cultures and sub-cultures cannot exist without relationships. Such groupings are subject to change resulting from the process of social and political events. In particular this thesis

acknowledges that senior religious leaders and their practices are adapted and modified as a result of various political and historical events and personal experiences.

Unlike in more secular societies, religious ideas are difficult to separate from everyday life in the DRC. As discussed in the literature review, the concept of a separate 'religion' is quite strange in the DRC; all aspects of everyday life are seen as interconnected with religious expressions and beliefs. The culture of popular religiosity is significant and for the majority of participants in DRC society there is nothing in life without religious influence (Ellis and Ter Haar, 2004). Church life and religious traditions tend to provide interpretations for all aspects of everyday life as well as its major milestones. Culture, religion and politics strongly overlap and this understanding of the social world of the DRC is crucial to the study's approach.

4.1.2 Epistemology

The concept of epistemology concerns the nature of knowledge, what is knowable, and to what extent generalisation can be made and evaluated. Clarifying this beforehand provides a framework for research design in the process of generating knowledge.

Taking a constructionist's stance, 'truth' or knowledge does not exist independently from people's experience, interactions and activities including symbolic language. Instead, knowledge, or meaning, is a result of researcher engagement with the social realities in the research's targeted area. A constructivist research design should generate context-based analysis of the phenomenon under investigation. As mentioned above, in the case of this study, the role of the clergy's public and political statements and practices in the politics of identity and their related conflict is the phenomenon. Knowledge generation was through interacting with the research participants and systematically exploring their beliefs and interpretations of the phenomena under study. Data were recorded in ethnographic notes: in this process, I was aware that some people might not express the truth and it may be possible to hear them inaccurately. Thus, I have involved many research participants in order to cross check the data (Anderson, 1997).

Taking a qualitative approach, knowledge creation has the advantage of generating data holistically, through examining as many situations as possible including specific realities or sets of individual behaviours in depth. The emergent results contributed to a generation of a wider and transferable body of knowledge related to peace building than simply adding to academic study. I hope that as an 'insider' fluent in the local languages with their nuances and symbols and metaphors and poetry, I have gained a deeper access to the meanings,

views and interpretations of the participants than otherwise possible (I will explain this advantage in more detail later).

Studying the role of religion in African society is complex. Certain aspects of religion are embedded in the local culture and tradition or may be concealed. To address such complexity, despite having prior insights (through personal experience, reading and interviews), there were assumptions and theories to draw from. However, these were insufficient to develop a research design. The reason is that what others perceive to be the nature of reality cannot be predicted. I consider that concepts of reality are dynamic, complicated, diverse and dependent on context (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988).

In summary, this interpretive epistemological position relating to research design provides a basis for understanding social processes and the role of the clergy in conflict resolution or deterring violence based on ethnonationalism. The design is flexible, continually allowing opportunities to observe and respond to changing themes or foci. From the start, it was recognised that the proposed data-generating process was going to be time consuming. However, this design arguably offers the best possibility for profound analysis and interpretation of the complex and contextual situations involved. The proposed analysis of data was complex and difficult too, but it has generated thick and high-quality data. Positivist critiques of the subjectivity of interpretivism are acknowledged and answered at every step in the research process to assure validity and rigour in data generation and analysis.

4.2   Research methodology – Ethnographic approach

One intent of this study is to develop a theoretical framework empirically grounded in field data that can enable a meaningful understanding of the role of the clergy and their practices in the resolution of violent ethnic conflicts. In turn, these practices are situated within the broader context of the interplay between religion, power, modern politics and conflicts in the DRC – first the practice, second the conceptualisation. I now discuss the role and rationale of the ethnographic approach which I used to reach the objectives of this research.

Ethnography originated in the field of anthropology but has become a popular approach to qualitative research. It is an inter-disciplinary method of study (O'Reilly, 2012) using language, skills and attitudes related to a wide range of social sciences. It is both a method (data collection technique) and a methodology (a theoretical and philosophical framework) (Brewer, 1994). The approach is classified as a naturalistic form of inquiry (Atkinson, 1992) within the principles of constructivist philosophy (Pettigrew, 2000). It gathers data by

studying a society of group of people in their everyday life, usually by taking part in social interactions with them with the purpose of gaining a more profound understanding of their realities. (Pettigrew, 2009). As discussed, the constructivist position is that knowledge, social reality and truth itself are constructions of people's perspectives of their world (Berger and Luckman, 1966). It hangs on the assumption that knowledge of realities understood by others can be constructed between the researcher and those involved in the research (Williamson, 2006).

Ethnographical approaches in peace and conflict studies are particularly relevant because peace itself is a concept rich in cultural, historical and traditional meanings but which differs profoundly from place to place. Ethnographic approaches and analyses can offer clarity with regard to cultural meanings, local experiences of existing peacebuilding interventions (Millar, 2014), and the potential role of religious ideas in peacebuilding.

In non-secular societies like the DRC's, religion is embedded and part of people's life. It is rooted in the social, cultural, sociological and anthropological identities of people. The concept of religion includes a wide range of characteristics such as values, beliefs, practices, doctrines and rituals (Lawrence et al., 2017). However, these cannot be isolated from secular lifestyles. MacGaffey (1988), in his ethnographic studies among the Bakongo people in Central Congo province of the DRC, noted that 'modern' and 'customary' spheres are inhabited by the same people, at different times, depending on challenges being faced.

My observing and seeking to understand the social world inhabited by the people being examined (Chowdhury, 2014) characterises the ethnographic approach that provides multiple perspectives and interpretations of the reality being examined (Bryman, 2004). The research acknowledges the widely debated limitations of ethnographic methodology (Atkinson, 1992). A considerable risk mitigation strategy was considered. One of the critiques is whether the ethnographic method is reliable enough to provide an authentic representation of cultural dynamics that may be strange to ethnographers and challenge their abilities to represent foreign cultures (Brewers, 1994). Malinowski (1922), who is considered as the 'father' of ethnography, suggested that the aim of the ethnographer is to understand the 'native's perspectives', to achieve her/his vision of her/his social world. Such a process was based on the observer's detachment from the people being studied, reinforcing their authority on cultures and authority on the traditions and cultures under observation and the outcomes of the research.

I argue that the existing understanding and critiques concern the old and deep-rooted Western scholars' appropriation of the method for studying local people in Africa, the ethnographers being originally mostly white men from upper-class Western communities. Since then, the ethnographic method has developed a variety of research approaches which are applied to the organisational cultures, or phenomena, of Western society, or conducted by an indigenous individual on indigenous people. I will demonstrate my credibility as an 'insider' researcher with cultural and linguistic competence and an understanding of the experiences of those being studied.

There is a genuine critique relating to the reliability of ethnographic descriptions that challenges the validity of generalisation. While claiming empirical generation of data, ethnographers can fail to establish a productive relationship between the setting and the larger society in which the data are associated with (Hammersley, 1991). To acknowledge such a critique, several approaches have been considered in this study. The design clarifies the ground from which the empirical generalisation is made. The research process considers several strategies, including relevance of the case. There is an involvement of diverse religious leaders, considered as representative of the setting or categories of heterogeneous religious groups (this will be discussed later). As stated in the literature review chapter, one of the main limitations to generalisation in the existing and limited studies of religion, peace and conflict is that there is a focus on the work of a single local church in a specific city or province. My strategy to overcome challenges to the generalisation of the findings was based upon consideration of the intersectionality of religious and cultural patterns and some general shared and cross-ethnic perceptions of religious leaders, and the selection of cases based on representatives of the major religious groups who are also known, listened to and likely to interact with the population and the media.

The ethnographic method is also criticised for weaknesses regarding a lack of theoretical assumptions (Brewer, 1994). As discussed in the introduction chapter, the study is guided by a theoretical assumption that connects to previous research. This enables the identification and generation of themes and concepts from the data (Haig, 2010). In this context, before engaging with data generation and analysis, the research recognised existing literature and theoretical models, allowing the beginnings of the construction of empirical evidence and the evaluation of initial relationships. However, due to the intensely subjective and emotional quality of the data collected, I remained open in my approach. I was able to do this by consistently applying reflection and self-evaluation in research design and data being generated. The main strategy here is that, while there is a need to draw from the literature

review during the discussion of my findings, such literature should not play a dominant role in the emerging data and their interpretations.

Other critiques relate to the process of generating data and assume a universal way of knowing or rejecting knowledge, and of evaluating the integrity and authority of the data (Brewer, 1994). However, as in other social research, data must reflect the context of social process that enabled its generation. The process in my research of gathering the data was envisaged to stay open, clear and reflective, with this reflectivity embedded throughout. Risks associated with the values, integrity and credentials of the ethnographer, and the authority of the data, are addressed later in my discussion of the 'insider' and 'outsider' position and my role in the research.

4.3   Analyses of ethnographic data

I used an established analytical method to consider the research participants' views of reality. It involved using two stages of analysis suggested by Ellis and Ter Haar (2007): emic[39] and etic[40]. This analytical approach is applied to the role of religion in conflict and peace, firstly in terms of understanding research participants in their own expression and interpretation (emic) and, second, by turning attention to the researcher and their interpretation during the post-fieldwork stage in ways that are meaningful to the researcher as observer (etic). Following these two interpretative stages, the model suggested translating the symbolic language of religious leaders into the secular language of social science. It honours locally conceptualised words and meanings, using the participants' language and views and their relationship with politics, and provides an opportunity to explore more deeply their role in addressing ethnic conflict. Below I provide an example of this process in action. A member of the clergy stated:

> Senior politicians come to my church during elections. I have never allowed them to speak from my altar or touch my microphone. However, there is an exception: I have allowed one senior political (vice president) to speak to the audience because I knew he was a man of God, but I told him you have blood on your hands. Tell the audience that you do not support a new rebellion that has emerged (Interview with BJBJ, senior clergy member who was head of one of the largest congregations in the DRC, eastern Congo, June 2021).

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[39] Emic perspectives – from the 'inside' are essential for researchers using anthropological approaches to acquire an understanding of a culture and to ensure representing others view in their own interpretations and cultural beliefs.

[40] Etic perspectives suggest explanations for patterns and behaviour made by an outside researcher/observer in manners that are accessible and meaningful to the observer (Hahn, Jorgenson and Leeds-Hurwitz, 2013).

Participant language	What he is conveying/my insider understanding (emic)	Researcher translation in accessible meanings outside (etic)
Senior politicians come to my church during elections	*Politicians come to me I don't go to them. They need me more than I need them.*	*Church and clergy are of an essential political interest. Clergy are influential as they enable access to a wider audience of church adherents who are potentially voters.*
*I have never allowed them to speak from **my** altar or touch my microphone*	*His altar is holy as that is where he stands to preach. The microphone is no longer simply an electronic instrument but a sanctified object that can only be used to disseminate the word of God.*	*Representation of spiritual power through symbols and words*
I knew that he was a man of God	*This politician was a religious leader too*	*Some political actors are also religious leaders*
I told him you have blood on your hands	*You have sins of murder due to your implication in a former rebellion*	*Unconcerned about security and political risks. Political risk is not necessarily a major obstacle in religious peacebuilding.*
Tell the audience that you are not supporting a new rebellion that has emerged in town	*Boldness to name and shame.*	*Clergy and potential influence in edifying peace. Religious authority is as important as political authority*

Table 4-1: Translation of the symbolic language of religious leaders into the secular language of social science

4.3.1 The practicalities of the process

Data provide evidence of the social reality under study. Data analysis helps make sense of the data generated (Bailey, 2018). The follow-up phase involved the organisation of recorded data, classifying the emerging themes, categories and properties and then attempting to interpret the findings. These interpretations fell into four sections:

  a) Meaning making of the research data

  b) Analysis involving a systematic organisation of the data into codes

  c) Identification of key emerging themes

  d) Further analysis using memos and then conceptual interpretations.

4.3.2 How themes were identified

Madden (2017: 145) argued that no universal model of identifying themes exists. However, I have chosen an approach by Stainston-Rogers and Willing (2017) in identifying key themes in the generated data. Analysis of ethnographic data started during field study. The

approach, formulated before the fieldwork and then reformulated several times during it, ensured that the research questions were clearer and increasingly appropriate for the study. I engaged with data through daily reflection that enhanced familiarities and created personal links between me as researcher and the participants and ensured a more accurate evaluation of competing and shared meanings.

I undertook multiple re-examinations of field study data. This process involved critical and repeated reading of ethnographic notes that revealed diverse new, familiar and unexpected characteristics. I recorded these as properties alongside the notes. Unexpected properties, such as justifiable violence, families dispute arbitration, from a specific interview or observation led me to re-examine multiple times previous and various interactions for missed opportunities of additional themes. On reconsideration, there was an emergence of profound levels of complexity. I noticed a subtle change in my perspectives; for example, I was no longer shocked about a clergy member's reference to justified war, which led to efforts to find different things, such as what led to such a state of mind.

I took notes of the frequencies of particular themes that emerged in the diverse forms of data. Those that appeared more regularly were highlighted as warranting more attention and consideration. These themes of interest were compared against each form of data (semi-structured interview, observation and archival, follow up email and Skype or WhatsApp phone calls) to evaluate their commonalities, intensity, and relationships. The more they were similar and frequent, the greater their potential relevance in enlightening the phenomenon being studied. The key aim here was to avoid any personal interest in certain themes and all allow themes to arise from the data. When multiple recurrences and patterns surfaced, substantiated themes were established.

I intentionally evaluated the data by identifying themes that specifically address each question. The questions I asked participants provided the overall direction of the research, but the sub-questions that arose during interactions increasingly reflected the understanding I gained from the accumulating data and its analysis. In some unusual and rare cases, there was not compatibility between the data and the questions used to generate this data. Questions were subsequently revised to ensure greater compatibility. The advantage of this analytical process was that ever richer data were generated. There was a long and detailed process of generating codes and memos.[41] The verbatim narratives of research participants strongly supported the processes of data interpretations and were essential to establishing more accurate meanings and translations.

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[41] Brief notes emerging from the thoughts, ideas, and questions that making a meaning of the data in the researcher's mind during data collection, coding and analysis.

In the analysis, I have acknowledged meaningful quotes from the research participants in Kinyarwanda, Lingala, French and Swahili. I have provided translation into English as accurately as possible. There may of course be minor differences between my translation and from someone else who speaks these languages. I tried to represent the meanings of these as accurately as possible by checking with other speakers of these languages.

Systematic research involves testing received meanings and interpretations. The process started by deliberately challenging the meanings and analytical explanations of the themes with the intention of uncovering the assumptions rooted in those themes. To address the 'insider' position and my personal attachment to the country and experience, I involved external experts to check my perspectives and meanings in arriving at the emerging themes.

While interpretive inquiry is known for its usefulness in providing deep and contextual analyses, the findings can face criticism regarding validity, reliability and generalisability (Elster, 2007). In addressing this risk, the analysis utilised standard data triangulation methods using an iterative process by implementing parallel enquiries: asking the same or similar questions across key informants and as part of focus group discussions. In cases of findings obtained from one source, cross-examination of a question strengthened the accuracy of findings and generated conclusions.

4.3.3 Analysis of official public and political statements

The themes that emerged from the data enabled me to design an original approach that allows an evaluation of enthusiasm in church leaders for peace making versus their role in tacitly supporting violence. These positions arose from the thematic analysis process: a) transcriptions were read multiple times; b) themes that arose multiple times were highlighted; c) transcripts were passed on to a third party to highlight themes independently; d) themes and conclusions were sorted into disparities within a tendency for peace or violence; and e) a diagram that defined different mutually exclusive multiple positions was devised. This diagram (as will be shown in the discussion chapter) categorises the themes that emerged from a specific question on the clergy's responses to the ethnic identity related violence and their public and political statements. However, it is also an original model that can be used to examine multiple religious leaders' positions in conflict and peace. The analytical approach enables to expand the existing exclusionary framing of the ambivalence

of religion in peace and conflict developed by Appleby (2000), which until now has significantly influenced the field of religious peacebuilding.

Later, in an analytical chapter on clergy actions and behaviours, I introduce a specific and original technique of analysis. To address potential criticism of the insider position and potential selective nature of selecting political events, a unique systematic observation of public and political declaration was made through two techniques. Firstly, I use a chronological approach, where all cases of violence and types of response from clergy during the above period are observed in the order that they took place. Secondly, I reflect on specific events related to the politics of ethnic identity whether the declarations of the clergy are involved or not. The analysis examines and contrast these two categories of events and responses and then explores the reasons why some events attracted the clergy's interest more than others and examines the nature of their reactions. The analytical approach undertaken in a chapter on clergy statements offers new findings whose implications have the potential to advance the existing body of knowledge on the role of clergy in peace or conflict.

The analysis did not rely on linguistic examination but used a range of original anthropological techniques. Specifically, observations, interviews and follow-up discussions explored interviewees' stances towards peacebuilding and conflict resolution to identify details of the roles of church leaders. These details included political statements made in relation to some conflicts and the contestation of the citizenship of Tutsi people and other speakers of Kinyarwanda in the DRC. To ensure that the analysis was not selective, I compared the nature and frequency of clergy responses between 1990 – 2023 to other violent events and the violence against the Banyarwanda and Banyamulenge. I cross-examined responses from the national and provincial levels and evaluated their meanings.

4.4   Data collections methods

4.4.1 Field research

This study draws from a six-month field study between October 2020 and February 2022. This field study aimed at capturing a more precise and deeper understanding of people's experiences of the role of the clergy in deterring conflict and bringing about conflict resolution. This generated data enabled the production of an analytical framework to explain the phenomena under examination and offered guidance on what could be potentially a more effective peace-building approach.

The field research was conducted in Eastern DRC (Goma, Bukavu and Kinshasa), Rwanda (Kigali and Gisenyi), Belgium (Brussels), France (Paris). My access to these areas facilitated engagement with religious leaders and others directly affected by conflict. The emphasis of the field study was to collect data on motivations and attitudes to peace and conflict, and to engage with religious leaders at national, provincial and grassroots levels, to examine the ways they use their religious position and influence to intervene in the ongoing issue of ethnic identity and nationality of the Banyarwanda and Banyamulenge. Data were collected by: a) observing and capturing experience of clergy during conflict; b) by examining public and political statements; c) by observing religious sermons, especially their contribution to promotion of peace; and d) by investigating the influence of religious leaders to integrate local religious and cultural resources to traditional doctrines in promoting peace.

Field work assisted in understanding religious leaders experiences and actions in response to ethnic violence. Such engagement in lived experience enabled the observation and analysis of multifaceted religious interpretations of conflict and peace. In the following section, I want to expand on the use of observation.

4.4.2 Observation

A qualitative observational approach was based on two case studies, examining the leaders of Protestant Churches and the Roman Catholic Church. During the field study, I observed the actions of religious leaders, in particular their forms of public statements in response to societal issues with a specific emphasis on ethnic identity conflict in Eastern Congo. Close observation that includes interactions with congregations, family and friends, daily domestic life, peacebuilding or prayer meetings, as well as everyday life at workplaces enabled the collection of a diversity of data and allowed for a rich understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

These observations were recorded by making field notes, audio recordings, diagrams and photos. By observing the life of these representatives *as it happens,* a researcher has the opportunity to develop a more complete and nuanced understanding (Babbie, 2008). The advantage of including observation in field research, as suggested by Babbie (2008), is that it often reveals the finer details of attitudes, patterns and behaviour that may not be visible via other methods.

4.4.3 Semi-structured and informal interviews

From October 2020 to February 2022, I conducted 78 interviews with 52 religious' leaders of Protestant Churches (ECC) and Roman Catholic Church (RCC) clergy, as well as with 11 experts on peacebuilding. The interviews were semi-structured and informal, and approached with an intention to make them conversational. My rationale was to avoid the formality of interview techniques and to provide space for views within the interviewees' interpretations. This technique had both ethical and methodological rationales: on one hand, the digital recording of interviews tends to put off Congolese officials, but also when a question is formal, they tend to respond in political terms, self-censoring what they do and do not say instead of providing a genuine response. On the other hand, it was appropriate to allow exploration and understanding of locally owned peacebuilding approaches or at least understanding these actors' mindsets in their own terms. Such dialogues are not only concerned with meaning, but how interpretations of specific phenomena change in different contexts (Joss, 2013).

I constructed an interview plan that defined the nature of the questions to be covered. In-depth and more discursive extensions were considered with individuals selected on the basis of their willingness to add further depth to discussions. During the interviews, there were two stages: I formulated the questions in open, exploratory, and general terms, starting by eliciting the interviewee's understanding of the broad area under exploration (see questionnaire in Appendix 3). Such an approach allowed them to introduce the subject of church, peace and conflict. It was also an opportunity to provide my understanding of these concepts as a member of the Congolese diaspora. This sense of dialogue provided reassurance, interest and rapport building between me and the interviewee. Once there was a sense of trust, interviewees were keen to speak and further discuss the issues raised. The second stage was to narrow down the interviews to the specific questions of the research. The flexible and relaxed atmosphere generated was strengthened by the use of informal meeting venues or homes, and the use of local languages: Swahili, Lingala, Kinyamulenge and Kifuliru which are considered less formal and unofficial, allowing more opportunity for further probing to achieve clarifications where necessary. However, I have conducted some interviews in French and English, too – depending on the categories of the participants.

4.4.4 Archival research

The evaluation of documents formed an essential part of this study. Written evidence provides further contextual background to the subject under study and complements other research methods (Bowen, 2009). An investigation of written political and public statements was envisaged: speech materials produced by influential RCC and ECC religious leaders and their organisations, newspaper and online commentaries, and various publications. I also included some digital records such as videos or tweets[42].

I reviewed and analysed public and political declarations accessed through the heads of the RCC and ECC, and the provincial leadership of evangelical churches in Bukavu, South Kivu. This investigation established that the leaders of these institutions have had a significant role in national political debates and often respond to political crises. Political statements produced by secondary religious leaders as part of these events were also examined.

4.5   Case selection

A case has been described by George and Bennet (2005) as an instance of a class of events which is a:

> Phenomenon of scientific interest, such as revolutions, types of governmental regimes, kinds of economic systems, or personality types that the investigator chooses to study with the aim of developing theory regarding the causes of similarities or differences among instances (cases) of that class events (2005: 17).

My focus is directed at 'types of personality': religious leaders representing two religious' groups in eastern Congo. And a phenomenon of sociological or political interest: the role of religious leaders in the ethnic identity conflict in Eastern Congo. Eastern Congo (city of Bukavu, Goma and Uvira) and Kinshasa (the capital city) were chosen as localities for the in-depth studies. However, I have included the cities of Brussels in Belgium and Kigali in Rwanda in areas of field study to capture the experience of clergy in the Congolese diaspora. A historical episode[43] was used as a focus for the analysis.

As explained above, data were systematically obtained from religious leaders belonging to the two main Christian groups in the DRC – Roman Catholic Church (RCC) and Protestants

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[42] Independent researchers can access the data that support the analysis and findings of this research. Raw data will be made available on request via University of Kent repository office. Access is restricted due to ethical requirements – they contain information that could compromise the privacy of research participants.
[43] Exploring the leaders' various responses to conflict between 1990 to 2022 with reference to the events described where religious leaders had an important role.

Churches (ECC). RCC is considered to be the most political influential religious structure in the DRC. Bishops are brought together via the Episcopal Conference of the DRC (CENCO) and in their meetings they can voice their political commitments. CENCO also operates a commission for peace and justice at each diocese. While the ECC expresses itself less that RCC, its leaders at provincial and national levels are influential in the political sphere.

The two chosen groups of religious practice are the most accessible and have the greatest political relevance. The pluralistic nature of religious beliefs in the DRC (Uzodike and Wetho, 2009) make an accurate demography of religious groups difficult to determine, because many individuals refrain from making a clear association with a specific religious tradition. While other religious groups seem less visible, and less vocal, in formal and national political and peacebuilding affairs, they are also active members of civil society. Where relevant some religious leaders from these groups were thus included in the interviews.

4.5.1   Selection of the research participants

My initial focus was on clergy in the conflict area of Eastern Congo. My aim was to represent all RCC dioceses and ECC church members in that area, thus, to consider diverse (ethnically and in perspective) religious leaders whose views might encompass an inclusive experience of other representatives. The selection of participants was based on three criteria.

Firstly, their senior leadership and influence in the Congolese societies and politics. While the focus was on officially ordained clergy, other religious leaders with a certain official and high moral status nationally were considered. The reason for this is that these actors have the potential to influence decisions and changes in the dynamics of peace and conflicts. Within this category, selection was determined by how large their congregations were or how many followers there are: over 600 followers are an example. A further criterion considered the level to which a leader is very well known, or perceived as well known, in the local community: as someone who can influence the hearts and minds of their followers or mobilise and inspire change in society. Secondly, leaders' involvement in politics and religious spheres, their background in Truth and Reconciliation (TR) initiatives, and those displaying some spiritual standing that the ordinary religious leader does not display. This category included those whose activism and values lean towards human rights issues and peacebuilding. Thirdly, leaders' personal experience of conflict, their views as expressed in public and media narratives, and their role as opinion leaders.

I also engaged with a number of academics and political actors holding religious roles. While equal gender representation was attempted, there are few women in religious leadership. However, women participants were included as informants from other relevant roles, such as experts in civil society agencies or in lower positions of church leadership. Responses from the lived experience of female representatives (religious leaders) inevitably enlightened the interactions and elaborate on the research questions.

Selection was also conducted through 'convenience' sampling (George and Bennet, 2005) – those who were willing and, in a position, to provide information. In this context, interviewees included 'ordinary' believers and others deemed relevant to the study, with the ability to contribute to the research questions. Some men and women were also selected based on their community standing, and their abilities to provide a nuanced view on the research questions.

I had conducted some preparatory work for this study in terms of identifying contacts in eastern Congo and Kinshasa, many of whom were identified through my personal experience in the DRC. This includes growing up the South Kivu province of the eastern DRC; I lived and worked in the region for many years, have visited from my current location in the UK and have worked there on a regular basis. I also follow events there closely through daily news reviews, investigative research, international conferences, and literature linked to publications on the DRC. I have built up a degree of trust and relationships with potential key informants.

4.5.2 Ethical considerations

The primary ethical considerations relate to conducting ethnographic research in conflict-affected areas. By considering this, I had to be consistently aware of the sensitivity or psychological impact of discussion about ethnic violence. I was also aware that the interaction between me as a PhD student from the Global North and interviewees in the DRC can create a perception of power imbalance. Being able to communicate local language created excellent rapport and ensured culturally based interactions that assure the dignity and respect of the interviewees' views. I avoided any communication engagement that may seem to advocate for a specific group or issue, or acting in judgemental way, as a political activist or investigative journalist. Such an approach helped to open a dialogue and create a safe space to gather a diverse perspective. I also had to elude leading questions and searching for answers I wanted to hear. Instead, I learned to acknowledge and differentiate the interviewees' personal and objective responses. I assured all research

participants that their participation was voluntary and that their shared information would remain anonymous. I have only used their coded initials where relevant. Many people in the DRC prefer notes taking over digital or video records. See the consent form in Appendix 2.

4.5.3 'Insider' and 'outsider' position, my role in the research

An 'insider' position for a researcher can be both a challenge and an opportunity. Unluer, referring to the earlier work of Bonner and Tohurst (2002) (2012), gave three key benefits in such a role:

> (a) having a greater understanding of the culture being studied; (b) not altering the flow of social interaction unnaturally; and (c) having an established intimacy which promotes the telling and the judging of truth (Unluer 2012, p1).

My own position as both a researcher and member of the social, cultural groups I am studying potentially provides a range of advantages unavailable to researchers from outside the region. I maintain that an ethnographic study conducted by someone originally from the DRC may enable this study to provide unique in-depth documentation of local perspectives, perceptions, and behaviours, although I also recognise that my ethnicity may have disadvantages arising from my inevitable already-existing point of view, bias, and preferences that an outsider would not necessarily have (which will be discussed in detail later). Notwithstanding this, acquiring an 'inside knowledge' of the way Congolese religious leaders see the world and express their concerns about conflict resolution is helped by my deep understanding of the language in which these conversations were held, which confers advantages of precision, clarity, nuance and the significance of choices of words and metaphors unavailable to translators or outside observers.

The 'insider' position in ethnography here enables me to gain richer insights into people's ideas, actions, thoughts and patterns of cultural behaviour and interpretations where they live, a deep understanding of diverse cultural and linguistic meanings and interpretations of experiences that are subject to time and context. I offer translation and also interpretation of aspects that are challenging for an outsider to understand – a methodological strategy relating to the fundamental principle of interpretivism.

Insider researchers also tend to more fully understand the complexities of local political issues and cultural hierarchy systems, both formal and informal. Umluer also drew upon the work of DeLyser (2001) and Hewitt-Taylor (2002) to explain that greater familiarity of the matters being studied can affect the research: it might be possible for example, that the

insider researcher may be too familiar with realities, and this could lead to under or overstating assumptions about aspects of the research process.

In recognition of this, I applied a reflective approach and critique in the choice of research participants, data generation and analysis. A reflective process consists of constantly evaluating my views by considering what could be other contrasting analyses and checking my understanding with other experts, especially those with the highest academic credentials and ability to comprehend DRC society. I also questioned my interpretations and observations before affirming concepts that emerged from the data. I often asked myself how an outsider to the DRC world would think of what I was observing.

My values have been modified by Western views after living away from the DRC for 23 years. During field study, I was aware that this change was noticed during my interactions in the DRC. The position that I now occupy, not by choice but by events, creates a situation of being both 'local' and 'external'. I was aware that my more 'Westernised' mindset – influenced by my life in the UK – can create a power imbalance at times. When engaging in research with Congolese communities I have been portrayed as part of a hierarchy. To address these perceptions, I used local and regional languages to 'localise' the conversations. Swahili – a common, but non-Congolese language – is used widely, and not identified with any tribe or racial group. This helped to 'normalise' relationships and interactions: removing or reducing the perception of me being an 'outsider'. As this study focuses mainly on senior religious actors, the aim was to keep power imbalances to a minimum.

The DRC is an ethnically fragmented environment. Belonging to a certain ethnic group has the potential to generate either automatic acceptance or rejection. I involved and trained two research assistants from different tribes to interview and observe certain individuals who may have been reluctant to participate fully and openly in the research discussions. Furthermore, fortunately, my name, physical features and French accent do not necessarily suggest my ethnicity, but I had to be conscious of maintaining neutral views, show consistent integrity and apply great attention to building trust in order to create a more acceptable position in interactions.

As a researcher I dissociated myself from narratives and collective memories that might influence my views. After decades of conflict in the DRC it is common for stories of political events to be associated with specific ethnic groups, and discussion of certain political topics or personalities have become taboo. Regarding such issues, it is important to acknowledge

that I have lived in the UK for 23 years. I have therefore developed a hybrid identity and a different, possibly more objective perspective on many DRC issues, a more nuanced view of my own and other people's experiences. There is advantage in having both 'outsider' and 'insider' positions to use interchangeably, in order to assure consistent ethical principles and address difficulties in engaging with participants.

In my professional life, I have developed an in-depth knowledge of the historical, political, security, economic, cultural, and linguistic aspects of the DRC. I have, through the use of ethnographic methods, developed familiarity with a wide range of socio-cultural and political settings and have produced publications to support my work. Such experience required robust engagement with academic research conventions and philosophical principles rather than simply using my privilege as an 'insider'.

Umluer argued that being an 'insider' can affect a researcher's perception of what may seem 'self-evident'. A researcher with local experience may be accused of being too familiar with social realities and have a blind spot for important aspects relevant to the study (Umluer 2012: 2). To address this issue, I employed a process of reflexivity, which involves questioning familiar knowledge and realities and the frequent application of unbiased ethical principles. I tried to maximise my 'hybrid identity' by not taking my local experience for granted. This approach was essential because of my position as an ethnographer who is also a member of the Congolese diaspora. My field trips combined an understanding of locally rooted, or traditionally facilitated, religious experience and the perceptions of fellow Congolese with approaches from Western academia to develop a formula for sustainable peace in the DRC. Ellis (1999) argued that it is possible to study religious beliefs and their effects on society and politics while remaining personally detached by observing the phenomenon through the use of rigorous research academic conventions.

Being a native of the DRC, my role in research has involved participation in the activities being studied as a participant-observer. In interactions with research subjects, I communicated my position as a researcher. In culturally sensitive discussions I was careful to keep to the ethical approaches approved by my university ethics review (see appendix one). The rationale throughout the field study was to build trusting relationships and ensure that those being observed and/or interviewed can interact with me freely and naturally. Such intentions and actions have, I believe, enabled me to gain access to authentic and nuanced explanations of complex situations, and to observe patterns of behaviour that would otherwise be inaccessible to outsider researchers. This role and approach enabled a deeper

understanding of the social, cultural, religious, and historical aspects of everyday life in the DRC and to see the context in which actions take place.

The DRC is diverse in its traditions and languages. Different facets of a language are used depending on the context. For example, a public administration official might use French to set a standard of formality and as marker of officialdom and authority. However, the same public official can use Swahili or Lingala to buy various products at a street market and is more likely to use his/her own local language when at their traditional home (in a rural area or village). English is used by some people in areas bordering east African countries as a symbol of power and status in terms of links with the outside world. I had access to local trusted and credible contacts, and an understanding of political and security situations and cultural and linguistic nuances. Each site for the study varies in culture, traditional beliefs and value systems; I ensured that culturally appropriate requirements were fully met and respected. Maintaining trusting relationships was a very important factor.

4.6   Concluding remarks

This section has described the strategies, methodological techniques, and processes used to construct the research design and to embed the study within the most relevant academic research conventions. I have reflected on various potential risks and discussed how I address those obstacles. This design uses a 'bottom-up' approach in the process of acquiring knowledge, in which the researcher conducts a series of interviews, conversations and field observations of the phenomena underpinning the research questions, leading to the discovery of concepts, categories and patterns applicable to relatively universal principles (Babbie, 2008). Generalisations and further ideas may also emerge (Goddard and Melville, 2004).

Ethnographic methods have been employed to enable an exploration of the phenomenon under investigation through the perception, or understanding, of those who live and experience them. The method facilitated deep insight and meanings from the data generated. In this context, the methodology enabled qualitative interpretations, a detailed analysis and grounded empirical inquiry of the many changes facing modern societies in the DRC. These accounts have added to existing research by allowing a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the world of Congolese religious believers, political actors, and the role of the clergy in the context of the building of peace.

This study also seeks to situate the religious leaders' practices within the broader context of the interplay between religion, modern politics and conflicts in the DRC. The use of ethnographic data generation techniques and methods has helped comprehend this aspect of intersectionality.

The design has also highlighted the need for using case studies from the two religious' groups under study. Within these case studies, several categories of evidence were collected, in order to represent the complexity of the issues under investigation. The multi-layered character of these issues was also captured through a critical examination of the political statements made, and interactions with politics and conflict, together with an appraisal of their impact and responses. An analysis and interpretation of their engagement through sermons, religious images and symbols displayed in their homes and offices were also included. In the next section, I want to introduce the first analytical chapter on the role of religion, religious syncretism and peace and conflict.

Chapter 5: Ethnicity and the role of churches

This first analytical chapter analyses the ethnic-religious nexus and their related societal barriers, attitudes, and behaviours that elucidate clergy inefficiency in religious peacebuilding. It shows that ethnicity loyalty and tribalism is more important than shared religious identity, even though it overlaps with Christian religious belief. This chapter will analyse the prevalence of a culture of Christian religiosity in the DRC, which could potentially act as a resource for religious peacebuilding but at present appears rather superficial – I refer to this as epidermic[44] religiosity. The analysis shows a critical resistance to transitioning from ATR to Christianity, creating hybridity in the belief system and a vacuum of either ATR or Christian religious resources for peace. The chapter examines in detail the social reality of a particular Christian church centred around a religious leader and the congregation's individual aspirations for spiritual protection rather than building a community of believers. The chapter demonstrates an ongoing and dynamic phenomenon originating from the Christian evangelisation and colonial period: a construction of ethno-religious territories. This context persists and serves as mobilising resource for religious power base. It shows that a consolidation of this historical political instrumentalisation of ethnicity also applies to the religious sphere today. I argue that understanding this context enables us to explain clergy obstacles in incidents of conflict resolution. The chapter will evaluate the interactions between ethnic and religious leaders and how these relationships shape what motivates clergy actions and attitudes. It will argue that loyalty to tribal grassroots social structures can affect clergy independence and their potential to play a constructive role in conflict resolution.

The chapter examines my initial assumption that the clergy have the potential to apply the shared Christian religious affiliations of Congolese society as a resource for the resolution of ethnic conflicts. It also seeks to make a novel contribution to the existing body of knowledge on clergy behaviour in the many divided societies in Africa, taking the DRC as a case study. My evidence will focus mainly on the Protestant churches (ECC) in this regard. However, some illustrations from the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) will be included for balance. As clarified previously, this study covers the period from 1990 to the present. As established in Chapter One, the dynamics of conflict in the DRC cannot be understood without a reflection

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[44] In the English dictionary (www.dictionary.com), the adjective "epidermic" relates to the epidermis in the discipline of *anatomy*: it is the outer, thinner, nonvascular, non-sensitive layer of the skin, protective of the actual skin or corium. It is composed of stratified epithelial tissue. In *zoology*, it is an outer protective layer of cells of an invertebrate. I use the term epidermic as a metaphor for the superficial nature of peacebuilding in much Congolese religious life.

on the colonial and post-colonial eras and the transition of the church's leadership from the European missionaries to the Congolese themselves (Bihuzo, 2020).

This chapter begins by presenting a brief sociological landscape of the RCC and ECC. It moves on to analyse how churches can be understood as a societal space whose agents/actors collude and compete to instrumentalise the economic, political, health and social benefits of 'salvation'[45]. Ethnicity and tribal alliances also play a part in clergy antagonisms and oppositions, complicating their role in the politics of identity conflict.

Chapters One and Two attempted to demonstrate two contrasting realities: firstly, that Christian churches and a related culture of religiosity[46] is widespread in the DRC and church leaders have a powerful influence on society (Autesserre, 2021; Ayo and Whetho, 2009). The existence of various Christian churches across the country is an undeniably important social phenomenon in Congolese society today. As shown in Chapter Two, contrary to 'Western' scholarly predictions that generalise the decline and disappearance of religion, especially in Europe, the growth of churches in Africa has not been affected by predictions of secularism, and there is no evidence to suggest their decline is approaching (Toft, Philpott and Shah, 2011). Both Chapter One and Two demonstrated that the Christian church is firmly rooted in most ordinary people's way of life in the DRC. Church leaders' claims of Biblical inspiration suggest they might possess a holistic vision that serves to combine religious and socio-political functions to improve their congregation's quality of life but, in reality, few demonstrate that all-inclusive view. Certainly, my field study observed expectations among the local people regarding the role that they felt the church clergy ought to play, both in human development and in political and social moves towards peace.

The second reality is that, paradoxically, the DRC suffers from a predominance of violent conflict linked to ethnic identity, despite its culture of religiosity that claims to diffuse peace. Evidence collected in this research strongly suggests that the basic causes of conflict in the country are not religious. Moreover, since most actors in the conflict claim to be Christian, arguably a shared religious identity remains the only factor that could potentially bring people together[47] and play a role in long-term peacebuilding. However, loyalty to ethnicity most often supersedes allegiance to any shared Christian faith (Kamaara, 2010). This

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[45] A process where people move from sins and its effects (death and being separated from God). It is about accepting personally that Jesus is your saviour and that he has died and risen from the dead. If you believe this in your heart and confess with your mouth you are 'saved'.

[46] Religion and religious interpretations affect every detail of life and death in the DRC.

[47] There are over 300 ethnic groups (Malemba, 2013), and all speak different local languages and practice different traditions and cultures. Geographically, the diverse provinces need more road infrastructure to unite them. Religious identity is the main shared feature between various groups (antagonistic or not).

chapter suggests that being Christian does not necessarily guide actions towards peace. A general supposition here is that Christian ethics and values, as shown in Chapter One, have the potential to foster social cohesion and peace between ethnic groups. It is also hypothesised that churches and their leaders could promote inter-ethnic harmony because of their professed position as representatives of God on Earth. However, there is strong evidence that, rather than peace and goodwill, churches currently offer a convenient environment around which ethnocentric ideas are shaped and inspired (Kamaara, 2010). As discussed in Chapter One, scriptures from the Bible, prophecy, and Christian songs appear to play a role in justifying a deep-rooted ethnic violence and as resources that make sense of conflict. Ethnic alliances continue to influence believers and the clergy that lead them. Before I engage with the main purpose of this chapter, I want to start by critically describing the demographics of Christian churches in the DRC.

5.1   The demographics of Christian churches in the DRC

The main churches in the DRC can be classified into two categories: the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) and the Church of Christ in DRC, known as '*Eglise Du Christ au Congo*' (ECC), which brings together different Protestant churches (Seay, 2013). Both RCC and ECC remain, officially, the main actors and structures capable of mobilising the masses that are structurally organised across the country (Bihuzo, 2020; Prunier, 2001; Seay, 2013). However, there are other recognised religious organisations such as the Kimbanguist Church, *Eglise de Jesus Christ sur la Terre par le Prophete Simon Kimbangu* (EJCSK), the Indigenous Initiated Church (IIC), the revival churches and Islam. In terms of institutional structures, membership size and social and political influence, the category of the RCC, ECC and EJCSK is the most important and central focus of this thesis. However, EJCSK is officially a member of the ECC. Therefore, this thesis' interest is with the RCC and ECC.

50% of the Congolese population are adherents of the RCC (Alfani, 2020; Ande, 2010; Ayo and Wheto, 2009), whereas 30% of the population are members of the alliance of Protestant churches (ECC). African Traditional Religious groups exist but lack a recognised and organised social structure. The Christian churches bring together more than 80% of the country's population (Ande, 2010; Jordhus-Lier and Braathen, 2013). Many are active believers for whom religious language and interpretations are part of daily life[48] in their respective local communities (Ayo and Whetho, 2009).

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[48] Going to church, saying grace, praying daily, talking about God, Jesus, thanking them for good things. During this study's field work, there was an attempt to find out whether there is a local translation of the word 'religion'. In Swahili, it would be 'Dini' which is something very distant to the local people's experience. Reference to people's beliefs as 'Dini' would be negative or even offending. Such a word would suggest something superficial or

5.1.1 Roman Catholic Church

RCC influence goes beyond the size of its membership. It is an old institution that was conceived in colonial times as auxiliary to the civilising mission of colonialisation (Oyatambwe, 1997). The RCC was one of the three pillars of colonial power: the Catholic church, colonial administration, and trade (Ande, 2010). The RCC had one of the major roles in the development of Belgium's colonial principles.

The church filled the gap of the post-independence state's incapacity to deliver public services. In the aftermath of independence, the country did not have public administration, an army, or civil servants. However, the RCC had well-trained native personnel, and the European missionaries had not departed (Oyatambwe, 1997) and they continued their mission. The early decolonisation crisis across the country provided the RCC with an opportunity to further emerge as an essential key player in Congolese society. The Church had an advantageous position across the country as a former leading partner of the colonial state. Consequently, the Church's influence and power in its public services institutions became evident in the absence of the post-independence state service provision. To local people and community leaders, the RCC had become the most visible and incontestable partner (Oyatambwe, 1997; Ayo and Wheto, 2009).

5.1.2 Église du Christ au Congo (ECC)

The ECC has become a 'catch-all' term for just over seventy evangelical churches (Meyer, 2004). Many of their leaders play an important role in politics and other secular approaches that promote humanitarian aid and other social actions. Across the DRC, in every village there is at least one church representative of the ECC [Interview with MLNG, one of the ECC leaders at national level, Kinshasa, 25th May, 2021]. These churches are indeed dynamic. Their influence on the Congolese society is significant. Some of their most established and formally organised churches are linked through funding and personnel to similar churches in the United States of America (USA) and Europe[49]. Each church organisation within the ECC, with exception of the Anglicans, is independently managed (Longman, 1998).

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artificial that separates people's spiritual traditions and experiences from other spheres of life. 'Religion' seems rather socially situated. It is a people's world view. There is ongoing dialogue between the daily situation and its connection with religious beliefs. People see religion as a resource to resolve problems they are facing: a tool to fight against the 'evil spirit', healing in context of illness, finding a work, finances, winning a political campaign, finding a wife or obtaining scholarship or a visa.

[49] Example, Swedish Pentecostals, the Methodist and Baptist Churches in the US and the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC).

At this point, I want to situate these two church networks within the category of non-state actors and public services providers.

5.1.3 RCC and ECC as non-state actors

Other than the state, no other institution is more powerful and influential than the Church (Callaghan, 2023) at the national level. It remains both a key crucial partner and most credible opposition (Ayo and Whetho, 2009) and can topple governments (Callaghan, 2023). As belonging to a church is voluntary, clergy can claim to represent almost a majority of the population and therefore becoming politically influential (Longman, 1998). As the DRC is generally classified as a 'failed state' (Trefon, Saskia and Smis, 2002), churches have acted as key non-state actors that fill the gap of the state failure (Longman, 2001; Prunier, 2001; Seay, 2013). This inability of the state of the DRC has resulted in new opportunities for political engagement by local non-state actors (Interview with SMGNG, a scholar and expert in governance. Bukavu, 4th June 2021). Englebert (2003) supported this observation by suggesting that the Congolese continue to exist because of civil society and international organisations' social activism. Both RCC and ECC are expected to promote peacebuilding. The RCC operates a structure called *Commission Justice et Paix* or the CJP (Justice and Peace Commission). Whereas, ECC works through its CJP-equivalent peacebuilding group, *Réseau d'Innovation Organisationnelle* (RIO). In theory, the CJP and RIO guide church leaders with regard to in maintaining ethics and social doctrines.

Church leaders often apply persuasive authority and power over state authorities (Seay, 2013). During the last 30 years of civil and regional wars, churches have become more credible service providers with the power to influence policy and decision making, as well as manage local institutions. The RCC and ECC developed as the main legitimate bodies with the capacity to provide basic services to the people. The RCC and ECC continue to oversee some of the largest responsibilities in public services, notably in education, health and social-economic development (Longman, 1998). Churches manage a wide range of social infrastructure, such as school, hospitals, and universities. The financial resources and comprehensive network of churches of the Catholic church means that these roles are visible across the country. Politically, bishops from both RCC and ECC do regularly issue statements in response to various situations or issues of public interests.

The above phenomenon is not new. Throughout post-independence, churches have increasingly filled the gaps left by a failing state, (Hesselbein, 2007). Since the era of the

missionaries, both the ECC and RCC have had a long tradition of being non-state service providers. It is, though, essential to recognise that ECC do not have the same capacity as the RCC but rely on external financial services. The historical presence and social activism of RCC and ECC social infrastructures in eastern Congo has enabled them to establish strong networks of support (Seay, 2015).

My interviews with Catholic and Protestant leaders provide the main evidence for this study. As noted above, a central claim of the thesis is that their practice, accessibility, and significant political relevance is crucial to understanding both the nature of and possible solutions to conflict in the DRC. It is important, however, to note that the pluralistic nature of religious beliefs (Uzodike and Wetho, 2009) make accurate demography of religious groups in the DRC a challenging exercise because many individuals refrain from making a clear association with a single religious tradition.

In theory, as with other major religions, the RCC and ECC have something in common. In their core claimed religious principles, there are ideas of non-violence and 'loving your enemy' as a test of one's relationship with God (Haynes, 2020). Generally, values such as tolerance and shared humanity tend to be expressed in these groups' teachings. The question is whether these ideals are lived and applied to deter ethnic identity-based violence or at least oppose the politics of identity conflict. This paradox raises a need for explanation later in this chapter.

5.1.4 A culture of religiosity without a community of believers

In this section, I demonstrate a solid commitment to the church and the Christian way of life and a disparity between the claimed religious values of peace and their practice. I argue that Christianity appears to have failed to act as the glue that brings the community of believers together in unity. Instead, it is an individual's *search* for a personal response to world issues rather than providing *solutions* to personal and world problems. The section shows a link between the introduction of Christianity and aspirations to economic power. Finally, it discusses a religious syncretism phenomenon: a hybrid between Christianity and ATR and how it impacts the claimed Christian religious resources for peace.

Such a hybridity reflects the house metaphor illustration (see Chapter Three). Religious and secular spheres are inhabited by the same people, at different times, depending on those requirements that can be met best in a specific sphere. Here, power through church leadership aspire to a modern form of Christianity, modern materials and adhering to

traditional religious beliefs which, in this case, become a combination of traditional and modern constructs.

Church life is central to most Congolese. It is irrefutably a live and growing social phenomenon. Church plays a key role in how ordinary Congolese see their place in local and global society, their abilities to influence change, and how politics impacts on their everyday lives. Religious belief shapes political attitudes and behaviours considerably (McClendon and Riedl, 2019). A significant majority of political actors of the DRC appear to be deeply religious and identify themselves as being Catholics, Protestants, Adventists, Kimbanguists, Muslims or belonging to a range of African traditional religions.

Christianity appears to be an important identity in the DRC. In principles, believers often claim their commitment to the core Christian ideas expressed for example in the 'Sermon on the Mount' (*the Bible*, Matthew, 5.1-7:29) and parables like the 'Good Samaritan' (*the Bible*, Luke 10:25-37). These might suggest that the religious values of compassion, peace-making and unneighborly love are embedded. The notion of peace is viewed as a spiritual/religious virtue across many religions (Mayall & Silvestri, 2015; Coward & Smith, 2004), including African traditional religions (Latoki, 2010) and the neo-Pentecostal evangelical movements growing across the whole country. It is understood that, as Christians, all were 'saved'[50] by the same 'messiah' and form one people, under one God. While there may be a sense that some denominations may be perceived by others as 'not biblical' enough and that there may be 'unbrotherly' divisions within the various Christian traditions, everyone can generally claim to belong to 'God's family'. Most attend and worship in the 'house of God' (church). Some in their extreme are able to justify violence and murder by seeing 'others' as both physical and spiritual evil'.

RCC claims being a 'God's family'. RCC leaders proclaim often a central Christian idea of the Church "as God's family" (*Eglise famille de Dieu*) (Galathians 3: 26). The notion expresses a culturally and generally understood baseline that might be expected to underscore action and attitude across all Christian denominations. Few Congolese could openly disagree with the intention of the biblical statements "There is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, nor is there male nor female, for you are all one in Christ" (Galatians 3: 28) or "Love your neighbour as yourself" (Mark 12: 30–31). Practice of Christianity is widespread.

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[50] The concept is used in Christianity to refer to 'receiving' salvation: a process where people move from sins and its effects (death and being separated from God). It is about accepting personally that Jesus is your saviour and that he has died and risen from the dead. If you believe this in your heart and confess with your mouth you are 'saved'.

The unity of life and religion is expressed emotively in many settings. In most circumstances, the name of 'God' is evoked in local languages such as *Imana, Mungu, Lulema, Nzambe, and Abeca Mpungu*. These words are not simply translations of God but have subtly different and important local meanings. For example, the name of God, Lulema, among the Bafuliru and Banyamulenge, conveys both God who created the universe and the regulator of every aspect of life. Prayers are seemingly one of the main preoccupations in the DRC. A display of an accepted form of (usually Christian) belief is important to people anxious to avoid being stigmatised as 'God's unbeliever' (*mupagani*). This carries with it other socially and culturally unacceptable accusations of 'occultism' and 'animism' or 'paganism'. Not belonging to any place of worship is not seen as an option. Indeed, in all the years I've spent in the country, I have not heard of or met a Congolese person who does not believe in God.

New churches are established regularly and never lack members. These worship places are like 'religious clinics' or 'religious supermarkets'; people go there to 'meet' their needs and aspirations. In my interactions with people in the DRC, I was often greeted by these words: *Bwana asifiwe* or *Yesu ashimwe (*'May God/Jesus be praised'*)*. Some of my interviews started with a long prayer led by my interviewee. I have also observed prayer meetings at workplaces exhorting God to provide guidance and direction in work activities. The names of God and Jesus are evoked and invoked in peace, joy, distress, and sorrow. The idea of a community of a wide range of people that share similar beliefs seems to be less important than elsewhere (Kroesbergen, 2019). One social scientist argued that:

> The 'self-help[51] nature' weakens whether we can use our shared Christian belief as a resource to address the issue of tribalism and politics of identity conflict. People can hold their Christian belief, as it is one of the many means of a solution to everyday struggle, and at the same [time] conduct violence and be hateful sometimes. Such nature of social reality reinforces division and offers limited space and opportunities to address collective issues, such as the conflict between antagonistic ethnic groups [Interview with HRKR, a theologian and social scientist, Holland, 28th January 2021].

Various observations made during this study attested to a sense of popular and epidermic Christian religiosity. Church members claim to adhere to Jesus teaching, and to the Biblical principle such as "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth" (Matthew 5: 5), "Love your neighbour as yourself" (Matthew 22: 37–39), or "If anyone slaps you on the right cheek,

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[51] By this he meant that church is a like a shop where members come to get what they need and when they need.

turn to them the other cheek also" (Matthew 5: 38–39). The ECC's religious practice places an emphasis on the role of what they call the Holy Spirit[52] more than biblical scriptures and principles. Protestant churches "provide room for prophetism, dreams and visions, speaking in tongues, prayer healing, and deliverance from evil spirits" (Mayer, 2004: 452). This forms the typical phenomena of charismatic Protestant churches all over the world. There is an evolving charismatic nature within the ECC that makes them appear more popular amongst locals (although ironically, the more 'severe' Catholics had in practice been more tolerant of traditional rituals and of polygamy). Such separation, as will show in Chapter Six on interplay between politics and church, does not necessarily suggest opposition; but in any case, the evidence I collected suggests that in the DRC, religious beliefs and the cultural milieu are rarely separate.

Diverse Protestant church communities continue to proliferate in the DRC. In doing so, they build on a leadership style that is often more flexible than the heavily centralised and global RCC.[53] Many Protestant congregations are also transforming into Pentecostal charismatic movements and assimilating African traditional religions (ATRs) (Ellis and Ter Haar, 2014). These churches offer a popular and 'localised' form of Christianity because many of their features overlap with ATR spiritual practices. Before Christianity, what we know of ATR suggests a relationship between humans and a deity or self and neighbour[54]. As Membe explained, these:

> are motivated and inspired by an aspiration to search for a type of Christianity linked to an indigenous spirituality. There is a tendency to escape from traditional and orthodox Christianity, to live an effervescent spiritual experience and be neither unrestricted from the mainline church boundaries nor confined by church institutional requirements (Membe; 1988: p170–172).

These churches increasingly present themselves as a resource to resolve the everyday problems of ordinary people (Ludovic, 2021). This phenomenon is not new: before Christianity, the Congolese were not polytheists – a local concept of a single God existed (Mbiti, 2010). Christianisation was seen by most as simply adding another layer to existing spiritual and religious beliefs, and shared languages became the tools to promote them.

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[52] In Christianity, generally, there is a belief in the trinity of God (Father, God the son, God the Holy Spirit). The Holy Spirit is defined as a unique different divine person but is equivalent in substance to the God the Father and God the Son. The Holy Spirit is subordinate to the Father and Son. Some of the expectations of the Holy Spirit is power to heal, to give prophetic messages and expel demons and speak in tongues.
[53] Protestant churches have less of a hierarchical and a pyramidal leadership structure.
[54] It is generally claimed that such relationship was harmonious but pre-Christian Africa was not necessarily peaceful.

Existing belief systems were founded in a cosmology where both visible and invisible spiritual beings reside in harmony alongside the living. People believed that these spirits could both positively and negatively impact on life; therefore, it was necessary to maintain good relations with them and between their communities (Mukendi, 2011).

There is also an emphasis on people distancing themselves from traditional practices by embracing radical misinterpretations of teachings from the Bible. For example, during the field study, I heard references, in the Church and social conversations, of accounts from the Old Testament to demonise those perceived as evil. The Hebrew Bible, Exodus 23.31, paints Philistines as villains and cruel enemies of ancient Israelites. The story suggests that the Philistines tricked a mighty Samson, an Israelite leader, by sending him a charming and deceitful beautiful woman called Delilah, thus stripping Samson of power. Similarly, the story of David and Goliath (which is in 1 Samuel 17-50-53) also paints Goliath as a Philistine, whereas David is referred to as an Israelite. Both stories are localised or domesticated as subtle descriptions of those viewed as 'enemies of God's people'. Although, in Jesus's story of the Good Samaritan, Samaritans were considered heathens by the Orthodox Jews of the time. This counters this Old Testament view. One of the theologians I engaged with during this study argued that:

> This religious phenomenon is limited in theological principles of peace. Clergy ought to focus their teaching on Jesus' sermon on the mount where he said 'Blessed are the peace makers' is surely a central tenet of Christianity. Such teachings have potential to respond constructively – through the "Gifts of the Spirit' (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and self-control Galatians 5,22) – to the evils of local conflict. Despite the spread of churches and continual expectations that they should play a role in bringing people together, Congolese communities continue to be divided along ethnic lines. Churches themselves are in conflicts based on competition of power and influence over the local communities. [Interview with PGTW, a theologian and an international preacher, Kigali, 22nd April, 2021].

Some reasons for such a culture of religiosity include making sense of both the visible and invisible worlds (Ellis and Ter Haar, 2004) and likely spiritual threats to the family members, homes, or belongings. Every unsuccessful project or initiative or illness in the family is believed to be associated, for example, with the ATR god of misfortune. Such belief extends from individuals' context to focus on the peace and happiness of one tribe in opposition to the violence and misfortune of their neighbouring tribes. It shows not only the use of church

practices and biblical interpretation in the struggle for power, but it also contradicts the pre-Christian ideas of Ubuntu[55] – 'I cannot be happy unless you are happy' (Kilama, 2019:2).

The type of Christian religious belief in the areas explored in this research focuses on addressing personal problems and the search for meanings and solutions to everyday life struggles, personal accomplishment, health, and material success. This phenomenon produces a very diffuse religious community of diverse practices within what might be seen to be a shared belief system with shared places of worship. Among the faithful there is little debate about the nature of reality or how a Christian might live in harmony with others, as Christianity claims. A Congolese scholar suggested to me:

> We can see that a combination of multi-layered identities in one individual is applied interchangeably. We need to acknowledge that Christians are part of this divided society and are victims of conflict like anyone else. It is complex to separate them from the environment [Interview with MKE, a scholar, Bukavu, 3rd June 2021].

As I observed, the clergy are social actors in conflicts, and many will not agree with Prof MKE. Due to their perceived moral authority and the powerful influence of the church, many theologians in the DRC argue that the clergy ought to be the ones to enlighten and illuminate society by addressing conflict through their teaching and practice.

PGTW discussed the various challenges faced by clergy, including:

> Firstly, clergy lack theological and doctrinal foundations. Secondly, they are integral to the same belief system and social realities. Thirdly, Church congregations tend to hold these clergy as hostages to impose certain sectarian deontology. To avoid losing their authority, these religious leaders do end up accommodating the wish and aspirations of their church members, which destabilise church structures and the abilities of their leaders to have a vision towards social issues such as ethnic conflict that continues to ravage the eastern part of the country (PGTW, Senior Protestant Church leader, an international preacher, Kigali, 22th April 2021).

The clergy and their adherents immerse themselves in interchangeable interpretations of the teachings of Jesus. The Bible is mainly based on a history of Jewish people. Jews would argue that how to live and love and be Godly is central to the Torah, for example, "thou shalt

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[55] It is a central southern African philosophy that promotes community, collectivism over individualism. Ubuntu asserts that every human being is interconnected, and society gives human beings their humanity.

love thy neighbour as thyself" from the Book of Leviticus 19:18. The New Testament, however, suggests a new way of living, prioritising love of one another and loving your enemy, rather than the instrumental dominative laws (Interview with JGPW, a prominent religious leader, Brussels, 20th February, 2021). However, many church leaders tend to base their messages on the historical aspects of the book. They tend to incarnate various characters in the Bible in ways that can be argued as misinterpreting the teachings and apply these into divisive rhetoric of either prosperity theology or 'us versus them'. They omit Jesus's explicit mission to change the old system that normalised slavery, poverty and the subjugation of certain groups of people. According to the Bible, held by Christian Congolese as wholly sacred and unchangeable, there is also a belief that Jesus humbled himself rather than aspiring for princely status.[56] But again, this is omitted in much of the religious leaders' own teachings.

The vacuums created by this limited moral guidance and shallow doctrinal knowledge tends to be replaced by an emphasis on what could be designated as the theology of prosperity. This emphasises the notion that someone who became a child of God through Jesus cannot, in a logical sense, remain poor (Nanou, 2021). Under such perception, precious natural resources like diamond, cobalt and gold belong to heaven [interview with SSBTK, a Congolese elder and pastor, Kigali, 29th April 2021].

Economic status became a major aspiration for some church leaders, who used their Christian identity as a cover for achieving their materialistic ambitions[57]. The competition for economic power among those that replaced the missionaries instrumentalised politicisation of ethnic identity already described in chapter one with reference to the Banyarwanda and Banyamulenge people. For example, Rukema (1985: pp24-27) suggests that a

> Sharp division developed between White missionaries and local pastors from Babembe tribe…… Eventually, it affected the Banyamulenge local churches. When the missionaries wanted to relinquish the management of their mission post to another white mission post which acted as overseer, local pastors wanted full control of its leadership and management due to lucrative ambitions.

Struggle for religious power control became tribal by preventing certain groups. For example, in 1980, as Rukundwa (2006) suggests, many churches in the area inhabited by

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[56] Some of the important quotes from the Bible: Matthew 5:3–12 or Luke 6:20–23 or Luke 10:29–37. These scriptures are contrary to rhetoric of some of the Bishops and Cardinals and pastors quoted.
[57] Idem

the Banyamulenge departed from one of the most influential Protestant networks, the *Communaute des Eglises Pentecotiste au Congo* (CEPAC). Rukundwa confirms that they accused CEPAC leaders of discrimination, nepotism, corruption, and authoritarianism. While clergy from other communities shared these concerns, the Banyamulenge became active in protests against CEPAC governance, predominantly composed of Bafuliru people, because of their marginalisation (Rukundwa, 2006, p. 163). The departure of many church leaders from CEPAC to another network, the Assembly of God (CADEC) took place at the same time as contestation by local non-Banyamulenge people a local decentralised administrative entity called Bijombo (Mutambo, 1997), a type of local customary power for Banyamulenge. The main Banyamulenge grievances against CEPAC were the passivity and complacency of the provincial and national religious leaders towards their struggle for native and civic rights (Rukundwa, 2006).

The post-European missionaries seem to have offered certain economic advantages that became an aspiration for power struggle. During the decolonisation process, the new non-white clergy realised that the Churches were a source of employment, education, and material wealth. Following their departure, the Protestant churches in particular faced a vacuum of leadership together with financial and organisational challenges. Individuals who had enjoyed close relationships with white missionaries, either as loyal and favoured servants or as having received basic education from them, were often referred to, as stated several times through this thesis, as "*les evolués*".[58] Many of these individuals became part of the new post-colonial administration, but with cultural and religious "references", rather than political ones. Church institutions and leadership became symbols of high social status and economic and educational progress. After independence, economic aspects of DRC society briefly improved. Clinics grew into large hospitals under the management of the new church leaders, partly as a symbol of material wealth. Christianity was synonymous with "civilisation" (*kusirimuka* – to be like a white – a term also used to refer to a modern person, *kizungu)*[59] and a means of accessing political power.

Some *evolués* became part of the political and church leadership. Others became advisors to the local district councils. From the start, the post-colonial political leaders maintained links with the Congolese church leaders. The interplay between power and material wealth in the post-colonial church became not only an aspiration but a significant driver of conflict (Cicura, 2019). I have observed how many religious leaders do not hesitate to display their

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[58] The civilised or intellectually advanced group.
[59] The reference to "*kizungu*" originated from "*muzungu*" (a white) but carries connotations of being both economically powerful and 'civilised' than race itself. *Kizungu* is a state of being civilised, transiting from the traditional way of life to the modern lifestyle associated with money and modern materials.

success in material wealth, such as through private houses, luxury vehicles, land and large modern built houses in the city, and ownership of profitable independent clinics and schools. This phenomenon creates rivalries and conflict among the clergy for religious and economic power. The next paragraphs, I move on to discuss how the introduction of Christianity brought a notion of an inter-cultural and shared God (Rukundwa, 2006), a foreign concept. I evaluate on the particularity and multifaceted nature of Christian religious practices in the DRC, as demonstrated in the house metaphor introduced in Chapter Three.

The introduction of Christianity resulted in social imbalance among local people. The process started by marginalising ATR in the lives of ordinary people whose leaders were the customary chiefs who often remained non-believers in Christianity. Missionaries or religious leaders became the new source of "moral guidance", and this created a conflict between individuals over access to religious power and its related social and economic privileges. One of the results of this imbalance was the development of a set of pluralistic religious beliefs that weakened tradition-based values. The Christian's God was irresistible as seemed to provide more than the traditional gods. Education, employment, clinics, and a modern lifestyle including money accompanied the Christianisation of a community. But the new Christian believers reshaped the Christian God in the form of many of their existing beliefs (ATR) in both visible and invisible worlds which were too useful. This phenomenon is illustrated by the house metaphor described in chapter three.

The newly evolving forms of Christianity sought to assimilate ATRs without their related cultural values and created what Kroesbergen called 'a faith without communities' (Kroesbergen, 2019)**.** The Christian worldview involved a universe defined by holistic relations and challenged long-established religious ways of life (Mukendi, 2011). Writing about a Bantu philosophy for example, the Reverend Placide Tempels (1945) describes the hybridity between ATR and Christianity. He suggested that in times of crisis and social oppression, an African who has been Christianised and assimilated to the European lifestyle – the "*evolues*" of the Belgian Congo – returned to their ancestral practices, for example when an illness is not being cured through scientifically approved medical doctors, some intellectuals would often seek other traditional forms of intervention. In this hybrid of beliefs, Congolese Christians exploit the modern lifestyle, Christian ideas, the cultural and religious tenets of postmodernity and the advantages of globalisation but remain anchored in their traditional spiritual beliefs and cultural antagonisms.

As stated above, the *évolués* continued to seek solutions for modern problems by secretly returning to traditional practices (Igboin, 2014). What Christianity offered was not seen as

efficient enough to respond to their existential expectations: it did not bridge the vacuum created by losing the traditions stigmatised by the missionaries. Newly "civilised" men or women would display all the signs wanted by the missionaries but continued to be fearful of the power of the spirit mediums (ancestors) that might be working against them or their family. When "misfortune" happened, Christian individuals still involved traditional elders, healers, and diviners and though the Christian God were seen as more valuable than ATRs. Many clung to the cultural and communal advantages offered by ATRs. Many interviewees argued that ATRs were the source of African resilience in the context of conflict (Interview with MYSHR, a senior Congolese theologian and ECC pastor, Kigali, 23rd June 2021, Interview with FNGBU, a prominent RCC religious leader and elder, Kivu province, 3rd May 2021). Therefore, the transition between old belief systems and new and foreign religions could be said to have created a vacuum that attenuated the resources and ideas of peace developed through ATRs.

In the following paragraphs I will illustrate how the above analysis can impact perceptions of church leadership in the DRC. I demonstrate how Congolese (political leaders and clergy included) generally exhibit a duality of religious loyalty- committing to Christianity in public discourse while often adhering to aspects of ATR in private. Frequently commitment to the latter appears more influential than the former. The illustrations below show, as the house metaphor conveys, how adhesion to Christianity has not fully erased more traditional religious beliefs. Consequently, I argue, the potential efficacity of claimed Christian values related to peace and social harmony are compromised and often nullified.

In South Kivu, for example, among the Barega and Babembe ethnic groups, traditional leaders who were evangelised by the Catholic "white fathers" (*les pères blancs*) converted to Christianity without detaching themselves from ancestral traditions. Many remained catechumens[60] until very close to their death, when they would choose to be baptised (*articulo mortis*[61]). Christianity for them assured a place in heaven – a means of providing security after death. In the Urega territory of Mwenga, among the Barega people, parallel to their adherence to Christianity, they practiced the "*kimbirigiti*" rituals (*Bwami*[62] and *Bwali*[63]). Those who had not been initiated in these traditions were not considered "genuine" or full members of the community. They were rather considered second class or "fifth column" Barega people. Inevitably uninitiated children felt marginalised or inferior to those who had been initiated.

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[60] A person (young) who is going through training or teaching in preparation for getting baptised as a Christian. It is also referred to as a 'confirmation' within Catholic religious practices.
[61] Baptism is when someone is about to die.
[62] Rite of passage to become a traditional leader if you are a boy.
[63] Rite of passage to become a traditional leader if you are a girl.

Concerning the case of the Banyamulenge, despite the community being of 'Christian' faith, there was a strong attachment to the stories of the community's 'God' (*Imana* – not the Christian God) that presided over their imaginations before Christianity was introduced. The concept of '*Imana*' is understood here as an invisible God who created the universe and everything in it. Such a traditional God was generally perceived as being benign and paternal. But the same God could also punish; war and disaster would be generally considered as God's punishment. Life on Earth is believed to be illusory, and eternal ('real') life lies in living with God after death. God is seen as being sovereign (above everything on earth). This is a God that 'speaks' to people, and to whom people can speak. The place of God in society implies that there must be a harmony with God before one can even think of harmony within or between the group and individuals. Therefore, this God is understood to play a leading role in internal social and political debates (De Lorenzo, 2004, p4). His role in world affairs is diversely appreciated and he is only invoked when all other earthly and spiritual possibilities have failed in a given situation (Rukundwa, 2006: 206).

Today ATRs are intrinsically perceived, publicly, as outdated or are stigmatised by Catholic and Protestant churches (Adamo, 2011). However, the notions of fear of God, life after death, ancestral spirits and supernatural powers, including prophecies, remain powerful in the hearts and minds of people across different religious groups (Schatberg, 2000). These have been integrated in local understandings of Christianity (Maxwell, 1995, Mayer, 1992; Mayer, 1998). This new religious framework provides Christian religious leaders and 'prophets' (who are perceived in the role of ATR diviners) with stronger legitimate positions and gives them access to much wider social and religious networks upon which to draw. Though, these religious amalgamations and adaptations challenge secularist ideas in their expectations of the impact of modernity and reinforce the role of religious beliefs in both everyday life and in their limitations in response to conflict or building peace.

The choice between a Christian God and other gods is not a straightforward one. As demonstrated in the analysis earlier and in the illustrations of Barega and Banyamulenge, there many signs of a religious pluralism. Ellis (1999) also noted that this fusion of faiths illustrates how even the most revered tradition accommodates novelty and change.

The spiritual realm as a tool for politics and material wealth is important. For instance, the former president Mobutu was known for his display of symbols of allegiances to ATR, a consolidation of supremacy not necessarily through state structures, but via patronage to local strongmen (Gossens, 2000) who could provide prophetic inspirations, divine protection, and sustainability of power. Beliefs lie in the power of supernatural beings and allegiances to

powerful spirits (Convicton-Ward, 2016). Through ATR, spiritual medium (ancestors) regulated life between people and God (Mbiti, 2010) and therefore were stronger than customary leaders. In modern days, Congolese people generally perceive church leaders as spiritual mediums (ancestors within the ATR context), stronger than political leaders.

For example, I observed a senior leader of Protestant churches during the fieldwork. At one point, I witnessed his intense conversations with his wife about their child, who had been repetitively unwell and absent from school. He suggested that:

> He has been to see the doctor several times. Results show that it is not malaria, but the child is not improving. We have prayed for him several times. We need to get her to a traditional healer (manga wa asili) or find a *Muombai wakuona* (a playful diviner/prophet) to tell us what is going on; we are now exhausted. (Field notes, Bukavu, June, 2021)

While not all religious leaders consult diviners' "*marabouts*", many acknowledge the existence of malicious spiritual influences. These influential remnants of ATR represent another often unseen and unacknowledged allegiance.

The continuation of aspects of ATR within modern African Christianity means that it may be impossible to dissociate people's adherence to religion from their search for survival strategies (Ellis and Ter Haar, 2007). From my observations, as described in the house metaphor, the ordinary Congolese populace and religious elites easily accommodate these multiple religious identities. They tend to use these forms of syncretism to address their daily problems - consulting pastors, prophets, traditional healers, diviners or marabouts (Teer Haar and Ellis, 1998). The mindset illustrated in the house metaphor becomes a framework through which the Congolese society understands the world.

A broad perception remains that leaders of many Protestant churches are a type of social and spiritual parent. They are referred to as *papa pasteurs* ('fathers'). Some of these *papa pasteurs* claim to have the power to predict the future. It is hard to disprove the veracity of their claims or to question them as they are perceived to be inspired by God and thus incontestable. They have become symbolic pillars of sacred authority whose followers, individually and corporately, obey and respect them, especially since they are able to mobilise finances through their influence on a whole congregation. One of the political analysts I interviewed suggested that:

Some of these churches are not just worship places. They are social and lucrative commercial enterprises. They are founded either on individualist ideas or tribal solidarity, focusing on healing, health, and well-being, promising spiritual advancement, personal prosperity, and material success. The adherents should show unquestionable loyalty and give monetary value or other social sacrifices. There is an emphasis on personal testimony and a tendency to spiritualise everyday situations. In return, these *'papa pasteurs*' develop a certain uncountability over their members [Interview with MRR, a religious and political leader, Paris, 3rd June 2021].

These *papa pasteurs* focus their teachings on the individual's *search* for a personal response to world issues, rather than providing *solutions* to personal and world issues (Kroesbergen, 2019). The belief systems and practices of many Congolese Christians appear superficial when faced with the challenge of providing solutions to the ethnic identity conflicts described earlier. It has indeed been said that some Christian beliefs "are like a social security card" [Interview with NKYAL, a scholar, religious and political leader, 26th February 2022]. Christianity or churchgoing in the DRC does not centre on claims of universal truth by adherents; instead, it provides a set of optional resources that might work for each believer. In such circumstances the church becomes a community of people seeking solutions, power, protection, and pragmatic ways to apply faith rather than a group of believers with a shared belief and joint social action (Kroesbergen, 2019). Faced by societal issues caused by dysfunctional politics and governance, and conditions of poverty and economic insecurity, God is a resource of hope and resilience rather than a guide to social action. Church adherence, and the Christian religion in general, entails engaging with God to solve one's own problems and maintain a personal relationship with divinity. This slant on Christianity makes it challenging to build a peace between people on the basis of a shared Christian belief. One theologian suggested that:

Considering that most people in the DRC claim to be Christian and believe in a Christian God, for church leaders to play a constructive role in inter-ethnic conflict in the DRC, Christian congregations and communities ought to act as a network of families of believers who are brought together based on a shared God and particular belief system. In this context, the notion of community as a social and religious group is their adherence to the teaching of Jesus Christ [Interview with HRKR, a theology scholar, Holland, March 2021].

In the following section, I question the transcendental character of Christianity and church culture in an ethnically divided society.

5.1.5 Interaction between religious belief and ethnicity

This section briefly explores a fundamental issue arising from the initial assumption of this thesis that the clergy are influential in Congolese society and could therefore play a constructive role in ethnic identity related conflict resolution: it asks the question, can Christian identity integrate and supersede ethnic identity and serve as a resource for peacebuilding? Its aim is to explore and highlight the role of church leaders in conflict resolution. My intention is not to claim that Christianity should replace ethnic identity and cultural heritage, but whether it is possible for shared Christian belief to transcend ethnic identity and play a substantial role in conflict resolution.

In the DRC, the driver or underlying cause of conflict is not as much about religion as about the actions of the religious. Unlike many other conflicts in Africa – for example, in Nigeria, Uganda or the Central African Republic – religion itself is insignificant in ethnicity-based violence in eastern Congo. It is, however, essential to acknowledge that, as the DRC's society is predominantly Christian, sometimes ethnic conflicts have used religious beliefs to justify and provide a spiritual legitimisation of violent attacks on others (De Lorenzo, 2004; Rukundwa, 2006). From colonial independence to today, some armed groups or rebellions have been led by religious leaders.

Before, I expand on the main discussion, I want to illustrate these two issues: on one hand, the use of religious belief in violence and, on the other hand, the involvement of a religious leader in the activism of armed groups. During Simba Mulele[64], one of the leaders of the Mulelist rebellion, Mussa Marandura, also worked as a pastor. Similarly, in 2012, Bishop Runiga headed a rebellion movement in North Kivu, the Movement of Mars 23rd (M23). Many armed groups have religious Sunday services in the bush before committing their atrocities. Early in 2000, during the Congolese Rally for Democracy (RCD) rebellion, there was a well-known armed choir named *Jangwani* ('desert place'). While I was conducting the field study, a viral video clip emerged showing an armed group led by Kibukila Mutetezi Tresor in which group members began a violent attack with prayers and songs of praise.[65]

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[64] A rebellion linked to communism after the assassination of the first premier minister of the Congo (then the DRC), following independence from the Belgians. The rebellion started in January 1964, referring to itself as the '*Simba*' (Swahili for 'lion') rebelling against the government. They were led by Mulele, who was a minister of education in the Lumumba government. The rebellion started in Kwilu, in the southwestern part. Between 1963–67, it turned into a civil war in South and North Kivu. In South Kivu, the rebellion targeted the Banyamulenge people (Mukwiza, 2016).

[65] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z-P3bk9xWPM available online, accessed on 6th June 2022

Fox (2000) suggested that religion can be instrumentalised in ethnic conflicts to legitimise the ensuing violence. Based on my observations and interactions with various political and theological scholars, the DRC is a close illustration of Fox's argument. Ethnic conflicts can indeed use Christian beliefs and may sometimes benefit from religious institutions to justify secular causes, but they do not seem to have transformed the prevailing inter-ethnic conflict into one of Catholicism versus Protestantism, or Christians versus Muslims, or Christians versus ATRs. The underlying causes of ethnic identity remain secular.

Both religion and ethnicity give people a sense of identity and belonging. Discussing the interplay between ethnicity and religion has been essential to the social sciences (Chong, 1998; Reese and Ybarrola, 2010) and conflict and peace studies (Stewart, 2009; Kunovich and Hadson, 1999). Some scholars focus their research specifically on understanding how religion relates to people's identification with their ethnicity or the role religion plays in shaping ethnic identity and ensuring peaceful coexistence. However, the nature of this interaction and can differ from one society to another (Chong, 1998). Religion and ethnicity can act similarly, religious identification can precede ethnic identity, or it might serve as another layer of ethnic identity (Williams, 1988). In the DRC, belonging to a Christian church does not replace ethnic identity and a shared affiliation to a church is not necessarily a vital organiser of identity within a social group (Longman, 2001).

While Christianity colours all aspects of life, it is rather a personal spiritual resource and strategy to prepare for a life after death, to achieve and navigate everyday life struggles [interview with a protestant senior clergy, EBYM, Goma, 29th April 2021]. It may appear however a relatively unimportant layer of shared interest and identity. Christianity has little impact on narrowing the differences that form the basis of conflict. An interviewed political leader stated that:

> In the DRC or, generally, in many parts of Africa, there is a concept of negative affinity: Christian values recommend brotherhood/sisterhood based on shared faith and living a life as in the teaching of Jesus Christ. However, in the DRC, blood, kinship, and tribal relationship are more important. Hence the expression that blood is thicker than baptism water. Christianism promotes peace, tolerance, patience, and non-violence. However, here we are not born Christians. Becoming a Christian is a state of mind, spirit and soul following self-transformation. It is, therefore, possible to be a Christian without living Christian values [Interview with MRR, a senior political leader and former expert in civil society, Bukavu, 5th June, 2021].

I argue that neither the transcendent nature of Christian religious identity nor a specific affiliation to one type of church has a role in bringing different ethnic groups together or as a resource to their conflict resolution (Longman, 2001). However, these shared religious and spiritual resources may play a constructive role in deterring violence within one community. My field study indicated that the reality for the majority can be summarised as involving multifaceted loyalties. As one of the interviewees suggested:

> A church is like a water reservoir. I can use whichever reservoir I need. Each person can go to a reservoir of water when he needs to and whichever he wants to) [Interview with NKYL, political leader and civil society activist, Bukavu, 7th June 2021]

Indeed, people do change Christian churches as often as they wish, and for different reasons. Another informant raised his criticism of the assumption of the superiority of Christianity:

> Here in Bukavu, there are many churches. However, often many members of each church belong to the tribe of its senior leader. Beyond this, the members are often from a certain geographical area. Ideally, once you convert to Christianity, you become a new creature. But in our situation here, it seems that we are Christians but still committed to our old identities. [Interview with MKE, scholar, Bukavu, 4th June 2021].

Changing membership from one church to another within or outside Protestantism is a relatively frequent occurrence in the DRC. It is also not unusual for family members to worship in different churches. The members of most of churches observed in South and North Kivu identify closely with their leaders. They are united by the same ethnicity, territory of origin and a shared language or culture. The ECC has therefore established itself as an ethnicity-based configuration, with ethno-political structures, rather than a unified body of Christian believers living the expected values of peace central to all Christian denominations. The plethora of different churches perhaps inevitably leads to opposition and rivalry between them, as well as between new and old leaders. These divisions have thus resulted in extra layers of conflict as church leaders lose their popular credibility due to ethnic partisanship and have less credibility in conflict resolution.

The interviewees in my field work suggested that features like locality, clan, and history were stronger determinants of belonging than common religious belief (Interview with PGTW, Senior Protestant Church leader, an international preacher, Kigali, 22nd April 2021; and NGBA, a scholar, Goma, 6th May 2021). These views suggest that religious identities may

not be the most practical basis for mobilising interest groups. People on the whole prefer to describe other features of belonging rather than going to the same church or having a common religious belief. However, I did observe an exception with Muslims in eastern Congo: a shared belief in social identity brings Islamic believers together and underpins their peaceful coexistence with other social groups. For Christians though, ethnicity and territory appear to be more important identities (Kamaara, 2010). At his address at the United Nations General Assembly on 4th October 1973, former President Mobutu referred to "*entre un ami et un frere le choix est clair*" ("between a brother and a friend, the choice is clear") (Turner and Young, 1985). While the expression was used to convey his position in support of the Arab states against Israel, in the DRC it is used rather as a way of communicating a deep-rooted day-to-day custom of ethnic nepotism. Mobutu's relatives within the Ngbandi tribe occupied senior important and high-profile positions in political and military institutions (Lumumba-Kasongo, 1992). The former Zaire's (DRC) politics have been fundamentally shaped by the differences between those perceived as 'related' and 'others'. During my field study, I overheard the same expression used to legitimise and justify a partisan approach by a senior religious or political leader. The house metaphor expresses these dynamics.

In a focus group I attended, church-related NGO leaders referred to the ways in which ethnicity is used to mobilise political support: "*Notre force comme tribus est aussi notre influence et positionnement par rapport au gouvernment et autres organisations influents*"[66] ("Our strength as a tribe is our ability to influence the government and governance of other influential organisations"). These societal dynamics often lead people to mobilise around their 'tribe'. Such clientelism appears to make religious leaders more aware of their links with the political elite or holders of power, wealth, and influence, and, as such, these ties cut across other identities such as social class or religion.

In connection with the above phenomenon, I now briefly reflect upon clergy engagement with ethnic conflict. The interdependence between the clergy and church consistently results in rivalries between church leaders, mutual condemnations, and internal division and this internal conflict within and between the alliance of Protestant churches plays a role in dissensions that affect society at large. An unedifying race for power and influence by clergy and non-ordained religious leaders manifests itself in both church leadership and in economic, commercial, and political affairs. I have outlined how these societal spheres are inextricable from each other and how those competing within it can often engage in conflict arising from a church split or from contests over church leadership. In some cases, the

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[66] Focus group with senior employees of Reseau Innovation Organisationnelle, a secular 'arm' of the Protestant churches in the DRC. June 2021. Bukavu.

clergy move from religious adversaries to irreconcilable and irreducible enemies. For the sake of survival these leaders mobilise tribal allegiances as a last recourse for their support. Ironically, as a result of these conflicts there is a tendency for further rival religious groups to emerge. When the clergy's priority is orientated to religious power and related to their fears of relinquishing church-based influence, their aspiration to authority is not geared towards edifying society towards peace or to the deterrence of violence. As demonstrated earlier in this chapter, there is a tendency to create closed circles of privilege, which again triggers rivalries between tribes. In these conditions internal solidarity and individualism become the primary concerns rather than community cohesion. Thus, internal church divisions have the result of rationalising and endorsing ethnic conflicts. In such a situation, the clergy tend to develop different facets and allegiances in interaction with a diverse interest group as reflected in the house metaphor framework. Here thoughts, beliefs and values appear to conflict and kept separate with each other in the mind and actions as reflected by the different rooms in the house metaphor.

One of the interviewees shared a view that illustrates the compartmentalised and competitive mindset of religious leaders in the interplay between religion and ethnic identity in periods of conflict:

> *Batabana b'amasango bahimiri bandi boshi ibindu bina: kushurika akabumbu bo bambere. Kushirika lisasi bo bambere. Kuimba a choir, bo bambere* (The youth of Masango area supersedes other people in three ways. When it comes to playing football, they are the best. When it comes to using guns, they are the best. When it comes to singing in a church choir using an organ piano, they are still the best) [Interview with RDG, a religious leader, Bukavu, 2nd June 2021].

This pastor was preoccupied with the 'skills' of his village youth choir, who were similarly exceptional as a football team and as an armed group. By praising the youth for their abilities in 'manipulating' (by which he means using guns), he does not question the conflict between his assumed 'moral' and 'ethical' position as a church leader in tacitly supporting violence and accepting the gross disparity between the 'qualities' he describes. Most armed group members are baptised as Christians, and most are also likely to have attended Sunday schools in childhood. Such pluralistic mindset is expressed in the house metaphor.

The following section discuss the reasons why the clergy remain loyal to their ethnic group and ethnoreligious territories and how these impact their impartiality and legitimacy in religious peacebuilding.

5.1.6 Mutuality agencies and ethno-religious territories as a basis of tribal loyalty

In this section, I want to reflect on clergy loyalty to tribalism and how it influences their response to conflict. I argue that both the RCC and ECC leaders have tendency to split along tribal lines and structures (*Mutualites*). I demonstrate that there is a role of the local colonial political entities which were used as a basis for the European missionaries to implement strategies for evangelism across the Kivu region. Consequently, there is an existence of phenomenon where church denominations maintain strong ethnic and territorial affiliations (Mutombo-Mukendi, 2011). The geo-politicisation of churches results in a paradigm of territorial and ethnic identity loyalty and allegiance.

Modern African states are a mosaic of diverse cultures and ethnic groups. Any attempt to conform these configurations into a body or nation is a constant challenge, and building national unity remains an issue for many countries. The DRC is a typical case of a state undermined at its core by ethnicity-based instability and violence. The hundreds of ethnic groups inhabiting the DRC have all different languages, different metaphors, different emphases, and therefore different cultures. The various governments of the DRC have continually struggled to build a national identity where all citizens might see themselves as belonging to one nation (Mamdani, 1996) and have mostly failed to establish and apply policies that can normalise and include various social, human and group behaviours (Green, 2020).

Opposition between political parties frequently instrumentalises tribal affinities and connections. Tribal affiliation is the most determinant of both national politics and a sense of a community. As with the house metaphor illustration, multiple and competing loyalties – to both tribe or clan – is mode of thoughts and actions. Maquet (1970: 54) suggested that, in the DRC, there exists a structural overlap between politics, power and the kinship system. Churches and the clergy are not exempt from this phenomenon; as we have seen, religious as well as political leaders tend to exploit ethnicity and ethnic affiliation for the sake of power. As a result, these affinities play an essential role in social mobility and ascension, providing greater access to social, religious, and political positions (Ande, 2010). I focus here on this phenomenon of these associations of mutuality, its sociological role in society and how it impacts on the clergy's ethnic partisanship in the context of peace.

In African societies, tribal associative structures, so-called '*mutualities'*, are essential for regulating a community's social relationships, especially in the case of internal crises. Mostly, they are known constructively, for their attempts to preserve cultural identity. Generally, they play an important role in grassroots political mobilisation. They also serve as

a resource with which to rally local people, based on tribal alliance, in support of their political candidates. While individual members of *mutualities* are ordinary people, in groups motivations tend to form around internal tribal ideologies and incorporations of ideas and action plans that oppose and discriminate against other ethnic groups. Bishop Nteziryayo (2023: 81) explained that:

> These tribal associations have become sanctuaries of tensions that aggravate, attract, and transform themselves into exclusions or inter-ethnic hatred, developing into violent confrontations based on cleavages and tribal differences inherited in all multicultural societies. The most challenging impact of these tribal structures, they create ghettos and imprison their members in a bubble of ethnic identity.

Indeed, these tribal structures focus on defending their interests against those of their neighbours, and their members tend to remain loyal to these associations. Opposing one's own tribal mutuality might be seen as a form of disloyalty or betrayal of one's cultural identity. Concerning the church, while the clergy shoulder various religious leadership responsibilities, they are also always members of tribal associations in terms of their cultural identity (Interview with NGBA, a Congolese scholar, Goma, 6th May 2021). Such intersectionality inevitably affects their independence in acting as impartial actors in conflict resolutions between ethnic groups. In my interactions with one of the church leaders, he illustrated this obstacle in this way:

> I cannot denounce the evil that some members of my tribe are committing as part of the conflict. I know many church leaders are fearful to lose their tribal base but also their congregation. Their tribe is like a ladder. Everything else that they are doing is like a ceiling. You cannot reach a ceiling without a ladder. [Interview with SMGN, Bukavu, 8th June 2021].

The above analogy about the use of a ladder to access the ceiling by SMGN illustrates that religious leaders need their tribal base (ladder) as a basis to access power (ceiling).

The fragment of the interview cited above starkly illustrates the ways in which these *mutualities* mobilise around ideologies of loyalty to tribal affinity, which cover for and refuse to denounce the wrongdoing of leaders and tribe members. The structures of mutuality manifest dissociation, confirm internal bonds against others and promote auto-justification (Nteziryayo, 2022). Furthermore, they appear to generate conflicts between the Congolese themselves (Longman, 2018). In the last three decades, ethnonationalist political

actors have instrumentalised different *mutualities* to antagonise 'outsiders' and 'foreigners' (Willam, 1997).

While social actors in these conflicts are always individuals, tribal alliance and perceived affinities often become generalised into discriminatory social representations of the imagined national view. This phenomenon suggests that belonging to a tribal mutuality supersedes being part of a church or a Christian community (Nteziryayo, 2022) and that tribal mutuality means that very often the clergy fail to achieve an objective position in conflict resolution.

When local leaders refuse to align or adhere to their tribal structures, they are seen as disconnected from their cultural roots and stigmatised. Bishop Nteziryayo (2022: p85) described how this happens:

> Leaders [political and religious] who fail to adhere may face exclusion from their tribal community. They may face social and psychological pressure, a threat to their lives. Many members of these tribal associations are often complicit hostages in situations they do not want or have not initiated. The law of tribal or clan mutuality continues to dominate Congolese society significantly.

A Protestant church leader from North Kivu explained the dominance of tribal mutuality over Christian affiliation (Nteziryayo, 2022) at length:

> It is challenging to associate Christian churches in the DRC with the message of Christ but with the ethnic groups instead. Clergy are part of these cultural identifiers. Regarding the ethnic identity crisis (citizenship rights of the Banyarwanda and Banyamulenge), clergy see this conflict similarly to their tribes. Instead of analysing the issue in a spiritual dimension beyond simple social aspects, clergy often take positions and align themselves based on partisan interests. These attitudes inhibit the capacity of religious leaders to develop an integrative (beyond ethnic cleavages) message to deter violence and promote peace. Instead, clergy exploit tribal alliance and kinship systems to seek popular support—some pastors side with armed groups or politicians to protect their ethnic identity [Interview, FNGBA, theologian, pastor, Goma, 10th May 2021].

Tribal sympathies often hinder clergy independence and impartiality in matters of peacebuilding (Prunier, 2001; Longman, 2001). There are, however, already some exceptions. Some clergy are committed to confronting the tribal issue and engaging with

peace strategies constructively. I have witnessed several influential and senior leaders actively committing themselves to the goal and values of peace. They have done this by taking peace-building action in civil society or by focussing their preaching on the Christian teaching of peace. These exceptional leaders were unafraid of losing economic, political, and religious power, but often found themselves excluded from proceedings by those leaders with an unchristian interest in power, wealth, and politics. In the next section, I discuss an interaction between religious leaders and loyalty to ethno-religious territories.

The evidence of the clergy in South Kivu illustrates some key aspects of the moral conflict described above. I have shown that ethnic groups tend to mobilise themselves around specific characteristics or unification features, including differences in languages and physical features, but also along political lines. In the following paragraphs, I describe the basic ideologies of ethnic activism and loyalty among church leaders in the DRC. I show that the territorialisation of ethnic identity is another layer of allegiance that impacts on the clergy's effectiveness at addressing ethnic identity conflict. As one interviewee puts it:

> Ethnic identity or the whole debate to contest the indigenousness of the Banyarwanda and Banyamulenge is presented as an issue through the conceptualisation of citizenship through the trilogy of land, customary power, and ethnic identity. In this view, one cannot pretend to have an ethnic identity without land (a place associated with your tribe) or claim land without customary power. Clergy fail to disseminate truth and compassion about this conflict debate. They have the potential to mobilise social and community change and transformation if they are not independent and dissociated with their ethnicity and ethnoreligious territories [Interview with Professor NGBA, Goma, 29th April 2021].

There are eleven tribes in South Kivu: the Bashi, Bahavu, Bafuliru, Bavira, Barundi, Banyamulenge, Wabwari, Barega, Babembe, Babuyu and Banyindu. The boundaries between the categories and subcategories of ethnic identity can sometimes be blurred and continue evolving and merging into new inclusive units. The literature review showed that ethnic groups in themselves are neither primordial nor static. For example, in South Kivu, the Bashi and Bahavu perceive themselves as being sociologically and linguistically 'related'. The same goes for the Babembe and Barega, Bavira and Bafuliru, Banyindu and Bafuliru. Some other tribes have been assimilated within the larger groups. For example, the territory of the Uvira and Fizi is also inhabited by the Wajoba, Masanze and Wagoma people. These groups were marginalised during the colonial period and assimilated with the Babembe and Bavira (Niyongabo, 2021). As I have argued ethnicity is a mutable, circumstantial, and

evolving phenomenon. In my field study, I found that exclusivity was expressed linguistically in territorial terms: for example, *Bubembe* (the land of Babembe), *Bushi* (the land of Bashi people) or *Bufuliru* (the land of Bafuliru people).[67] This additional 'layer' of allegiance influences both political institutions and church governance and reinforces the exclusion of ethnic groups who are not given the prefix '**Bu**' – like the Batwa and pastoralist groups that do not have highly defined territories. As demonstrated above, some social groups' traditional administrative authorities were initially suppressed by the colonial powers and then replaced by others. One of the examples of this in South Kivu is the case of the Banyamulenge administrative structure that was thoroughly suppressed (Mutambo 1997; Rukundwa, 2006).

Christian evangelisation has affected ethnic divisions in several ways (Rukundwa, 2006). There was intense competition between European Catholic and Protestant missions (Young, 2002). As stated earlier, the Belgian colonial authorities privileged the RCC and divided various territories into religious franchises (Ande, 2010). Protestant missions evangelised in areas where there was little RCC influence. Due to the pyramidal structure of RCC leadership, it was possible to apply and impose uniformity in dogma, rituals, and religious practice [interview with an RCC bishop, JGPW, Brussels, 21st February 2021]. However, different missions approached interactions with Congolese communities and their conversion to Christianity in contrasting ways (Young, 2002). The first Protestant missionaries replicated existing European divisions in setting up their missions in Africa. Still today the distribution of Christian denominations in the Congo reflects the beliefs of those originally granted access to each community or territorial identity group.

There are presently 64 Protestant denominations in South Kivu.[68] Each denomination is led by someone primarily associated with a certain ethnic group, and thus church leadership is primarily based on ethnic identity. In the colonial era, each territorial or ethnic entity became a kind of 'protectorate' of missionaries according to their country of origin. Protestant missions evangelised in areas unoccupied by the RCC influence [interview with a Congolese RCC Bishop, JNGW, Brussels, February 2021]. In order to 'disseminate' evangelical[69] approaches as rapidly as possible in South Kivu, Swedish, Norwegian and British missionaries worked alongside each other and 'split' the region into territories of specific ethnic groups. In this context, the Norwegians focused on the territories of Mwenga

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[67] I have put the '**Bu'** in bold in each of these three words because this signifies the emphasis upon the territory claimed to belong to each group. These are what professor Bosco Muchikiwa Rukakiza refers to as "territorial identities".

[68] Idem.

[69] Evangelicals are perceived as a radical and vibrant Christian church group. The word is defined based on the expressive nature of believers found in many churches, denominations and nations.

and Shabunda, inhabited by the Barega and Bashi. The Swedes were responsible for Uvira, inhabited by the Bavira, Bafuliru and Banyamulenge people (though, due to their isolated geography and accessibility issues, the Christian gospel was introduced to the latter ethnic group only towards the end of the colonial era by their neighbouring ethnic groups (Bafuliru and Babembe) (Rukundwa, 2006). The area inhabited by the Babembe and Babuyu was the responsibility of the British and Americans. Schools and hospitals were initiated depending on the policy of each of these groups of missionaries. There were Catholics, too, within these areas, led mainly by Italian 'white fathers'.[70]

These ethno-religious territories collectively produced a geo-politicised mosaic of churches and related leaders whereby only a native of a territory is permitted to lead a church and a bishop or *representant legal (*a native church governor). Such a church governance system continues to create rivalries between various contenders to church leadership or between Protestant churches (ECC) and the Roman Catholic Church (RCC). It is important to understand the basis of the system of tribal or territorial representativeness.

The concept of representativeness applies simply to the leadership of the churches. The idea is about having an ethnic and territorial entity representation within influential institutions. It is a significant feature of the Congolese customary social contract across all aspects of life (Calderon et al., 2018). In the DRC, this notion defines the relationship between members of a tribe and its religious, customary and admirative leader. For each community, having an ethnic or territorial representative at provincial and national levels in a secular and religious institution appears anchored in the local customary governance system (Mamdani, 1996). It is also known locally as *le notre* ('ours or our own'). It serves to retain power away from others (neighbouring ethnic regions) and as a support base for political parties. It offers a degree of legitimacy to state institutions, even in situations that lack transparency or have predatory or dysfunctional administrations (Matsanza, 2010). Generally, after acquiring l*e notre*, people expected a redistribution/extension of authority and influence offered by such legitimacy across territorial or ethnic identity structures and groups. The reassurance of representation gives tribal leaders access to state institutions [interview with GRUG, a national political leader and peacebuilding expert, Kinshasa, June 2021].

Through the notion of representativeness, there is a general expectation that members of the tribe represented would 'share' what has been accumulated or enable/favour others via

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[70] White missionaries/priests from a specific congregation referred to as Xavierians.

their role (Kä Mana, 2000). There is social pride in having a tribal representative. In the case of religious leaders, the phenomenon seems to inhibit impartiality and independence in conflict resolution because of loyalties, accountabilities, and allegiances to territorial and ethnic identities.

In summarising this section, it can be argued that the ECC leaders mainly tend to split along ethnic identity lines and differ over religious leadership. The local colonial political administrations were used as a framework for the missionaries to implement strategies for evangelism across the South Kivu region. This led to church denominations with strong ethnic and territorial affiliations (Mukendi, 2011). The geo-politicisation of the Protestant churches has resulted in a paradigm of territorial and ethnic identity allegiance in the churches. The issues presented here are some of the obstacles to church leaders in responding objectively to the politics of identity conflict. In the next section, I reflect briefly on how the clergy use religious practices to make sense of ethnic identity conflict. This section uses an example of the Banyamulenge ethnic group.

5.1.7 The role of prophetic discourse

In this section, I demonstrate the use of prophecy in politics and everyday narratives of conflict. There is a deep interaction, I argue, between the interpretation of Christian religious beliefs and modern politics and conflict.

The Bible, perceived throughout the DRC as the ultimate truth and a sacred book, has affected many ethnic groups in many ways. Taking the Banyamulenge as an example, it has become the tool for interpreting everyday life, including conflict with others, especially the issue of their contested citizenship rights. However, these understandings are influenced by events believed to have been predicted in the Bible, which spawned new thought models and perceptions concerning social and political changes.

Concern about the future has always played a central role in the community's leadership. This is particularly true in the context of peace and war. Prayers, divination, prophecy, and other religious discourses help edify the peace process and promote an understanding of the role of traditional leadership even in the context of modern politics. The same religious activities may be used to 'predict' future events. For example, the diviner, known as the *Umuraguzi*, may announce or predict what the future might bring i.e., peace or conflict. Their power is understood by the community as being disseminated impartially and his role is to share the universe's secrets without intermediaries or fetishes. A positive outcome from

divination will be celebrated through thanksgiving rituals (*kubandwa*). Present events are strongly believed to have been accurately predicted in Bible. Prophetic public statements using Biblical references in preaching have influenced the contested citizenship rights of the Banyamulenge.

Prophecy (*Amahanuzi, Guhanura*) is central to the economic and political independence struggle. Prophecies wield influence and authority and can be more powerful than even the most prominent Munyamulenge politician or military (De Lorenzo, 2004: 14). For example, the prophet Bicinoni led the front line of the Banyamulenge local defence troops, who, during the 1990s conflicts 'were guided' by the advice of prophets who suggested how to lead the battle, and positions (and outcomes) of negotiations.

For the Banyamulenge, the importance of prophecy has developed further due to the ongoing conflict and political conditions that bring them to the heart of the ethnic identity crisis that began in the 1990s. Such an approach to public and political statements tends to focus on their ethnic group survival, which excludes other tribes from the prophetic 'bounty'. Such a phenomenon may suggest using prophetic messages as spiritual or religious resources to make violent resistance understandable. These are not only religious beliefs but also internalised explanations of everyday violence, which are often referred to as miraculous.

Using prophecy in the interpretation of contested political rights, there is a sense of reinforcing political events as both acts of evil (Satan) and acts of good (God). The denial of political rights to the Banyamulenge is seen as being beyond the realm of political decision-making and, in fact, is seen as a consequence of Satan seeking to destroy 'God's people' – in this case his own community, the Banyamulenge. During my interview with a Banyamulenge community/religious leader in April 2023, he suggested that:

> Every political event affecting us has had historical predictions and warnings, therefore political outcomes have a spiritual explanation. Historically we were powerless against a giant violent state, and in the middle of ethnically motivated ferocity, how else would one explain our survival? [Interview with SSBTK, a senior community leader and pastor, 23rd March 2021].

This example illustrates how extensively politics and religion are intertwined in this region and, in the context of this thesis, the Banyamulenge's struggle for political rights. I have observed in various interactions with the Congolese people that it was difficult separating

politics from the Christian message. Humans throughout history have claimed the support of God when waging or suffering war, as noted by Ellis (2001), but this does not imply that politics are irrelevant; rather, that it is more commonly expressed in religious rather than political discourse (Behrend, 1999). The above section has shown how theological texts are sometimes used by religious leaders as an internal resource of resilience and interpretation of politics of ethnic identity.

5.2   Conclusion

This chapter has shown that ethnicity and tribal affiliations are more important than religious identities for people in the DRC, even though these overlap with religion. My initial assumption was that Christian religious beliefs could provide a social environment conducive for peace to ultimately triumph. This chapter shows that church clergy provide services beyond the religious to adherents, social groups gather around their religious leader to meet their ambitions for growth and power, as well as material wealth, protection and spirituality. When observed, Christian religious practice appears less about forming a cohesive community than mobilising around a *papa pasteur* who provides answers to their needs (prayer and related rituals). The Christian faith is not a mobiliser of identity; it cuts across all other forms of identity, but ethnicity remains an endemic category.

The leaders of Protestant churches are essential pillars of the DRC's civil society. These grassroot social political pressure groups have abilities to mobilise people against the central government. These churches also manage public services such as schools and hospitals. Protestant churches operate as ethnopolitical configurations rather than as a body of a shared assumption based on a shared understanding of the core values of Christianity. Many key players in the conflicts and politics of the DRC are generally members of churches and this fundamentally ought to impact upon church leaders' credibility, independence and expected 'moral' duty to deter ethnic/identity-based conflict.

The analysis shows a critical resistance to transitioning from ATR to Christianity, creating hybridity in the belief system and a vacuum of either ATR or Christian religious resources for peace. It argued that Congolese Protestant churches leaders generally focus more on personal responses to individual (health, housing and education etc.), global issues (such as poverty and impact of war) and life after death rather than providing a solution to collective issues (peace with neighbours) or on a quest to establish a community of believers. Faith indeed plays little role in mobilising antagonistic groups around shared beliefs to instigate violence or unify.

126

This chapter has described the ways that Protestant churches and the clergy compete for adherents, power, and influence. These rivalries tend to inspire individuals' desires to address their personal needs and struggles rather than to establish a community with a shared sense of religious identity. The clergy, on the whole, establishes a service-based relationship between themselves and church members. The multiplicity of Protestant churches with members often belonging to the same ethnic identity as their pastor engenders long-term rivalries between leaders and churches.

The chapter has shown how *mutualities* have *reinforced* the practice of tribal alliances and loyalties. These structures reflect the ethnic identity and tribalisation of churches. Constructively, such associations enable mutual support and foster cultural heritage. Destructively, they act as ethnopolitical groups mobilised around a socially constructed notion of a tribe.

Colonial political administrations were the original channels for missionaries to evangelise across the South Kivu region. They established leaders of church denominations with strong ethnic and territorial affiliations. The geo-politicisation of the Protestant churches continued in the post-colonial era and resulted in an increasingly polarised paradigm of territorial and ethnic identity allegiance within the churches. This study argues that this phenomenon hinders church leaders from responding objectively to inter-ethnic conflict. Ethnonationalist political ideologies affect clergy autonomy and independence resolving ethnic identity-based conflict and building peace.

The analysis here highlights the complexity of the interplays between religion, ethnicity and territorial identity. Finally, the chapter reflected on the role of religious texts and prophecies in interpreting political events and related conflicts. While these appear to act as internal sources of resilience, there is little evidence of these discourses bridging links between antagonistic groups. The following chapter will discuss how the political elites exploit religious leaders' trust in the local community as a resource to maximise support, access politics, and gain economic advantage. Church leaders represent, embody, and endorse people's concerns and fears, but are compromised in wider issues of morality and putting the core values of Christianity into action.

The literature review showed that many scholars have explored the ambivalent role of religion and religious leaders in peace (Appleby, 2005). Since religious leaders undeniably occupy powerful positions to inspire values-based approaches directed at the common good

of both actors and the subjects of violence, their role is crucial, but many of them and their congregations tacitly or practically support militancy and violence. Church leaders' neutrality, independence, and impartiality in peacebuilding are compromised by their secular allegiances and ethnic identities. I have conveyed these dynamics and realities in the house metaphor in chapter three. Such phenomenon produces a range of categories of destructive positions. I will discuss this further in this thesis' discussion and reflection section. I want to shift to a new discussion on an existence of symbiotic relationship between clergy and the state power.

Chapter 6: A symbiotic relationship between clergy and state actors

Both the Introduction and Literature Review articulated the underlying critical assumptions and scholarly arguments concerning the role of the Christian clergy in conflict: on one hand, church leaders have the potential to act as both impartial agents for conflict resolution (Sandal, 2017; Ter Haar, 2005) and transformation (Alfani, 2019), while on the other, the church elites can have active militancy in the violence itself (Appleby, 2000). In Chapters One and Five, I have also shown the significance of the religious beliefs of leaders in the DRC and their potential role as traditional resources for peaceful co-existence (Autesserre, 2013; Muchukiwa, 2017; Ter Haar, 2005). In Chapter One, I demonstrated that church institutions are influential, and argued that they are the only establishments with a moral authority and political force capable of exerting rigorous pressure towards the 'good' on the political elite and regime, despite authoritarian rule. I argued that both the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) and Council for Protestant Churches (ECC) remain the most effective civil society organisations and that most Congolese people claim to be of the Christian faith. Indeed, I have argued that Christianity is the only shared identity in an otherwise deeply ethnically and politically divided group of communities.

This chapter analyses the interplay between church and state as an obstacle to the clergy's effective role in the politics of identity conflict. The findings in this chapter present a pluralistic positions and mindsets as expressed by the house metaphor. It shows that: the RCC and ECC religious elites in the DRC have, historically, been subservient to and assimilated into the prevailing political power, or in opposition to it. It shows that the leaders of RCC (mainly), which seems to have the status of state religion, tend to entangle with the Congolese state and are to an extent, sometimes extensively, compromised by being associated with it. In other situations, these religious leaders act as brokers of political dialogues at the national level or are antagonistic to the government when other functions are unavailable.

This chapter will describe both this continuous mutual dependency between the church and state actors and multifaceted roles of the RCC and ECC elites in their interactions with the state. The dynamic political and religious positions held by many priests, pastors and bishops have resulted in the absence of their constructive role in Congolese ethnic identity conflicts and, because they are often seen as embodying ethno-nationalistic stances, they are rarely seen as independent or impartial in the ethnic identity crisis. I will argue

throughout this analysis that the clergy have failed to maximise their credibility and political influence to act impartially to deter violence based on ethnic identity. Their desire for material wealth through politics acts as an obstacle to any independent role in conflict resolution. Their tendency to behave like a secular civil society pressure group modestly demanding government accountability in the democratic process perhaps characterises the conflict between their commitment to a gospel for the outcast and powerless, and their pursuit of the economic advantages associated with political power. I claim, however, that the clergy could in fact play a constructive role in reducing conflict or instigating peace in eastern Congo if independent from many forms of interactions with political power.

This chapter focuses mainly on the RCC clergy but some illustrations relevant to the analysis will be drawn from Protestant church (ECC) leaders too. The main reason of this focus is the relevance and significance of the RCC in the context of the interplay between politics and the state, while the ECC tends to model RCC practice. I will attempt to elucidate that understanding the clergy's role in deterring or amplifying politics of identity-related violence requires comprehending not only their link with state actors but the changing nature of this relationship.

The chapter examines the clergy's role through different phases and political crises in the DRC, from the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo (AFDL) rebellion (1996 – 1997) to the current crisis. The failure of the clergy to take constructive roles because of their entanglement in national politics and the resultant "cosy" relationships with political leaders will be illustrated through multiple and contradictory clergy facets. The analysis will on the National Sovereign Conference (CNS) from 1990 to 1992, *St Silvestre*[71] peace agreement process and National Electoral Commission (CENI) to explain the elicits of politics of identity and the challenges, impediments, and constraints that have prevented religious leaders from edifying the society towards resolution of the ethnic identity conflict. The choice of these instances is inductive by nature – it was referred to by many of the interview participants as the most important illustrations to understand of the interplay between the clergy and politics.

The chapter takes different themes for analysis, all aimed at generating evidence to support the key arguments outlined above. I will start by introducing a concept, Church at the Centre of a Village (CCV), that the clergy use to rationalise and frame their involvement in politics or

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[71] In 2016, former president Joseph Kabila attempted to stay in power beyond the legal term. His move led to a political crisis. In order to address the impasse, the Catholic Church facilitated a Peace Accord on 31 December 2016 at Saint-Silvestre Hall in Kinshasa. The event became known as the St Silvestre Agreement.

as legitimate actors in peacebuilding. I will provide an analytical description of the different and interchanging nature of relationships between the clergy and political leaders and how these impacts on religious leaders' role in conflict.

It is important to note that the discussion in this chapter does not necessarily follow the historical chronology of events. As mentioned above, it borrows from examples in different periods. While this study focuses on the period 1990 – 2023, as I have clarified in the introductory chapter, in the DRC history matters. In some contexts, it will be important therefore to reflect on historical settings to enable us to comprehend a series of patterns and behaviours of the RCC clergy versus various political regimes in the early stages of decolonisation and how these are relevant to conflict in the DRC.

I begin by introducing a concept commonly known in the DRC and French West Africa as "*église au milieu du village*" (Church at the centre of the village). I will then move on to reflect on a symbiotic relationship between clergy and politics and will later examine various contradiction positions.

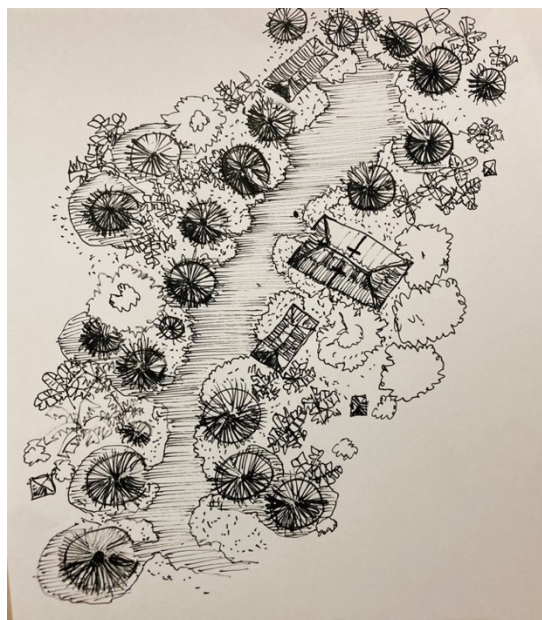## 6.1   Church at the centre of a village (CCV)

Figure 6-1: Church at the centre of the village (CCV)

Firstly, I want to explain, briefly, why I use the concept of Church at the Centre of a Village (CCV) and how it relates to the overall topic of the chapter. The sociological rationale of the concept of CCV conceives the "church at the centre of a village" as a collective

representation of the role of churches in the DRC. It is consistently evoked in public and political narratives to question the neutrality and impartiality of the RCC and ECC churches. It is a very popular expression that was consistently reiterated by the interviewees as a metaphor to describe functions that church leaders ought to play in edifying Congolese society towards peace and conflict resolution.

The idea is widespread in discussing the interaction between Church, peace, and politics (Balemba and Iluc, 2022) at the national level. While this study uses the specific proposed frameworks (see Chapter Three), considering multiple interpretations of CCV, applying it to this chapter's analysis helps convey the various meanings and interpretations used by political and religious elites in their interchanging positions and engagement with national politics. From my observations during the field study, it was uncommon for the interviewees to contextualise the relationship between the Church, the state and peace without referencing the notion of CCV. The concept of the CCV was referred to fifty times by the research participants. Mostly, scholars and religious elites interpreted the interplay between religion and politics through CCV in several facets: to justify, oppose, condemn, seek to mediate, and claim neutrality.[72] The scholars that this research engaged with argued that the use of CCV shows a domestication and appropriation of a foreign concept in African politics. At this point, it is important to briefly describe its ancient origins and relevance in today's politics in the DRC.

Today, the concept of CCV is subject to a contrast between its use and the expectations it generates. The metaphor enables a legitimisation of the role of the church in politics by mediating collaborative interactions between government and church. The Roman Catholics have in this sense perpetuated a Western and crucial function as a mediator in Congolese national political crises, just as they did in the ancient and medieval world.

The concept offers a sense of hope for positive change in the village. For the Congolese people, it is generally expected that the Church would provide socio-economic developmental activities around the village, and that it would support people, spiritually and practically, when their resilience is affected by adversity.[73] The concept of CCV is often used to portray impartiality in the context of conflict resolution (peace-making in the outdoors in a green field or under a tree or a *Baraza).[74]*

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[72] I will return to this later to unpack these positions in the use of one expression/concept.

[73] During interviews with prominent leaders in this study, there were frequent references to such expectations.

[74] A community-level conflict mediation institution.

The Church is expected by villagers to be active in promoting human rights. It is a tool for promoting and maintaining spirituality and bringing the 'good news'[75] of the Gospel to all. But the Church, as we have seen, is also an important socio-political, economic, and cultural actor. It is expected to be omnipresent in all domains of social life and an institution on which everyone can depend. Ideally it reflects social justice and should be a symbol of unity in the village – not simply a building but an idea that expresses certain values. There is an expectation by Congolese society that the church leaders ought to be fair and speak for all equitably (Little, 2007; Glazier, 2018). Such traditional systems offer a critique of some Western justice systems (Marshall, 1972), which aims for a zero-sum game between two or more parties. The concept of CCV is not expected to deliver a win–win solution, but instead one where no one wins or loses but all are satisfied that justice has been done.

On using CCV to rationalise the Church's political action and oppose and condemn the political power, the Church tends to express criticism and disapproval of the government's failures in implementing democratic processes. In such a case, the Church involves several options. Firstly, the RCC, through its Episcopal Conference of Congo (CENCO), gets to an antagonistic position with the ruling party and its government. Within such a tense dynamic, Church elites use CCV to vindicate their public expression of condemnation of the state institutions' governance accountability. In a discontentment of the Church, the government can question the Church of its failure to remain neutral from the politics in line with CCV ethics (Mutombo-Mukendi, 2011). Government leaders often also use the term CCV to remind church leaders that they should refrain from participating in political affairs. For example, most recently, in June 2023, the heads of the RCC were critical of President Felix Tshisekedi for his governance, lack of transparency and independence in organising the country's presidential elections in 2023.[76] In his angry response, Tshisekedi issued this statement:

> I take this opportunity to raise the alarm in response to some diversions of the Catholic Church I am observing. A drift that I qualify as dangerous, especially in this period of elections. The Church must remain at the centre of a village. I would

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[75] In different religions, it is a theological concept that reflects the idea of the Gospel. During the Roman imperial religious tradition and modern-day Christianity, the good news (Gospel) disseminates the message of Jesus and salvation. An understanding that Jesus is a saviour who came to earth and brought peace for the benefit of the whole universe and humankind.

[76] DRC: Félix Tshisekedi puts the Church back in the middle of the village, available online at https://lejournaldelafrique.com/en/drc-felix-tshisekedi-puts-the-church-back-in-the-middle-of-the-village/ accessed on 27th June 2023

instead propose that the church must stay at the centre of Congolese people. It must preach love, unity and equality[77].

Similarly, in early 2018, during antagonism between the Church and President Joseph Kabila due to his attempts to rule beyond his mandate, the Council for Catholic bishops (CENCO) applied pressure to demand presidential elections. In a press conference, Kabila slammed the CENCO leaders by arguing that:

Nowhere in the Bible has Jesus Christ ever presided over a national electoral commission. Give to Cesar what belongs to Cesar and God what is for God. When we try to mix the two, it is dangerous. The result is always negative (Kabila, cited in Sarr, 2018: 1).

Beyond a situation of antagonism, sometimes politicians use the expression to suggest neutrality in service provision and their claimed involvement in addressing social and economic issues or working towards reconciliation between people. For the RCC, CENCO leaders are acting in their responsibility provided by CCV requirements to demand reliability of the elections and deter violence and prevent conflict. Tshisekedi, in return, has urged the Church to remain at centre of the village[78].

The Church acts to provide a legitimate function and expectation for clerical involvement in mediating between ruling powers and political opposition in cases of deadlock or processes connected with political transition and elections. The RCC would either rise above to lead political key institutions (Prunier, 2001) in times of political crisis or offer to mediate between the government and opposing parties, who would be seen incapable of reconciling their differences, by claiming to fulfil its mission of the CCV. It sees itself a chosen in line with CCV principles to act as mediator between the ruling power and opposition. There is an assumption and expectation, as mentioned above, among the local people in the DRC, here that the Church is an impartial institution that represents the interests of all involved in conflict.

Thirdly, the phrase is used to defend religious leaders' abstention (rather than neutrality) in conflict. For example, the Church would claim its status as apolitical and therefore its need to avoid taking a side. There is a sense here of defining another form of 'neutrality' by

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[77] Élections 2023: Félix Tshisekedi fustige une "dérive dangereuse" de l'église catholique en cette année. Available online at https://www.opinion-info.cd/societe/2023/06/25/elections-2023-felix-tshisekedi-fustige-une-derive-dangereuse-de-leglise accessed on 25th July 2023
[78] Idem

justifying inaction in conflict and perhaps helps to normalise inter-ethnic conflict. In such a situation, the Church claims to remain silent and to keep a nonalignment position.

The traditional role of CCV in context of peace appears to not consistently be applied. The concept acts to legitimise the Church's participation in politics, state/church relationships, and the Church's neutral or passive role in political and ethnic identity conflict. In some sections of this analysis, I will refer to the concept CCV in my attempt to explore the participation, or its absence, of Church leadership in conflict resolution in the DRC. In the next section, I will argue that these claims of neutrality through the concept of CCV seem not only to be in contradiction with actual practice, but also its use seems in fact to help to normalise or legitimise ethnic identity conflict. In the next section, I want to examine the interaction between church leaders and politics to set a scene for the interchanging nature of the relationship between church and state power.

6.2 Interplay between Christian clergy and politics

The clergy's interactions with political power are not a new phenomenon. While a historical background is not the focus of this study, it is important to highlight this briefly. As explained by one of the interviewees:

> In the DRC, the behaviour of church leaders today directly results from the Church's relationship with the state or traditional authority in the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial periods [Interview with a senior Congolese religious leader Bukavu, SBTK, retired pastor and elder, 16th June 2021].

Indeed, the DRC is one of the most prominent cases in Africa where the symbiotic relationship between the church and the state was historically significant. The Congo Free State (EIC), under King Leopold's ownership between 1984 – 1912, worked closely with the Belgian Catholic Church and missionaries to successfully implement the colonial project, referred to as 'Bula Matari' (the breaker of rocks) (Young and Turner, 1985: 30–31). When the Belgium government took over from King Leopold in 1912, Catholics had become a powerful player in the management of state affairs. For example, by mid-1920, the Catholic Church managed almost all primary and secondary schools and many health services across the country (Carney, 2016). As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the Christian church in the DRC contributed significantly to the establishment of an educated elite (Oyatambwe, 1997) and continues to play a similar role today.

135

Today in Africa, probably for the majority of people, religion and politics are interconnected frameworks through which individuals and communities explain their everyday experience (Ellis and Ter Haar, 1998). The decades of political turmoil in the DRC have seen a confusing on/off relationship between various clergy and the political regimes. This interplay between clergy and political actors goes beyond the simple manifestation of religious references, rituals or symbols in state institutions, being performed through solemn declarations by incoming presidents and heads of state.

The country's constitution is secular and there is a clear separation between the state and church.[79] The existence of legal provisions to separate these two domains has not stopped their coexistence – indeed relationships between church and state have remained at the heart of national politics. The state judiciary is secular, but there is an official recognition of religion's role in managing crises through the consideration of religious freedom (Mukenge, 2020). In the Christian conception, power and liberty come from God and are, therefore, sacred (Ellis and Ter Haar, 2004). This sacralisation became the main argument that the church leadership in the DRC used to support the struggle for freedom and democracy in the 1990s and during the most recent political impasse[80] in the DRC. Nonetheless, throughout the 20th century, church and state have been intertwined to establish an overlapping system of power, and DRC society is consequently characterised by confusion between religious and secular spheres, as noted by one of the interviewees:

> Church and the state operate in the same country and are responsible for the same people. Demographically, the number of their followers is similar. Both organisations cannot ignore one another. Their loyal collaboration and mutual estimate and respect can only work towards achieving the well-being of the people [Interview with professor BMBSH, a scholar, Bukavu, 15th June 2021].

From the view expressed above, in the absence of state public services, the church expresses its accountability to the state by assuring the welfare and socio-economic well-being of the Congolese people (Seay, 2013; Prunier, 2001). For example, I have explained in Chapter Four that churches are fundamental in providing education and health services. Indeed, from my observations in the fieldwork, many church leaders claim that circumstantial issues have led the church to oversee responsibilities that might have been expected from those in politics and public service. During the field study, the DRC government announced

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[79] See the DRC Constitution of 18th February 2006 and the law number 004/2001 of 20th July 2001.
[80] See later discussion where I provide more insights on a political crisis between 2016 – 2018.

a new education reform, *Gratuité*, to remove the requirement to pay fees to primary and secondary schools. The announcement was received with a degree of opprobrium by the churches as it significantly impacted their sources of revenue.

Beyond the provisions of public services by religious organisations, both church and political spheres continue to operate with mutual benefits. To reinforce their legitimacy, state actors seek various channels to engage with the religious elite, in particular influential members of the clergy (Protestant and Catholic) because they can be either vital political allies or serious threats. Similarly, many members of the clergy have developed their influence by playing roles in the political sphere, such as the secular work of managing lucrative public institutions or giving religious approval to state decisions (Kitata, 2020). Both sides strive to survive through such reciprocal and undeclared partnerships. Through various turbulent national events, political transitions and leadership changes, church leaders have demonstrated that they can mobilise the masses as effectively as formal political opposition (Callaghan, 2023; Seay, 2013). Clerics and influential members of congregations are generally also perceived as an integral part of the political system rather than neutral actors (interview with SMGG, a DRC scholar, Bukavu, 3rd June, 2021). Today, as throughout the 20th century, politicians understand the spiritual, social and economic importance of the churches in the lives of the people (Prunier, 2001). Therefore, they tend to legitimise their actions and inactions by seeking support from the church. As one interviewed academic[81] put it:

> To palliate the vacuum and insecurity created by the lack of delivery on their manifesto, the political actors tend to seek an alliance with famous and politically influential churches and use biblical rhetoric [Interview with SMGG, a senior academic, Bukavu, 2nd June, 2021).

Political power in the DRC is negotiated between many stakeholders (Ande, 2010). Access to governmental leadership is often shaped through actors and systems that combine formal and informal understandings of the state. Relationships between key players and their political and religious networks can rapidly change from collaborative to conflictual depending on circumstance, public influence, and economic interests (Jager and Zogg, 2019). As I will show later, in the context of antagonism between the clergy and political elites these shifting dynamics can have deleterious consequences. The churches are often entangled in these processes.

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[81] SM is one of the distinguished and highly respected scholars in the DRC. He specialises in political affairs. He is known generally for his integrity in scholarly work. For example, when I interviewed him, he had just resigned from a significant research consulting work in which he thought he could not compromise his values and academic rigours.

Church leaders act as a resource for the leverage of political power (Wetho, 2006: p81). Since independence in 1960, there have been continuous interdependencies and interchanging interactions between clergy and political leaders. The collaboration between the RCC and the state offers religious leaders' space to influence governance structures, institutional policy, and decision-making (Mutombo-Mukendi, 2011). For example, senior religious leaders for both the RCC and ECC at national and provincial levels are often consulted for advice by the government authorities on various policy reforms [interview with DMSTK, a Non-Government Organisation (NGO) leader and an academic, Bukavu, 22nd November 2022].

The above interdependency between religious and political spheres are adaptable and not mutually exclusive. Although the church elites do recognise that their church members are not obliged to follow political leaders' vision and policies if these are contrary to moral and humanitarian requirements arising from biblical teachings, church leaders at times tend to transform religious discourse to accommodate governance issues and narratives in response to political issues (Interview with MRR, a civil society and political leader, Bukavu, June 2021). To mitigate such risks, politicians understand that their political speeches must be adapted to the lives of their electorate, with references to God and the Bible when engaging with the public and church audiences – a language that Christians and church leaders can easily understand.

The above practice has to a degree become institutionalised (Mutombo-Mukendi, 2011). Churches, institutions, and their communities act as bases for active solidarity through civic and political engagement and as centres for the mobilisation of financial resources. The churches' intimacy with the people may therefore often be used to support presidential election candidates at the national level or to instigate changes in social leadership. The network of Protestant churches, for example, supported former president Joseph Kabila in the 2006 and 2011 presidential elections. In return, they were rewarded with the presidency of the senate. These close relationships, some interviewees argued, have led to the legitimisation of policies that run contrary to establishing any lasting peace throughout the country (Interview with GRUGN, a senior government officer and peacebuilding expert, Kinshasa, 26th May 2021. Any implied acquiescence to inter-ethnic conflict rapidly becomes integrated into government policy and practices and its response to conflict (Mutombo-Mukendi, 2011). When the church aligns itself with the regime's position during episodes of conflict its independence is compromised.

Alliances are essential for political aspiration. I have shown in chapter five how informal religious movements reinforce and extend their aegis or affirm the credibility of their representation within the structures of power, while senior political actors are constantly seeking spiritual and prophetic guidance. A recent development comes into play here, with the advent of Neo-Pentecostal Christianity in the DRC, which has had what many see as a vibrant, dynamic, and transformative effect upon society. A noticeable fissure has opened between 'establishment' clergy (of the RCC and ECC) and the influential 'spiritual leaders' who head large Neo-Pentecostal congregations. The former, as we have seen, are close to state political institutions, but the new Pentecostal churches can now mobilise and engage very large gatherings during their "evangelisation and healing" events (Meyer, 2004). They have also developed a significant virtual presence via 'God's channel' satellite television and other social media platforms. These leaders reach out to transnational communities worldwide, while based in the DRC. Due to their pan-continental influence, political candidates have often sought their 'blessing and prophetical guidance'. For example, President Felix Tshisekedi Tshilombo travelled to various countries to request prayers and prophetic direction for his electoral campaign in 2018.[82] As one interviewee said, "to win an election they have to speak like the electors" [interview YSNK, senior military leader, Kinshasa, 28th May, 2021]. As president and head of state, Tshisekedi is also known for seeking guidance on diplomatic and economic decisions from several Pentecostal church leaders (Gras, 2023). On one hand, church elites aspire to influence politicians through their spiritual discourse, sermons, prayers and prophetic messages. On the other hand, not only are political leaders continuously seeking spiritual power (Ellis and Ter Haar, 2004) and protection, they also need to access a critical electorate. The latter can benefit from financial donations towards their church services.

Both types of Christian religious leaders constantly compete to be heard by their communities and to garner support from economically influential political leaders. It is public knowledge that many religious senior political actors erect a chapel/prayer room in their residences,[83] and some have access to private 'pastors' to offer advice on spiritual matters.[84] These churches seem to influence the public sphere as a problem-solving tool (Ludovic, 2021). Today, political leaders either adhere to these large Neo-Pentecostal churches or are themselves pastors. Prayer events in political institutions are not uncommon; indeed, I observed prayer sessions before I started many of my interviews with church and political leaders. Some interviewees who were critical of such a spiritual encounter argue that

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[82] See The DRC: President's Pastors [available online at
https://www.southworld.net/dr-congo-the-presidents-pastors/ accessed on 10th March 2023]
[83] During my field study, I witnessed some of these prayer rooms in Goma, Kinshasa and Bukavu
[84] Interview with a senior Evangelical Church Bishop from the Authentic World Mission in Brussels.

religion is another form of politics (Interview with NGBA, a theologian scholar, Goma, 6th May 2021). It enables mobilisation around ethnic alliance and to establish influence in society.

I have shown in Chapter five that tribal loyalties are an important resource to access power (political, economic, and religious). An important example is the Catholic Church's shifting of its initially antagonistic position to align with Mobutu's authoritarian regime in 1989. The death of Cardinal Albert Malula[85], in 1989 'offered' an opportunity for Mobutu to influence the Church hierarchy against a significant opposition group, the Union for Democracy and Social Progress (UDPS). Malula was replaced by a Mobutu loyalist, Mgr Frederic Etsou, of Mbandaka (Prunier, 2001). The church leadership under Mgr Etsou eased relationships between the church and Mobutu's regime. Etsou opposed anti-government protests and movements (Oyatambwe, 1997). Similarly, the ECC was at time led by Bishop Jean Ifoto Bokeleale, a native of Equator province as Mobutu and a one of his strongest allies (Longman, 1998). Mobutu seized on this ethnic and regionalism alliance with Etsou and Bokeleale to manipulate regional and tribally-based divisions, and the conflicting aspirations for political power (Longman, 2001). Mgr Etsou could not oppose or contradict Mobutu's government, and this meant he came to stand in opposition even to his own institution, CENCO (Longman, 1998).

Interdependence between clergy and political actors goes beyond cultural ties in the arguably avaricious desire for material wealth, and economic incentives have played a significant role in the interplay between clergy and political leaders. From my observations during field research, many religious leaders abstained from critiquing those wielding political power. Some suggested that various people from the RCC and ECC elite could be characterised as playing a critical role in politics in order to maximise material and financial benefits for themselves. In a range of regimes, heads of state are known for their tendency to offer donations to religious organisations (Longman, 2001) and such financial incentives have often led to competition among the clergy to access such advantages. Over time, the church hierarchy has benefited from the generosity of presidents. For example, in implementing his strategy, Mobutu recognised the power and influence of the churches (mainly RCC) by donating expensive vehicles to newly-ordained or influential bishops (Willame, 1997). ECC received a significant donation of important land in the capital city of Kinshasa, where it erected the Centennial Protestant Church building, the largest church structure in Africa (Hoffman, 1992). A new tradition was born as bishops competed with

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[85] He is celebrated as one of the pioneers of opposing the government. He was critical of Mobutu's authoritarian regime and particularly his restriction of RCC influence. In reaction, Mobutu nationalised religious schools, endorsed an Indigenous Religious Church (Kimbanguism), side-lined the RCC, and abolished religious studies in schools, ceremonies, and Christian names (Riviere, 1997). Malula went into exile.

other dignitaries of the Mobutu regime for such gifts (Oyatambwe, 1997). Growing up in the DRC, it is quite common to hear that President Mobutu offered substantial amounts of money to every ordained priest or bishop. Such a tradition was also practiced locally. Churches nationwide that resisted their national leaders' support of the government's political position received threats of funding cuts to support their services (Longman, 1998: p57). The aspiration to egregious levels of wealth was not only associated with politicians.

Frustrated by a conflict of leadership in his evangelical protestant church, one of my informants echoed his disapproval of a proposal by government officials to reform the church governance:

> As I don't clearly declare my support to the government, they ask me to create a 'democratic' and 'transparent' system of my church leadership, such as succession from my pastorship. It is absurd! This church is my baby, as I have started it from scratch. Now, it has thousands of members. The church's assets are a subject of envy. However, I have built it. Furthermore, my wife and I are their spiritual parents. I am the vision holder. How [can] something that evolved spiritually be thought of as being governed in such a way. [Interview with a senior clergy, AMSS, Kigali, 28th April 2021,]

Generally, unsurprisingly the clergy in the DRC tend to accommodate the established political order. My interviews and conversations consistently recorded clear expressions of respect and deference for those with political power. Often such respect was more associated with material expectations than the politician's authority. This symbiotic relationship was evident in symbols on display in senior church leaders' offices that usually contained the country flag, the ruling political party logo, photographs with senior political leaders, and the emblems of state institutions. In my observations in the highest national offices of both CENCO and ECC, I witnessed various photographic portraits of these churches' leaders and the country's president. I also noted various state medals of honour. Considering such visual displays, it seemed more like an office of state than of clergy, while these various unspoken indications of endorsement of the political dignitaries were expected to be returned by them in the form of favours [interview with NKYL, a civil society political leader, Bukavu, 7th June 2021].

The above phenomenon does not just relate to the past; during my field study, President Felix Tshisekedi reportedly offered a 4x4 Land Cruiser car to the head of the Roman

Catholic bishops' council, Bishop Donatien Nshole.[86] Such practices are not unique to the DRC or the Roman Catholic Church. Many politically influential Protestant church pastors in the eastern region benefited financially from Joseph Kabila's regime (Larcher, 2018) and, possibly as a result, the national leadership of Protestant churches, *Eglise du Christ au Congo* (ECC) was formed. ECC leaders offered their support to President Kabila when an offer to collaborate was rejected by the Catholic Church in 2018.

As this section has argued, mobilisation around economic and political power plays a key role in church leadership.

Illustrating a conflict over economic power within the Catholic church, one of the bishops interviewed shared his experience:

> ….It is a sensitive subject that has become a contentious issue with our diocese. Those who opposed my leadership were mainly concerned with two key things: money and senior roles and titles. In this case, the pursuit of finance and administrative power. Therefore, many were ready to do everything at their disposal. A thirst for power has often commanded the behaviours of my beloved colleagues in the clergy cycle. Such issues ruined our relationships (Interview with a Catholic bishop, JGN, Belgium, February 2021]

This unethical partnership has profound implications for the churches' attitude towards conflict in eastern Congo:

> The church and politics remain intertwined. There is a sense of reciprocal and coexistence based on expected mutual interests (political and economic). On one hand, there is a tendency for political leaders to seek endorsement of religious dignitaries as means to sustain their political power. On the other hand, religious leaders often see their closeness to political leaders as an opportunity to access material power [Interview with ALTG, former senior Catholic priest, Goma, 14th May 2021].

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[86] This news was reported by many national media sources including on mediacongo.net available at https://www.mediacongo.net/article-actualite-100503_felix_tshisekedi_offre_une_jeep_a_mgr_donatien_nshole_pour_faciliter_la_mobilite_dans_ses_itinerances_pastorales.html accessed on 16th December 2022]. One of the reasons such an event was reported in the news is, on one hand, to show that this leader is acting against the expected normative ethics and religious moral standards of upholding the values of integrity. On the other hand, accepting such 'gifts' suggests that the church is acting contrary to its principles of 'moral authority' in Congolese society. This would not be 'big news' if such 'gifts' were offered to a politician. It would be standard practice.

Based on these mutual interests, the clergy often prefer to compromise or reconcile when interacting with political leaders than confront them. Church leaders' contestations against the state political process therefore tend to remain sporadic. Their independence tends to be significantly limited. When their actions to pursue peace appear to contradict with the established order their protestations generally remain superficial and lack substance and strength. The quote below in Swahili by one of the retired prominent religious leaders illustrates the implication of the interdependency between political and religious leaders on conflict resolution:

> Something to know is that, as political leaders, clergy too are desperate to mobilise supporters from the people. Politicians have a rhetoric that attracts people. When clergy have interests to lose by contradicting the politicians, they cannot speak the truth. They cannot act independently or challenge political actors in case the latter is a party in conflict. [Interview with FNGBG, Goma, 26th April 2021]

FNGBG is one of the most influential religious leaders in the DRC. He is well-known nationally as an influential religious leader. His declaration carries particular significance. He is retired: perhaps this status provides him more freedom to be objectively critical of the church leaders across the country. He is an expert in conflict issues in the Kivus. To illustrate his influence, while I was interviewing him his phone rang. He demanded to interrupt the interview. Following the phone call, he informed me that the call was from the country's president seeking advice on bringing peace to North Kivu.

Despite FNGBG's own apparent advisory status at the highest level, the views above confirm significant obstacles in religious leaders playing a constructive role in conflict resolution. An illustrative example of inter-reliance and its potential impact on clergy can be seen in the following case.

Following the Sun City Inclusive and Global Peace Agreement[87] in 2003, a new constitution was enacted as part of the post 'second war' transition government. The process introduced various institutional reforms, including a decentralisation policy to provide local and provincial institutions with certain autonomy, power, and control (Englebert and Mungongo, 2016). New rural district councils, referred to as '*communes*', were created for certain

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[87] Between March and April 2002, Sun City, South Africa, hosted a peace process (the Inter-Congolese Dialogue) to end wars that involved six African countries and a dozen of rebel groups. The rebel leaders and the Kinshasa government agreed to end the war. An outcome of their agreement was a formation of a transitional government that lasted two and a half years. This transition process was presided over by Joseph Kabila and assisted by four vice presidents.

territories with significantly limited access to administrative services and where there seemed to be fast-growing populations (Bezares, Englebert and Jené, 2018), including in the area of Minembwe in South Kivu, a homeland of the Banyamulenge people. The decision to officialise Minembwe as a *commune* became contentious and at the heart of local and national politics (Mathys and Verweijen, 2020). Consequently, the policy led to an escalation in tensions and increased violence between Banyamulenge and other neighbouring tribes (Bafuliru, Banyindu and Babembe). National political elites competing for control inflamed the violence by mobilising armed groups and local people to rally around the idea of ethnic identities and to prevent the *commune* from being installed (Mathys and Verweijen, 2020) because it would generally benefit the Banyamulenge.

The controversy over this official inauguration of Minembwe as a '*commune*' became a political instrument that mobilised leaders from all backgrounds, including Christian clergy.[88] This tense debate exploited the deep-rooted uncertainties that represent the exclusionary idea of 'indigenousness' versus 'settlers' (Mamdani, 2001) which sees certain minority groups as racially not 'Congolese' enough. A senior bishop of Uvira, Mgr Muyengo, aligned himself with ethno-populist political view to actively oppose the installation of this local district council, which is, ironically, among his archdioceses.[89] Bishop Muyengo mobilised people through his engagement in the media to support an existing conspiracy theory that suggested the idea of establishing the *commune* was a path towards 'Balkanisation' and an opportunity for the Banyamulenge to acquire 'indigenous' rights' (Mugabe and Ndahinda, 2022). I will reflect on this in a discussion on the clergy's public and political statements. Many argue that this position of the Christian clergy gives support to ethno-nationalist rhetoric in order to seek popularity and influence, and to express loyalty to the government. Many in civil society believe Bishop Muyengo's leadership faced local and internal opposition. As with populist politicians, he seeks support from communities and church congregations to prevent systemic divisions to compensate for his unpopularity. In this way, such a contentious political debate on the link between the district of Minembwe becomes an interest and a resource to mobilise people around a common issue. Bishop Muyengo justified his position and actions as fulfilling his role in context of the Church at Centre of Village (CCV) concept.

The above analysis shows that despite the claim by the clergy of being apolitical, there is an ongoing relationship based on shared or aspired interests. The idea of the CCV is used by

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[88] Congo digital. Available on : https://africa.la-croix.com/en-rd-congo-leveque-duvira-sexprime-sur-la-nouvelle-commune-de-minembwe/ accessed on 30th March 2023.
[89] Okapi radio. Available on [https://www.radiookapi.net/2020/11/20/actualite/securite/affaire-commune-de-minembwe-leveque-duvira-sous-menaces-de-mort] accessed on 29th March 2023

the clergy in this context to justify a position that aligns with state actors by claiming that the Church has a 'moral' duty to address social-political issues affecting most ethnic groups. However, the CCV can also legitimatise the inaction and indifference towards the violence. The apolitical approach in this context may claim that ethnic conflict is politically induced and, therefore, a matter outside the realm of religion [interview with SMGG, Bukavu, 2nd June 2021]. This scholar, SMGG, interviewed argued that:

> Such ambiguous claims often create an environment of insecurity in relinquishing powers and social hierarchy, sustaining unresponsiveness in conflict and violence. Such a phenomenon tends to produce justification or concealment of tacit support for political power that induces conflict. These indifferent positions by clergy appear to exploit powers and fail to develop values that can be transformative conflict situations [Interview with SMGG, a scholar, 2nd June 2021].

The content of this statement from Prof SMGG is central to this chapter's key arguments. The following discussions will provide details to support the views expressed. In the following sections, I examine the interactions between clergy and state power and how it obstructs their independence in conflict resolutions.

6.2.1 Clergy and political leaders – antagonism and partnership

In this section, I discuss specific situations where the clergy opposes or collaborate with political leadership. Such contradictory relationship between church and state is not new. It seems as it was more prominent in the post-independence period (Oyatambwe, 1997). I would now like to expand and show that this phenomenon continues to impact church leaders' role in the conflict. I argue that the church has missed opportunities to use their potential opposition force as a tool to address the grassroot social economic issues and conflict.

Considering its influence in Congolese society, the central government tends to associate the Church as a partner. Otherwise, as discussed above, the RCC would mediate between an incumbent government and the opposition. When the Church relinquishes these functions, it seeks alternative political action, such as opposing a political leadership. For example, a group of *laïcs*[90] approached Cardinal and Archbishop of Kinshasa, Joseph-Albert

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[90] Literally, 'laics' mean 'seculars'. They are dedicated members of the RCC as well as intellectuals and professionals in secular affairs (public and private institutions). These individuals form the most significant and influential church civil society. It is a cross-country network of political activists and RCC supporters. Coordination

Malula, in 1965 to demand that he denounce mass atrocities committed by the regime of Mobutu (Boyle, 1992). Malula responded that they must recognise that Mobutu's authority comes from God. Therefore, the Church should mind its own business (Cheeseman, 2015: 73). Later, in 1990, the Church became progressively closer to the Mobutu regime and went as far as sharing power. There were intermittent governments with the significant presence of laïcs personalities and other senior public service domains (Oyatambwe, 1997). During this period, the Church supported President Mobutu's authoritarian rule (Boyle, 1992) despite their knowledge of disturbing human rights abuses and the violent and venal suppression of any opposition (Mutombo-Mukendi, 2011). The analysis will later discuss and further illustrate this continuous role between allyship and the government, mediators in the national political conflict and resistance to the incumbent regime (Cheeseman, 2015).

I want to return to tensions between church and state in early 1990s. The RCC is credited for its efforts and actions that contributed significantly to the end of President Mobutu's dictatorship and triggered the beginning of a democratic process in the early 1990s. On 16th February 1992, the RCC clergy organised the famous 'march of hope' (*March d'Espoir*)[91] in the capital city, Kinshasa. This demonstration of over a million people (De Dorlodot, 1994), wearing Christian symbols and carrying crosses, demanded that Mobutu re-open the National Sovereign Conference (CNS) that would have led to a transitional government, but which had been brutally interrupted by Mobutu himself as he realised the CNS was getting influence and had a potential to challenge his leadership (Oyatambwe, 1997). The clergy and their supporters, *laïcs* and the general Christian population resisted the violent pressure from Mobutu's security services, despite many deaths.[92] Despite this violent outcome, the pressure applied to Mobutu's rule led to a resumption of CNS work and influence which had been interrupted a few months earlier. As a result, the CNS was re-opened, marking a hugely important victory for demonstrators and the RCC clergy. The CNS illustrates well both clergy antagonism and collaboration with political leaders and a direct implication of RCC and ECC elite in a debate on ethnic identity.

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of 'laïcs' originated from an attempt by the Vatican to separate the Church and politics by delegating the political action of the Church to the *laïcs*. The Congolese' *laïcs* are dynamic local community actors claiming to "serve the evangelical mission of the RCC church" and establish ecclesiastical political movements in line with the Canonical Code of 1983. The *laïcs* are an 'instrument' for the socio-political mission of the Church and can be seen as a means of maintaining its political power and influence.

[91] The protest was referred to as a Christian demonstration. It brought together thousands of people with Christian symbols and dressed as Catholic priests. Protesters demonstrated determination to stand against the harsh and autocratic regime of Mobutu to demand political change.

[92] The security forces including the Special Presidential Guards (DSP) used violence to stop thousands. Security forces used violence to block the demonstrators and killed between 13 and 49 people (Lanotte, 2010; Boyle, 1992). The violent response prompted rumours about the outbreak of civil war as the political situation deteriorated

As result, RCC clergy spearheaded the CNS debate between 1990 – 1992. CNS was referred to by several scholars and NGO leaders with whom I have engaged with during the field study as a relevant paradigm that enables an examination of RCC senior clergy as pressure group for the democratic transition process of the early 1990s. As mentioned above, CNS outcomes appear directly connected to the factors of the identity crisis in eastern Congo from the mid-1990s to the present. I contend in fact that many influential church leaders tacitly supported the political processes that endorsed ethnonationalism and the populist politics that animated the CNS and the ethnic identity-related violence in eastern Congo. This claim was taken up by several interviewees, including this political activist:

> The CNS significantly triggered the ethnic crisis that affected the DRC in the last 30 years. However, the clergy had a significant role in the character and outcome of the conference. While the RCC senior leaders have not caused the ethnic crisis, there is no evidence to show that they were publicly against the conditions that led to it [Interview with ZGS, a political opposition leader, Kinshasa, 28th May 2021].

Within the CCV justification, the Catholic church seized political opportunity offered by participation in the CNS. Many RCC leaders joined civil society street movements, social pressure groups, and forums (Longman, 2001; Buhuzo, 2020; Mutombo-Mukendi, 2016). However, in a collapsing economy, Mobutu resisted the new political environment of multipartyism (Ntantamika, 2021, Ruhimbika, 2001). Several priests from the RCC produced a memorandum addressed to the head of state challenging his policy and political regime (Longman, 2001). Mobutu eventually proclaimed the Third Republic, ending monopartyism and the MPR party's hegemony, and ushering in the prospect of a nascent democratic state in the DRC (Gossens, 2000: 246).

The relationship between the RCC and the Mobutu regime was particularly tense between 1990–1997 with some periods of collaboration. Following the death of the archbishop of Kinshasa, Cardinal Malula, Bishop Etsou[93] became a cardinal. His tribal alliance with Mobutu (Prunier, 2001) magnified the relationship between the church and Mobutu's rule (Larcher, 2018) among political opposition and within RCC leadership. However, despite Cardinal Etsou as its head, the remainder of the church emerged as a dynamic node within civil society to pressure Mobutu to accept a governmental transition process. This and similar forms of tribal loyalty have become accepted without any basis in law.

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[93] Cardinal Etsou has been mentioned several times through this discussion. Due to his tribal loyalty to President Mobutu, he created a different dynamic in the church opposition to Mobutu's presidency. He opposed his own institution to support Mobutu.

The RCC faced a series of internal conflicts in 1990. There was division between the lower echelons of the clergy and the elite. In early 1991, young priests, supported by the church-based Amos Group,[94] *laics* and the Christian community in Kinshasa, organised a series of demonstrations on 21st April 1991 to demand a CNS (Willame, 1997). However, as stated above, Cardinal Etsou was loyal to President Mobutu in early April (Oyatambwe, 1997: p111) and advised his priests to avoid anti-government protests; he was concerned about the confusion between a secular and Christian engagement (Oyatambwe, 1997). In response, his priests in Kinshasa decided to write a letter to President Mobutu and, in response to this, the cardinal suspended all political activities and the work of the Amos group. The momentum opened up further political crisis at the national level.

In early August 1991, the CNS was re-launched. Archbishop of Kisangani Mgr Monsengwo[95] was designated as head of the CNS, the most prominent institution which was assigned the responsibility for reforming the political system in the DRC. He immersed himself in the political antagonism of Mobutu, whose power was fading, and a fragmented opposition whose members originated mainly from the post-colonial elite (*les evolués*), who had emerged from the Mobutu political system they were fighting.

Cardinal Archbishop Monsengwo's position towards Mobutu changed. He became a partner rather than an opposition and shifted from his claimed neutral position to becoming support Mobutu's government. He had initially promoted an image of an independent mediator in the context of the church in the centre of a village (CCV) and was determined to use such authority to establish a new political vision for the country. During the field study, a senior RCC leader defended the challenging position of Monsengwo:

> He was under pressure and understood the weight of his responsibility and the historical legacy that awaited him from the Congolese people. It is important to remember that Mobutu was an autocratic leader. It was not easy to bring him to accept the proposed democratic change. He needed to align with him to engage diplomatically with him [Interview with NSL, an RCC Bishop and one of the senior leaders of the DRC national council of RCC bishops. Kinshasa, 28th May 2021].

One of the leading African scholars in theology, KMKM, challenged Bishop NSL's argument arguing that personal and private interests may have played a role in Cardinal Archbishop

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[94] One of the most important RCC based human rights organisations in the then Zaire (DRC).
[95] Bishop Monsengwo later became a cardinal and archbishop of Kinshasa.

Monsengwo's position:

> While the CNS was going on, Monsengwo regularly travelled to meet President Mobutu at his private residence in Gbadolite. His role rapidly assimilated into the politics of power during the crucial period of tribal-based crises and regional geopolitics and opportunism. The archbishop entangled himself between a dictatorial regime and an opposition whose ambition was to acquire power. He embroiled himself in seeking honour, public image, and fame. The trust that the people had in this man of God declined. He became an ecclesiastic beast among political beasts. He lost the moral authority and spiritual leadership that constituted his main source of legitimacy in the political sphere [Interview with Professor KMKM, a leading theologist in Africa. KMKM has written extensively on religion and politics, Goma, 28th April 2021].

While the above comment aligns with the popular perception at the time, others like Bishop NSL argue that the democratic transition could not have been achieved without such political engagement with Mobutu (Interview with NSL, a senior clergy of RCC, Kinshasa, 27th May 2021). I want to move forward to a slightly different example of clergy antagonism with the government.

More than two decades later following the CNS, the RCC again demonstrated its power and influence as a political resource for the Congolese population. President Joseph Kabila's 2015 bid to continue for a third term had faced widespread resistance and this resistance was supported by the RCC. The Catholic Church had already rejected the presidential election results as fraudulent and therefore invalid (Okapi Radio, 2011). Cardinal Monsengwo, of the RCC, issued what became a famous public message in the Congolese political narrative that: "it is time that the mediocre leave power and offer space for peace and justice" (CRG and Ebuteli, 2022: p11). Public demonstrations intensified and turned violent in various regions, resulting in the death of at least 43 people (Human Rights Watch, 2016). As a result, a draft law designed to enable Kabila to extend his mandate beyond the constitutional arrangement failed. Kabila was ousted.

The CENCO[96] conference of 2016 also agreed plans for a transitional government that would include a prime minister from the opposition. The bishops' role in brokering peace was welcomed by both the opposition and people across the country, demonstrating its

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[96] As explained above, CENCO is the acronym for the organisation of the Roman Catholic leadership in the DRC.

prominent position. However, Kabila failed to implement the peace accord and the RCC concluded that Kabila had no genuine intention of relinquishing power. A new opposition of RCC clergy to the government re-emerged. The church leaders mobilised the people again and issued a statement[97] on 23rd June 2017. One of the CENCO leaders excoriated the leadership: "We will not accept the fact that a minority of people in the leadership has decided to hold millions of Congolese people as hostages. It is unacceptable! We must take responsibility for our destiny."[98]

A series of political demonstrations between government and opposition supporters took place, often involving violence against church buildings and individuals. For Kabila supporters, the church was considered a legitimate target due to its failure in building peace and reconciliation (Larcher, 2018). However, ultimately, the intensive and combined pressure, from oppositional groups, the churches and the international community, produced a positive result and Kabila was ousted from power in 2018. It was another seminal moment where the RCC clergy's opposition contributed to political leadership change.

To summarise, the clergy in the DRC have demonstrated their capacity to mobilise church followers and the general population to seek accountability from the leading political class. They rather use their spiritual authority as a resource to influence political spheres. The RCC has been actively involved in political engagements through the *laïcs*. The priority of the church clergy in opposing the government remains to instigate changes to issues of national importance, such as elections, governance and the opening of political spaces. The antagonism between church and state also acts as a hindrance to clergy independence in playing an impartial role. In this case, political leaders would use the CCV to challenge the clergy to avoid politics. On one hand, the clergy would evoke the CCV to justify their inaction to address ethnic violence. On the other, religious leaders would claim to play a prophetic role by resisting against the government on behalf of the people. In a constructive sense, the expression 'Prophetic voice' is universal in theological scholarship (Gunda, 2009; Rutagambwa, 2020). It is often referred to in the DRC as an expectation of church leaders' role as the 'adult' in the family in the context of conflict or injustices. Based on the above definition, neither the use of CCV nor prophetic voice expressions are accurately represented but seem rather to legitimise clergy opposition the government.

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[97] CENCO, Debout Congolais! Le pays va très mal!, Mission et Migrations, disponible sur https://missionetmigrations.catholique.fr/sinformer/afri- que/295787-debout-congolais-pays-va-tres-mal/.
[98] RDC: la CENCO exige la tenue des élections en 2017. Congo Reformes. Available at [https://congoreformes.com/rdc-la-cenco-exige-la-tenue-des-elections-en-2017/ accessed on 24th March 2023]

6.2.2 Clergy as political mediators

Religious leaders are frequently involved in national political conflict as mediators. There is substantial literature on the role of the clergy in the peace process in many cases of conflict across the globe. In the DRC, the clergy's attempts at moving toward peace take place in the context of facilitating mediation either between the government and rebel leaders, or between political groups and the government in cases of an impasse within political institutions. While the mediation role by the church elite could fit well with the CCV concept, the motives of such implication tends to be rather political (Kä Mana, 2000).

The RCC and ECC clergy have contributed significantly to some of the major national political dialogues. In 2002–2003 the RCC and ECC leaders, in conjunction with other civil society actors, contributed to a Comprehensive Peace Agreement, which was drafted in support of the Inter-Congolese Dialogues (ICD) in South Africa. As a result, most parties in conflict agreed to end what Prunier called 'the Africa World War' (Prunier, 2011). More recently in 2016, negotiations led by Congo's National Conference of Catholic Bishops (CENCO) helped facilitate political dialogues at *St Sylvestre*,[99] leading to a political agreement that brought together leaders from all backgrounds across the country. Shortly before the *St Sylvestre* agreement, the RCC took a radical position in favour of the 2006 constitution that limited the presidential term to two years. Some of the facilitators of the *St Sylvestre* agreement, such as Cardinal Ambongo and Bishop Nshole, continue to play a pivotal role in national political debates.

The above involvement seems crucial to further responsibilities. Their role has been to facilitate dialogue among different factions, but this position is also used to provide church leaders with an opportunity to enhance their political profile; indeed, this role often serves as a route into formal politics, as confirmed by several senior religious leaders from the RCC or ECC church leaderships whom I interviewed. Their involvement in the peace process in Sun City, South Africa, led to their subsequent political trajectory:

> Church leadership can be a steppingstone to accessing high-profile peace talks; later, this opportunity serves as an endorsement or credentials of becoming a

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[99] In 2016, many signs showed that President Joseph Kabila planned to hold onto power. He attempted to run for another term beyond the country's constitutional provision. The situation led to a crisis between his government, political opposition and the RCC. The RCC leaders-initiated peace talks, at a place called Saint Sylvester, between the Kabila political coalition and the opposition. In December 2016, the peace process reached a peaceful solution. It became known as the *St Sylvestre* agreement, which defined a new path toward national elections.

politician. Because of the expected normative nature of leading a church and the notion of the Church at the Centre of a Village (CCV), there is often an expectation that church leaders have the potential to act as mediators [Interview with EBYB, a lawyer, pastor and an expert in peacebuilding: Goma, 17th February 2022].

Many church leaders who took part in these dialogues also held important roles within some key national political institutions. Some senior ECC clergy became heads of important public offices; for example, the ECC Bishop Kuye wa Ndondo headed the national Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), whereas another ECC Bishop, Marini Bodho, became the senate president between 2003 and 2006. Under his leadership the country's new constitution was adopted and promulgated by the National Assembly. He has become the second most important authority in government. While he was president of the Senate, he remained the national president of the ECC. One of the interviewees raised concerns about conflict of interest:

> Participating in a peace process such as the Sun City peace accord provides an important status. It offers opportunity to access lucrative advantage in politics. However, as religious leaders, heading a critical institution such as the Senate, these august and generously remunerated posts do affect their moral authority and status as a spiritual leader and impartial actor in a divided society, limiting their abilities to act without political influence [Interview with ALTG, a former RCC priest, a scholar, and an expert in civil society peacebuilding, Gisenyi, 24th April, 2021].

Clergy engagement in these peace mediation processes has thus resulted in deeper entrenchment in government. I interviewed several church leaders who became members of parliament following their role in high profile mediations or simply having participated in national peace dialogue. Some had maximised this background to join the political opposition. Several interviewees suggested that over hundred members of parliament have a background in non-government's organisations (NGOs) and religious-based institutions. Some of these would have gained experience as professional peace makers. Notwithstanding the concerns mentioned above, there are many examples demonstrating the influence of the church – again particularly the RCC, in seeking short term peaceful solutions among the actors mentioned above.[100]

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[100] The chapter acknowledges, for example, the role of the RCC clergy in mediating President Kabila and political opposition in the context of the gridlock of government institutions. In this chapter, I also acknowledge the contribution of religious leaders in the peace process between 1998 – 2003 in South Africa.

Several former RCC and ECC church peace facilitators who had become political leaders described their views of their specific role. One influential pastor from Bukavu explained that:

> Being neutral was being part of the political game without being in the game – we could keep our neutrality by being within the game to influence positively. We have a calling to ensure that the politicians can act responsibly and are accountable to the people [Interview with KWND, one of senior leaders of the national Peace and Reconciliation Commission, Bukavu 3rd June 2021].

Another, an evangelical pastor, commented:

> We are 'called' to assist politicians too. The problem is that we have left politics to the unbelievers or those who do not practise Christianity. That is why we are in this mess. The difference between church leaders and politicians is blurred, as we are all leaders of society, but we know better what people need. We need to use our influence on politicians. When we invite them, they will not decline our invitation [Interview with BJJR, a senior national leader of ECC in eastern Congo, Bukavu, 2nd June 2021].

It appears that senior clergy see the political realm as their domain of influence. Both RCC and ECC churches and the state compete to influence the people and manage public and political institutions (Seay, 2013). As noted earlier, the RCC leaders have played an essential role in various constitutional crises at the central government level, confirming the reality of a strong influence within the social pressure groups.

This dynamic relationship provides a different explanation of what it means to be neutral, as implied in the concept of the CVV. While the aspiration of the clergy to play a role in the political sphere, as discussed earlier, may be influenced by the desire to access material wealth, there is a pragmatic stance from some religious leaders, justified as moral responsibility, that sees an absent Christian clergy within the political landscape as a serious lacuna. Such an understanding is perceived by many as itself another form of neutrality: there is a perception that for them to be neutral is to act as regulator of moral actions in the political sphere and ensure some degree of accountability. This interpretation is subject to different views.

In summary, the above discussion acknowledges the clergy's role as mediators of national peace talks between political actors on political matters. This function appears to be used in

accessing political influence. Generally, religious leaders in both the RCC and ECC see themselves as having a mission to exercise their duty as embodied in the CCV by which they ought to mediate between the ruling power and opposition. Here, there is an assumed neutrality of the church.

The following sections discuss how such a perceived notion of impartiality in the context of CCV is also applied when clergy are compliant. In the latter situation, there is pushback by the ruling power to remind the RCC and ECC elite that they should act in line with the CCV concept – remain silent and neutral. These entanglements, I argue, limit clergy independence in the resolution of inter-ethnic conflict.

6.2.3 Clergy subservient to the state

This section uses the National Electoral Commission (CENI) and CNS as illustrations of clergy subservience to the government. These examples were referred to most by scholars with whom I engaged with during my field study. They help to support the overall argument in this chapter by elucidating further evidence of the interchanging nature of the relationship between religious and political leaders, and how it affects conflict resolution. I want to start with the CENI and will reflect on CNS later.

In the past eight years, high ranking members of the church have led the CENI[101], an institution whose authority determines the transparency and legitimacy of national elections. Such authority raises a wide range of expectations of the church regarding political stability and peace. During the transition period around 2003, among various institutions seeking to enable the democratic process, a national Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and the National Electoral Commission (CENI) were set up.[102] A new 'system', again involving church leaders presiding over CENI, was introduced by Joseph Kabila[103] and has now

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[101] RD-Congo : les confessions religieuses encore divisées sur le choix du président de la Céni. Accessible online at la-croix.com see https://www.la-croix.com/Religion/RD-Congo-confessions-religieuses-encore-divisees-choix-president-Ceni-2021-07-29-1201168482 [accessed on 23rd June 2023] Or « L'Eglise a été l'un des acteurs-clés de l'émergence de la démocratie en RDC » available online at https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2023/01/31/l-eglise-a-ete-l-un-des-acteurs-cles-de-l-emergence-de-la-democratie-en-rdc_6159940_3212.html [accessed on 23rd June 2023]

[102] DRC constitutional law number 10/013 of 28th July 2010 on the functions of the CNI. Modified law n° 13/012 du 19 of April 2013 and n° 21/012 of 3rd July 2021. Chapter 3, art 10.

[103] The electoral law (no 21/012 of the 3rd July 2021, article 24 bis) recommends that the CENI should be led by a committee that includes a president designated by civil, social and religious groups, a deputy president nominated by the ruling party, another vice president nominated by the opposition, a rapporteur from the ruling party, a second rapporteur from the opposition, a questor from the opposition and his deputy from the ruling political group. Religious groups at CENI are represented by a Catholic, a protestant, a Kimbanguist (a Christian religion), an orthodox, a Muslim, someone from African independent churches and one from revival churches.

become accepted. While the constitution of 18th February 2006 disbanded the TRC, like CENI, it was nevertheless headed by the clergy.[104] Under the idea of CCV, the DRC governance institutions accommodate religious groups in playing a role in the leadership of CENI.[105] In the unstable political system of the DRC, the involvement of the church can determine the presidential election winner. One of the interviewees echoed this:

> Involving a religious leader as president of CENI is more political than constitutional. It has become a new form of electoral strategy for a ruling party to ensure control and influence over who leads the CENI. Constitutionally, CENI must remain independent from external influence, but how its leaders are chosen shows their lack of independence [Interview with BMBY, an investigative journalist and former employee of the Senate 2nd August 2022].

The constitution of the DRC does not explicitly extend special provisions for religious leaders to lead the CENI. The reality, however, is that continuing the precedent of church involvement is politically expedient for the existing secular authorities (Interview with BMBY, a political analyst, Kinshasa, 27th May 2021). In 2006, during the first presidential elections in the DRC, Kabila decided to nominate his former adviser, a priest, Abbé Malu Malu, as the head of CENI. Controversially, Priest Malu Malu initially took over a role as representative of civil society. However, there was a wide perception that his closeness with President Joseph Kabila led to a decline in his credibility. He oversaw enormous financial resources to organise national elections and he had access to economic benefits for himself as ally to President Joseph Kabila (International Crisis Group, 2015). It became clear who would win the presidential elections and Malu Malu subsequently emerged as a designated expert during the Global and Inclusive Peace Agreement in Sun City (2002 – 2003) (Larcher, 2018).

Having a religious leader as head of the CENI has potential to inhibit critical political debate for three major political reasons. Firstly, it can provide credibility and legitimacy for the CENI institution among much of the population. Secondly, the mindful selection of a church leader as head of the CENI tends to antagonise ECC and RCC leaders and the Independent Initiated Churches – minimising pressure against the ruling power. Finally, it generally enables the ruling president during elections and makes it very likely he will win:

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[104] During the field study, I had the privilege to interview and observe a former president of the TRC.
[105] CENI is a political body with a similar profile to the senate and national assembly.

In 2006, before the presidential elections, suddenly, we witnessed something unusual. President Joseph Kabila converted to Catholicism and later had a wedding service in a Catholic church. Later, the president selected someone from the same church. In 2011, President Joseph Kabila organised many religious activities within the ECC (Methodist). Today, we can see a similar phenomenon where the CENI president is from an Indigenous Christian church: the current president's tendencies promote this religious group [Interview with EBYM, a lawyer, pastor and expert in peacebuilding, Goma, 13rd May 2021].

Despite the clergy's accepted role in overseeing the national elections, the institution of CENI has been at the centre of critical views and allegations of election fraud and corruption.[106] The trust in church leaders at the head of the CENI seems to be dissipating (Accord, 2019). My own observations were that, while the clergy is complicit, this method can be seen as political manoeuvring to exploit people's perception of the clergy's authority as a strategy to establish trust in the electoral process and influence the outcome of the election. Clergy leadership of CENI has also of course created rivalries between religious leaders from different denominations, perhaps confirming the perception that church leaders of all kinds are motivated more by political power and wealth than by spirituality. One academic Congolese interviewee affirmed that:

Following each presidential election, the lives of all the former heads of CENI seem transformed. They have either enriched themselves or have benefitted from various financial advancements. It is clearly visible. We can see the changes [Interview with a scholar and leader of a Non-Government Organisation (NGO), DMST, Bukavu, 3rd June 2021].

Leaders of the CENI tend to come from mainly the RCC and ECC (being the largest religious groups demographically) depending on a president's preference. However, according to some interviewees, in some cases politicians may face challenges to manipulate the RCC leaders corporately. As discussed earlier, the RCC for example has had an effective role in brokering dialogues that led to an electoral process (Kitata, 2020). According to several interviewees, many political leaders found RCC opposition challenging

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[106] All presidential elections results (2006, 2011 and 2018) were disputed in constitutional courts. There have been independent reports to suggest a lack of transparency and fraud. Below is some evidence available online [https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/fraud-allegations-cast-shadow-over-dr-congo-election-success] accessed on 10th March 2023. [https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/02/01/how-washington-got-on-board-with-congos-rigged-election-drc-tshisekedi-kabila-great-lakes/] accessed on 10th March 2023

and would rather search for alternative religious groups such as the ECC or an Indigenous Initiated Church (referred to as Kimbanguist). An expert lawyer argued that:

> While both RCC and ECC leaders are susceptible to political manipulation, RCC still maintains a certain degree of resistance to corruption and influence from politicians. RCC clergy inflexibility has led political leaders to find another solution – collaborate with ECC [Interview with MKND, an author, a constitutional lawyer, and human rights activist, 24th August, 2022]

Indeed, in 2010, President Kabila considered a Protestant pastor, Ngoy Mulunda, without the approval of the RCC. In the same way, in 2005, Corneille Nangaa, a Protestant church *laic,* was elected as president of the CENI even though the RCC had rejected his candidature. The RCC started finding themselves with waning CENI influence; in 2019, following the 2018 presidential elections, the RCC and ECC allied in the hope that, with their diverse majority, they could impose their choice of CENI president. They succeeded in opposing a decision by parliament, dominated by members of former president Joseph Kabila, to designate Rosard Malonda[107] as head of the CENI. However, the RCC and ECC failed to elect one of their two candidates against Pastor Kadima, a leader of an independently initiated church (Prophet Simon Church). Kadima was put forward by the current president, Felix Tshisekedi (Serwat, 2023), and was supported by a coalition of relatively minor religious groups in the DRC. It was not a random choice but a calculated political strategy to influence the elections in the face of RCC and ECC resistance. Not only does such a position for Kadima significantly influence Tshisekedi as head of state, but it also sets a precedent where the ruling power can boycott the RCC and ECC if it finds another type of religious leader. In this sense, religion becomes a tool for sustaining political power rather than an impartial actor.

The idea of involving church leaders in the CENI is multifaceted. Political actors understand religious leaders' influence on society and their potential to enable politicians access to

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[107] During the first two years of President Tshisekedi, there was an ongoing obstacle relating to the control of power between President Tshisekedi's coalition, *Cap pour le Changement* (CACH), and the former President Kabila's coalition, *Front Commun Congolais* (FCC). Both alliances had agreed to govern the country together in coalition. However, FCC had maintained significant influence over important state institutions. The shared leadership system created conflicts between the FCC and CACH about who would manage, control and influence critical national and provincial institutions. Ronsard Malonda was previously one of the senior leaders of CENI during Kabila's ruling power. The RCC and ECC members preferred his candidacy. However, Tshisekedi supporters accused Malonda of having a close relationship with President Joseph Kabila. Tshisekedi's coalition wanted to get their candidate, Pastor Kadima.

electoral bases. For example, having members of the clergy at the heads of the CENI appears to be a strategy to reassure people about the legitimacy of government institutions and the electoral process. This position limits the clergy's abilities to act in the context of CCV or as independent and impartial actors in conflict resolution; they may be compromised. In this case, the clergy has not necessarily acted upon what might be called the normative and ethical expectations of Congolese society. GERU, himself being a religious leader, argued that:

> I have strong doubts that it was possible to occupy such positions of responsibility within the state and still have the ability and desire to move society towards peace. For example, all the elections so far were perceived as contentious and controversial, all had significant irregularities [Interview with GERU, a senior director in Ministry of Environment, an expert in peacebuilding and religious leader, Kinshasa, 25th May, 2021].

The evidence above leads me to argue that pursuing a role in national politics is a major preoccupation of many of the most able religious leaders and that this political and concomitant economic pursuit has resulted in their withdrawal from substantive attempts to address and resolve conflict.

Religious leaders appear to lack independence due to conflicting interests. Furthermore, inter-ethnic conflict is a concern outside religious leaders' main priorities. I now want to apply this discussion on the CNS work to enhance an understanding of clergy and their subservience to the state and in response to the ethnic identity conflict.

While under the leadership of RCC[108], between 1990 and 1992, the CNS became preoccupied with the question of the 'dubious nationality' of people of Kinyarwanda expression (especially Tutsi) and the concept became a political commodity (Ndahinda, 2016). The CNS rejected their rights to citizenship (Ntantamika, 2021, Mokelwa, 2022). Members of parliament from the grand Kivu (South and North), animated by ethnonationalism and xenophobic sentiments, demanded that these people must be excluded from this national consultation (Mokelwa, 2022), and the CNS acquiesced. The debate rapidly inflamed hate speech against Congolese people who were Kinyarwanda speakers, especially the Tutsi[109] (Huggins, 2010).

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[108] In Chapter Seven, I will analyse clergy responses to various violent events including CNS related conflict.
[109] Tutsis are not the only Kinyarwanda speakers. There are Congolese Hutu people too

Among those excluded from the CNS were many Tutsi dignitaries. The most central figure affected by this exclusion was the senior Catholic Bishop, Mgr Patient Kanyamachumbi Semivumbi, to whom the concept of 'dubious citizenship' was applied. Ironically Bishop Kanyamachumbi was at the time general secretary of the National Council of Catholic Bishops (CENCO). During my field study, several Catholic Bishops shared corroborating testimonies. Some claimed that the failure of the church's moral and ethical guidance, as required by CCV, during this crucial period created a vacuum in adequate leadership to deter the ethnic conflict in eastern Congo:

> Excluding the Bishop from such national consultation was a political statement and endorsement of ethnonationalism politics by the Catholic church. The power corrupted the church. They lacked the courage to defend even their colleague. A general of such council of Congolese bishops is always a Congolese. Were they wrong in voting him in the first place? [Interview with ALTG, a former priest, an expert in peacebuilding, Goma, 4th May, 2021].

The sense of guilt may remain among some of the participants in these conferences. Several Catholic bishops participating attempted to justify their involvement and failure to stand for inclusive values, with one bishop telling me that: "political passion of the time was tense, and it was almost impossible to go against such rhetoric. If he had tried to stop the xenophobic movement and bring the national debate to principles of truth, justice and equity, there would have been violence" [Interview with an RCC Bishop NSL, Kinshasa, 24th May, 2021].

Referring to the same conference yet another bishop reflected: "I think he [Monsengwo] should have defended the sacred values" [interview with JSBMN, an RCC priest: Nairobi, 4th February 2021]. This juxtaposition of different views from RCC leaders show disagreement in what their role could have been during the CNS.

During this period, church leaders' influence over the future of the DRC was at its zenith. Cardinal Monsengwo became seen by many as a serious contender for the presidency since he was the de facto leader of the political opposition. The CNS ended its proceedings in 1992 when Mobutu conceded power-sharing with the church. He nominated Bishop Monsengwo to be head of a transitional government (HCR-PT) that involved opposition groups, in what was perhaps the first genuine move in decades towards political change and democratisation.

The parliament, under the leader of the RCC, Bishop Monsengwo, initiated a political commission addressing the 'dubious nationality' crisis.[110] In April 1995, the transition government published a parliamentary report, *Vangu Mambweni,* named after the chairman of the enquiry (Ruhimbika, 2001; Mokelwa, 2022). The report dismissed the previous recognition that the Banyamulenge and other Congolese Tutsis were Zairian nationals. It recommended expelling them and other 'migrants' who had come from Rwanda and Burundi (Stearn, 2013). Mambweni's claim was that Banyamulenge, and other Congolese Tutsis of North Kivu, were 'others' and came from Rwanda with a 'mission' to enslave indigenous Congolese people and forcibly steal their lands (Prunier, 2009; Huening, 2013). Tutsis in South and North Kivu again became victimised as a result of pseudo-scientific colonial race-based narratives. The distinctive physical features of the Tutsi, often associated with 'foreignness', saw them labelled as recent 'immigrants' who had in the Mambweni's mind acquired Congolese citizenship fraudulently (Eltringham, 2004). The report also recommended that the provincial authorities in North and South Kivu expropriate Tutsis' belongings (Nganguzi, 2020).

For many, the Mambweni report findings contributed to ethnic identity-based crisis in the Kivus and, between 1995 and 1996, violence against Congolese Tutsi in North and South Kivu (Prunier, 2001; Ntantamika, 2021) escalated. On 27th September 1996, vice governor Lwasi Lwabanji issued an ultimatum of six days to Banyamulenge to leave the DRC (Ruhimbika, 2001). The national government deployed eleven members of parliament to ensure the application of these requirements (Interview with ZGS, Kinshasa, 27th May 2021). Mass deportations and killings started in urban areas of both Kivu and Rwanda. Thousands became victims of vicious ethnic cleansing (Mokelwa, 2022; UN Mapping report, 2003: 77–169). Thousands of Congolese Tutsis were forcibly deported from the DRC to Rwanda or fled to other neighbouring countries, and others became stateless (Ruhimbika, 2001). In South Kivu, actions taken by Congolese authorities under the influence of Kivu politicians such as Anzuluni Bembe, who eventually became speaker of the Zairian Parliament (1989–1993), or Shweka Mutabazi,[111] the former *commissaire de zone* of Uvira, contributed to the downward spiral of armed conflicts in the early 1990s (Ruhimbika, 2001; Ntantamika, 2021).

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[110] Memorendum des Quarante Tutsi et Banyamulenge de Kinshasa addresse au Marechal Mobutu, President de la Republique du Zaire (Rutazibwa, 2023). See also copy of this archive document

[111] Anzuluni Bembe is a well-known former member of parliament and a native of Fzizi. Following the CNS, he became one of the senior leaders of the national transitional government assembly and later became president. The publication of the Vangu report led to violence and ethnic cleansing in eastern Congo. Whereas Shweka Mutabazi was a senior authority in South Kivu, he was the administrator of the territory of Uvira. Ngabo Lwabanji was a former deputy governor in the South Kivu provincial government. He is known for his infamous speeches calling for the mass deportation of the Banyamulenge to Rwanda. Both Mutabazi and Shweka were ordered to confiscate the belonging and properties of the Banyamulenge. These events led to mass killings and partly instigated the war in 1996.

This policy of exclusion triggered violence in both North and South Kivu, in areas inhabited by Tutsis (Ruhimbika, 2001). As result, towards the end of 1990, confronted by unemployment and discrimination, many Congolese Tutsis joined the rebellion of the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) who were fighting against the Hutu-dominated Rwanda government under President Juvenal Habyarimana. Eventually, regional factors coalesced with these internal dimensions, propelling the country into the first and second Congo wars.

> Cardinal Monsengwo and other clergymen facilitated the ensuing debate on the findings and their resolutions. Only a few participants raised their heads to reject the heinous and incendiary nature of the parliamentary decisions. The silence of RCC and Protestant clergy was deafening. Within Monsengwo role as CCV guardianship, the Church had the opportunity to prevent the subsequent ethnic identity conflict crisis of 1996–1997 (Interview with KBDG, a former priest, Kigali, 25th April 2021).

The above view was echoed by another interviewee, YSKG. He took part briefly in the CNS and briefed the CNS political commission to challenge extremist policies. He argued that:

> The CNS and its aftermath policies on citizenship led to ethnic cleansing in eastern Congo. It was a moment for RCC and ECC to rise and deter what seemed like a storm of violence. RCC clergy had challenged President Mobutu's dictatorship regime and successfully influenced him to accept governance reform. As they had such power and influence, they were more than capable of preventing the politics of ethnic identity that dominated the CNS and its aftermath and contributed significantly to the crisis that continues to affect the country today [Interview with YSNK, a senior military leader, 15th February, 2022].

While Monsengwo established political legitimacy for the church through the transition process, he faced challenges from various opposition, including his own church. Prof KMKM suggested that:

> He has become part of the political establishment. He was able to block the publication of reports concerning political assassinations, political affairs, and the embezzlement of public resources. Even the RCC laics, members of the civil society and political class and other RCC clergy challenged his leadership as he became significantly influential and close to the central government leadership. They accused

161

him of blocking specific reforms [Interview with Professor KMKM, a theology scholar, Goma, 24th April 2021].

The above comments show important obstacles faced by the RCC and ECC leaders. On one hand, their independence was constrained by the interchanging relationship between church and the state actors. On the other hand, an internal conflict within the RCC clergy regarding Cardinal Monsengwo's closeness with Mobutu seems to have impacted on unity and a concerted voice.

Generally, the views from my various respondents show that there was an expectation, under the CCV requirements, that the RCC clergy had an important platform and could have attempted to enlighten the political environment so dominated by ethnonationalism. It was the crucial period when political events and rhetoric triggered a crisis that denied the political rights and, in the end, the human rights of hundreds of thousands of specific members of Congolese society. The absence of religious leaders' moral guidance on this issue may have set the tone for future inaction. As in the case of Rwanda during the 1994 genocide of Tutsis, people from all backgrounds expected and sought help to establish ethical authority and direction form religious leaders. The clergy appear to have entirely missed the opportunity to apply constructively and without political aspirations the idea of CCV (church at the centre of a village) to maximise their influence on politicians to prosecute peace in eastern Congo.

6.3   Conclusion

The analysis in this chapter raises issues of a symbiotic relationship between church clergy and the state. This phenomenon produces several outcomes. Firstly, instead of serving as unbiased actors, the church elite are preoccupied by challenging the central government leaders on matters of national interest such as elections and political spaces, acting as mediators between political groups or else showing compliance with political powers. Secondly, as politics have tended to involve various degrees of tribalism, church leadership has frequently embedded the racial and ethnic prejudices of church members and their respective communities and the *laïcs.* Thirdly, the type of relationship that religious leaders establish with the state at any given time determines if and how they can play an influential role in peace-making in eastern Congo. In such contexts, the private interests and actions of individual church leaders, which often involve the pursuit of material wealth, tend to conflict with the claimed church values of playing a prophetic role.

The chapter shows that RCC and ECC leaders' positions changed depending on political situations and the influence of key political actors. Their intimacy with the government increased their dependence on the political institutions and diminished their potentially constructive role in conflict resolution. Indeed, the dependence character of the churches' role could be argued to have become a potentially destructive and malevolent force. The chapter has shown that as in politics, religious leaders can misuse their power to support corruption and divisive ideologies.

While I have shown that the churches consistently engaged and competed over the power to deliver public services, their closeness to politicians led the clergy to focus on matters of national power. Catholics and Protestants were never a homogeneous religious group. However, as leaders and when engaging politics, they are motivated by similar aspirations and tend to operate together. They also each played an essential role in developing public services and national politics.

The relationship between church leaders and state actors has been, and remains, complex and multifaceted. Within the concept of a church in the centre of a village (CCV), both institutions have mutually beneficial interactions and collaborative spaces. Church leaders perceive themselves as partners, mediators and as potential political opposition. The political elite views them as a resource and as religious leaders of earthly affairs, who hold influence that can legitimise their power. Indeed, any separation or antagonism between the secular and religious spheres of influence has a tendency, among the Catholics especially, to create unenthusiastic responses in public opinion, since there is an expectation that the Church *should* play a socio-political role. Due to the general religiosity of DRC society and especially in contexts of conflict, the church leaders either strongly influence the state or the state influences the church leadership.

CCV plays multiple roles: to justify involvement in politics, clergy inaction in inter-ethnic conflict and political mediation between the ruling power and opposition groups. It also serves to condemn action either by political actors or by religious leaders.

I have shown that the CNS significantly contributed to radicalising quarrels on nationality and ethnic identity. The basis of church-state collaboration seems to be on ethnic identity. On one hand, the interplay between religious leaders and politicians is important. On the other hand, the stigmatisation of Banyamulenge (Tutsi) and Banyarwanda (Tutsi and Hutu) as foreigners and a threat to national unity and territorial integrity cannot be ignored. This chapter has explained this complicity through identity while pointing out, in some cases, the

corruption of the Church. A combination of these factors affects clergy impartiality and effectiveness in conflict resolution. For example, this chapter has given evidence that neither the RCC nor the ECC used their national political influence to constrain the 'dubious citizenship' crisis. It shows that both the CNS and the related HCR-PT established measures that in fact endorsed the delegitimisation of citizenship of certain ethnic groups. Furthermore, I have presented multiple sources of evidence that show many from the RCC leadership[112] tacitly played an important role by enabling a political environment that escalated violence. The RCC and ECC have not escaped clientelism and corruption in their pursuit of private and personal enrichment. The next chapter discusses clergy motivations, rationales, practices and attitudes towards ethnic violence. It also presented evidence on how clergy respond to the ethnic identity crisis in eastern Congo.

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[112] There are no women in senior positions of church leadership in this study

Chapter 7: Church leaders' responses to the ethnic identity crises

The aim of this chapter is to critically analyse the interactions between the clergy and the dynamics of politics of identity, and how they have publicly expressed their motivations and concerns about the contestation of Congolese Tutsi citizenship rights. It examines the nature of public and political statements issued by the clergy of both the RCC and ECC in response to ethnic identity crises. It focuses on their reactions to specific events relevant to this study, whether in deterring or sustaining conflict. The chapter draws from documents examined at the Roman Catholic National Episcopal Conference of Congo (CENCO) and ECC archives in Kinshasa. An analysis of these official accounts' sheds light on the action or inaction of the RCC and ECC elite, both before and during the period covered by this thesis.

Evaluation of the data shows that during the period 1990– 2023, the RCC and ECC leaders' responses comprised various forms of written statements that were often shared and disseminated across the country for public consumption. In the past, copies of their declarations were either read on radio or TV, compiled, and published in a booklet or distributed widely through the local dioceses in the form of a memoranda. In the present era of social media, church leaders also share official communications through emails, press releases, YouTube and WhatsApp.

In this chapter, as expressed in the house metaphor, the analysis shows a form of multiple attitudes and behaviours displayed by the religious leaders in response to ethnic identity conflict. The RCC and ECC clergy have been ambiguous, silent, complicit, or complacent during the incitement of violence against Tutsi communities, particularly throughout the 1990s and the more recent violence in North and South Kivu. The Catholic clergy has also engaged in dog-whistling practices in recent years. Evidence in this chapter shows that their reticence to speak publicly against targeted violent events against the Banyarwanda and Banyamulenge are mainly due to a fear of losing public or government support and, while there are some exceptions, many clergy tend to embody the racial and xenophobic ethnic prejudices of their respective communities. By keeping to a relatively safe position, the clergy could arguably be understood to have endorsed the resurgence of an ethnic identity crisis, and this is evidenced in the numerous quotations used in this final analytical chapter.

As stated in the methodology chapter, to address potential criticism that analysis is selective, a unique systematic observation of these documents is made through two dimensions. First is a chronological approach, where all cases of violence and the responses from the clergy are observed in the order that they took place. Secondly, I will reflect on specific events related to the politics of ethnic identity whether the declarations of the clergy are involved or not. The analysis examines the reasons why these events attracted the clergy's interest more than others and examines the nature of their reactions. The analytical approach and focus in this chapter offer new findings which have the potential to advance the existing body of knowledge on the role of the clergy in peace or conflict.

The public and political declarations of RCC bishops have been the subject of many studies in various disciplines. Scholars have approached the topic from linguistic and theological angles. Many of these contributions provide a general analysis of clergy engagement in society and politics (Oyatambwe, 1997) or a discursive examination of their speeches (Kitata, 2020). This chapter does not offer a linguistic analysis but uses original techniques and observations (as highlighted in Chapter Three) and specifically takes peacebuilding and conflict resolution stances to identify the church leaders' role, through political statements in a particular type of conflict: the contestation of the citizenship of Tutsi people and in general speakers of Kinyarwanda in the DRC.

The implicit practices and responses to conflict and violence of the churches will be deconstructed. A key argument is that religious leaders are constrained in responding to atrocities because, firstly, of their own racial and tribal prejudices that tend to produce an exclusionary type of non-violent action – an exclusive type of peace that benefits non-Tutsi tribes. Secondly, the political pressures of ethnonationalism at national and provincial levels. Thirdly, because of their unstated support for the perpetrators' actions. The most constructive position of many clergy, as mentioned above, is that they promote peace within a certain type of people rather than peace between all. In other words, they encourage solidarity and peace among those perceived as socially homogenous rather than help build peace between antagonistic communities. The use of silence is acknowledged too as a strategy of political rhetoric (Anderson, 2003). The next sections analyse the interactions between the clergy and politics of identity and their responses to related ethnic violence.

7.1 Analysis of Interactions between the clergy and the politics of identity conflict

7.1.1 Tacit support to ethnonational violence – clergy national leadership

A systematic examination of the archival documents demonstrates that, between 1990 and 1996, RCC and ECC clergy joined in efforts to nudge President Mobutu's authoritarian regime towards democratisation. However, their preoccupation was more on nation-building[113] and the collapsing state (Hesselbein, 2007) than response to the politics of identity conflict. Their official messages centred on various competing interactions between the ruling power and the work of the National Sovereign Conference (CNS). These preoccupations, together with the ensuing violence, riots, and chaos caused by institutional failure, were discussed in Chapter Six. Having played a vital role in the 1992 transition process, the RCC perceived themselves as a moral authority, but they also inherited a volatile political environment – a national political crisis linked closely with a rise in the politics of ethnonationalism (Mokelwa, 2022). During my interviews, one of the senior RCC leaders at the national level expressed the RCC limitations.

> *Notre intervention est limitée considérant le niveau de la crise. Nous n'avons pas une force de l'ordre pour renforcer la sécurité. Nous nous impliquons mais à un certain niveau, c'est toujours le rôle de l'état de réguler les relations sociales.* [Our intervention is limited considering that the extreme level of crisis. We don't have a police force. We don't get involved but at certain point, it is the responsibility of the government to regulate relationship between different groups*]* (Interview with SNSHOL, a senior RCC clergy, Kinshasa, 27th May 2021)

In early 1990s, the clergy responded to certain violent events that affected the non-Banyarwanda and Banyamulenge. In May 1990, CENCO denounced a massacre of "some dozens of students" (Oyatambwe, 1997: 105) by Mobutu's Special Guards (DSP) at the University of Lubumbashi, economic capital of the DRC. The clergy declared that they could not keep silent following such a grave crime (CENCO, 1998: 246). They issued a similar public protest in writing against riots and looting in Kinshasa in 1992 and 1993. Without specifying the victims, the RCC clergy used a strong response that branded state security forces as terrorists in relation to various incidents of oppression and abuses in Kasai, Katanga, Ituri and North Kivu (Bashuth, 1998). CENCO also condemned the killings of

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[113]Archival document, socio-political speeches of the DRC's national council of bishops (CENCO). Messages, declarations, and press releases of CENCO bishops between 1996-2006 and during the political transition in the 2000s. Documents were assembled by Prof Bishop Faustin-Jovite Mapwar Bashuth in collaboration with the CENCO office in 2008, page 32.

dozens of Christians on 16th February 1992 in a political demonstration event, '*La Marche de l'Espoir*' (Willame, 1997). On 21st August 1994, religious leaders issued a strong message of support to their colleagues, Rwandan church leaders. Yet, these had failed to respond constructively to the Rwanda genocide.

Contrary to the above, the clergy remained silent in response to the persecution of the Congolese Rwandophone people, especially Tutsi. In examining religious leaders' declarations between 1990 and 1998, I found contradictory actions despite a publication in early 1995 of a parliamentary report that recommended expelling Tutsis from the DRC (Bashuth, 2008). The CENCO archives reveal a vacuum in clergy responses during this period. However, those expressing concern by the decision to cease making responses were not only subject to the threat of becoming stateless, but their lives were at risk (Hesselbein, 2007) as the Vangu Mambweni resolutions,[114] as discussed in Chapter Five, to expel the Tutsi started to be applied.

This silent avoidance of confrontation of the issue of citizenship of Banyamulenge and Banyarwanda groups (mainly Tutsis) also acts as a form of political statement. A detailed analysis of documents from the CENCO and ECC archives in Kinshasa makes it clear that there was a noticeably selective response to nationwide violence. There is an absence of acknowledgement of some violent episodes at the national and provincial level concerning issues of the contested citizenship and ethnic identity of the Banyamulenge and Banyarwanda. These absences warrant attention alongside other observable realities. Helpful and non-partisan statements could have been offered that expressed neither weakness nor neutrality, that avoided marginalisation, and that offered a listening ear. Congolese clergy and religious leaders might have been expected to live up to official church responses to violence connected to ethnic identity, but instead they appear to have provided tacit endorsement of the ethnopolitics that contributed to violence.

The political transition period between 1990 to 1996 was characterised by intense and growing tensions associated with the ethnicisation of politics. Between 1993 and 1995, interethnic violence broke out in North Kivu, causing 7,000 deaths and over 200,000 people to flee.[115] Victims were mainly the Congolese Tutsi and Hutu populations (Mokelwa, 2022, Ntantamika, 2021). In reference to the event, the CENCO message consisted simply of a

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[114] On 28th April 1995, following recommendations by the parliamentary commission (referred to as Vangu Mambweni), the transitional parliament (HCR-TP) approved resolutions to expel all Congolese Tutsi without delay. They also voted to confiscate their property. At the provincial level, authorities implemented the resolutions.
[115] Catholic bishops' public statements. Documents 1990–1998 from archives at CENCO, Kinshasa.

short prayer: "We pray for God's mercy for our Congolese and foreign sisters and brothers who died" (Bashuth, 1998: 456).

The prayer is both disproportional to the events and probably intentionally ambiguous. It fails to specify which victims are Congolese and which are foreign nationals – there is no clarity on the number of victims or their identities.

According to Vlassenroot (2010: 58), in September 1996 various factions of the then Zarian army stormed the Tutsi people's churches. They arrested or killed religious leaders from this targeted group in South or North Kivu. But in the RCC archives there is a conspicuous lack of documents in response to this crisis. RCC and ECC clergy from the Tutsi ethnic group received little or no attention, nor did they receive protection from their religious institutions (Interview with JSBMN, an RCC priest, Nairobi, 22th February 2021). During interview, one of the few Tutsi priests who survived commented that:

> They came and selected Tutsi priests. Our crime was being a Tutsi. They arrested us in our dioceses. Our bishop, who was from the Banyamulenge tribe, had fled to Rome. We became prisoners. We experienced an extreme form of torture. We hoped that RCC leaders at both South Kivu and Kinshasa would come to our rescue or will express their concerns concerning abuses of their fellow clergy. The army ended up deporting us to Rwanda. We later learned that many senior Banyamulenge pastors were killed [Interview with JSBM, a former Congolese priest, Nairobi, 5th November 2020]

One of the Catholic leaders at the national level explained the possible rationale for the Church's 'neutrality' or silence:

> The RCC and ECC clergy and religious leaders' silence was not related to likely political risk as they were already fearlessly confronting a brutal and authoritarian regime. However, it was somewhat concerned that confronting the question of citizenship was a risk to lose popularity, the leadership and political influence that it had always held, which had grown significantly as part of the democratisation process. It is possible, too, that it avoided similar critics as in the colonial experience that also used religion to advance its social status and economic interests in the name of God. For the RCC, there was a fear, too, that the new authorities might isolate the Catholic Church in favour of Protestant churches or indigenous-initiated churches [Interview with BMRZ, a scholar, Bukavu, 3rd June 2021].

The democratisation process turned into xenophobia and exploited politically the issue of citizenship of the Congolese Tutsis (Buzard, 2021). As demonstrated in Chapter One, the nationality law has a link with Congolese ethnicity. The citizenship of the Banyarwanda and Banyamulenge citizenship is consistently subject to public debate and political manipulation (Jackson, 2007). Consequently, a core factor and unifying political ideology for many nationalist politicians in the DRC and armed group leaders in eastern Congo is the notion that generally, the Banyarwanda in North Kivu and Banyamulenge in South Kivu, specifically the Tutsi category in these groupings, are 'outsiders' (Ndahinda, 2022). These political actors argue that peace in the DRC will only be possible if the Congolese Tutsi can forcibly be evicted from the DRC to Rwanda or the Horn of Africa.

RCC leaders generally developed a passive or indifferent position to what emerged as systematic, targeted violence against the Banyamulenge and Banyarwanda following the Vangu Report resolutions (Jackson, 2007). The discourse relating to this issue is multi-layered and complex. A conspiracy theory was popularised by populist politicians and in the general public that was very close to the hate rhetoric generated in the period prior to the 1994 Rwanda genocide (Mujyambere, 2021). This postulated a Tutsi plot against the DRC, in which Tutsi people were believed to have infiltrated security agencies of Rwanda's government to weaken the DRC government (Meyer, 2011). Other social and political actors, especially within civil society organisations, claimed that Congolese Tutsi were a resource to help Rwanda 'Balkanise the DRC', although the terms of such Balkanisation were not precise (Buzard, 2021). Here, the main perception was that the DRC was in danger of being subsumed into a potential Tutsi-Hima empire (Mugabe and Ndahinda, 2022). The general public or ethnonationalist politicians in the DRC tend to believe that the imagined Tutsi-Hima hegemony aims to grabbing Congolese land, enslaving those claiming to be natives and causing the breakdown of the country (Buzard, 2021, Huening, 2013).

It is nonetheless important to acknowledge that the politics of identity were not the only matter that concerned the clergy at this time at the national level. These leaders faced a political crisis caused by the move from a single to a multi-party state that established power-driven competing, pro- and anti-Mobutu political coalitions. The clergy confronted the possible disintegration of the state and the emergence of lawlessness resulting from the government's incapacity to manage the issue of refugees from Rwanda and Burundi in the eastern part of the country. Despite these monumental changes, the silence of the heads of the RCC in response to the violence discussed throughout this thesis became a pattern throughout the period. This was in stark contrast to the ways in which these leaders had

excelled in their political and public declarations against the failure of political and economic governance and the absence of democracy in the past, as discussed in Chapter Six.

7.1.2   Unified at provincial level and divided at national level

On 9 March 1995, there was in contrast to the above, a unified response to the internecine strife in the east of the DRC at the provincial level. Independent of their church leadership at the national level, four bishops of North and South Kivu united in expressing their concerns about the climate of violence, which was ignored by CENCO (Dorlodot, 1996, Longman, 2001). Monsignor Munzihirwa Christophe, Archbishop of Bukavu and apostolic administrator of Kasongo, Kataliko Emmanuel, Bishop of Butembo in Beni, Bishop Ngabu Faustin, Bishop of Goma, and Gapangwa Jerome, Bishop of Uvira (Amor, 2002), issued a statement:

> Everyone, wherever he or she lived, felt at home, as none was considered as foreigner. It was only when the politicians started to play identity politics and questioned the citizenship of Kinyarwanda speaking population that the trouble started (Dorlodot 1996: 168–171)

These RCC leaders promoted an attitude that lacked a consensus from their council of national leadership (CENCO), which weakened their response. Clergy of RCC neither endorsed nor condemned the widespread tribalism and intolerance in society. They argued that the contestation of the citizenship of people who speak a language relating to Kinyarwanda (Hutu and Tutsi) must end, as these groups of people were natives of the DRC. These statements challenged a matter at the heart of political controversy at the time and was likely to face resistance. Such responses went against popular ethnonationalist rhetoric widespread in the country. Grassroot non-government agencies (claiming to promote human rights) in South Kivu were active in producing hate speech (Ndahinda and Mugabe, 2022) through media campaigns, and the provincial sections of political parties affiliated to former president Mobutu responded vigorously against the bishops' statement, considering their position an act of treason (Interview with YSN, a political analyst, Kinshasa, 16th May 2021). These civil society and political actors operated as competitors with the Church, in their intention to influence the population on matters that mobilised support.

Some respondents during the field study argued that the sympathetic response to the Tutsi persecution of the four bishops may have been influenced by a change in leadership of CENCO (Interview with KBDG, a journalist and former priest, Bukavu, 3rd June 2021). Monsingor Faustin Ngabu, Archbishop of Goma, had become CENCO's leader towards the

end of 1992. A member of the Hema tribe in Ituri, like the Tutsi, Hutu and Banyamulenge, he and his people had experienced persecution due to their ethnicity. Some commentators have described him as sympathetic to all Congolese Kinyarwanda speakers (Prunier, 2001; Longman, 2001); this was recorded in my field study as a common perception. Jerome Gapangwa, another of the four Bishops, belongs to the Banyamulenge, one of the most affected by the DRC citizenship issue. Later, these four leaders diverged in their responses. They adopted different approaches and principles to different victims. I will return to their division later.

7.1.3 Divided at both provincial and national level

The RCC clergy both at provincial and national level were not only divided regarding the violence against Tutsi people or generally Kinyarwanda speaking populations, but also inconsistent in their response, depending on which ethnic group was a victim of the violence. As stated earlier, at the national level there is no evidence of a clergy response to this violence. However, in North Kivu, between 1993 and 1995 Monsignor Faustin Ngabu, the then Archbishop of Goma, in his own capacity, denounced violence that targeted Kinyarwanda speakers (Dorlodot, 1996). He condemned the country authorities lack intervention and their complicity.[116]

> The authorities who should come to help the victims of violence seem on the contrary to want to feed the fire that destroys them… We are troubled to note that these practices that sow divisions, misery, and death within the different ethnic groups in our region are result of an organisation at high level, and we regret that the regional and local authorities who have as the mission to inform the central government about the reality of facts prefer to execute directives based on lies (Longman, 1998: p60)

Paradoxically, Ngabu's report in his capacity as Bishop of Goma was published while he was also the president of the DRC Council for the RCC bishops (CENCO). Yet, in his own capacity as the head of CENCO, corporately, there was no consensus to speak out at national level - there was silence. Speaking about the statement by Ngabu in North Kivu, a RCC clergyman explained:

> Despite being the president of CENCO (the then CEZ), he was unable to mobilise other bishops to condemn the violence in North Kivu. His report about the atrocities

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[116] Newspaper, Le Soft n°153, Thursday 17th June 1993, p.12. Archive, CENCO.

reflects both his convictions and conflict with other clergy at the national level. Every RCC bishop has full authority and power in his diocese but when it comes to CENCO there must be a consensus about their corporate position towards such a violence [Interview with JSBMN, a former Congolese priest and personal secretary to an RCC bishop, 6th November 2022]

The above disparity in response indicates a division between the RCC as an institution and individual RCC leaders in their dioceses (Longman, 2001) at provincial level. Another interviewee argued that:

The corporate church's leadership (RCC or ECC) refrained from making public statements regarding what they see as politicised conflict. They responded objectively and genuinely to various conflicts but the question of involving Rwandophones (Hutu or Tutsi) is contentious. If the RCC and ECC convey a clear and constructive position, they would lose supporters. Their silence often means they are not against the actions of certain members of the local population [Interview with EB, a researcher, human rights lawyer and pastor, Goma, 10th May 2021].

In 1996, CENCO realised that there was a potential conflict associated with the ethnic identity. On 20 January 1996, RCC bishops issued an official declaration entitled '*Respectons la vie et la personne humaine*' ('We must respect human beings'). In this statement, the clergy shared a message of hope to inspire those who had lost their loved ones to violence across the country. Furthermore, these leaders challenged Congolese society by arguing that the root cause of the DRC problems was a decline of humanity.[117] They expressed their concerns as follows:

Such a crisis of morality and a normalised dehumanisation comes from a culture of undermining God and negating human values. We are experiencing behaviours of failing to respect the laws, greed for modern materials and beliefs, and worshipping occult forces. We have also experienced rejection and discriminative actions that dominated the CNS, notably the exclusion of certain members of the Congolese society because of their ethnic identity. For the same reasons, entire populations have been persecuted and expelled in specific regions or become internally displaced or refugees abroad (CENCO, cited in Bashuth, 2008: p33).

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[117] Archival document, socio-political speeches of the DRC's national council of bishops (CENCO). Messages, declarations, and press releases of CENCO bishops between 1996-2006 and during the political transition in the 2000s. Documents were assembled by Prof Bishop Faustin-Jovite Mapwar Bashuth in collaboration with the CENCO office in 2008, page 32.

Sadly, this statement was too little and too late. Towards the end of 1996, the ethnicisation policies of the central government had led to violent consequences in the east. War in the Kivus, initially referred to as the 'Banyamulenge uprising', had started. Neighbouring countries such as Rwanda became involved through military invasions. Political leadership in Rwanda claimed that their involvement was motivated mainly by the potential threats posed by the former Rwandan army and militias – the Interahamwe – that had committed genocide in Rwanda (Willame, 1997). The pretext was to support Congolese Kinyarwanda speakers, whose security was severely affected by the remains of Mobutu's power and the ethnonationalist outcome of the CNS. However, in 1998, other countries like Uganda, Burundi and Angola intervened for multiple reasons, including security interests and an opportunity to loot DRC resources (Mutombo-Mukendi, 2011). This rebellion became formally established as the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo (AFDL), led by Laurent Kabila, who was the third president of the Democratic Republic of the Congo from 1997 until his assassination[118] in 2001. In response, on 29th October 1996, CENCO issued a declaration entitled '*Non a la guerre, oui pour la paix et la justice*' ('No to war, yes to peace and justice'). In this public statement, they expressed serious concern and preoccupation:

> We have now reached a state of emergency as war is being prepared and imminent. There is a likely risk that the situation will fuel violence nationwide. Today, in North and South Kivu, people are anxious and in a state of panic due to the emerging crisis. Concerning the violent situation in Uvira and the surrounding areas due to the presence and actions of Banyamulenge, it is only a manifestation of a significant underlying problem that remained unresolved: The issue of citizenship. Who is Congolese, and who is not? The misleading interpretation of the law on this subject has not contributed to peace. Many observers have demonstrated that confusing legal frameworks have created ambiguity. Scenes of violence and aggression between individuals and communities are becoming commonplace and endemic. We are witnessing similar feelings in the parliament in Kinshasa and through the media. We are noticing similar acts in the cities and rural areas where militias are emerging and organizing themselves for a human hunt (CENCO, 2008: p37).

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[118] Laurent-Désiré Kabila was one of the senior leaders in the first post-independence government in 1960. He later became an opponent of the second president, Mobutu Sese Seko. Kabila was also part of the 1965–67 revolution. In 1996, he was the leader of a Congolese rebellion, the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo (AFDL), supported by Uganda, Burundi and Rwanda. He became the third president of the DRC in 1997.

Mobutu was ousted on 17th May 1997 and the AFDL was considered by the RCC as a revolutionary movement. In the RCC's declaration of 28th June 1997, CENCO framed the conflict as a war of liberation and a joy of people at the national level:

> The AFDL struggle had different aspirations and expectations. People have welcomed the rebels everywhere with joy, enthusiasm, and jubilation. The end of Mobutu's regime provided hope across the country. People seem to rejoice that the new authorities have started implementing the CNS decisions. CENCO hopes that CNS aspirations will be respected and honoured by the AFDL authorities. We want to congratulate and recognise all (former rebels) who took part in the AFDL liberation war (Bashuth and CENCO, 1998).

The AFDL and CENCO's positive relationship did not last long. While CENCO recognised the AFDL as a liberation movement, it also pointed out its disapproval of the AFDL regime. Notably, it deplored the many human rights violations and an expedited justice system without a transparent formal process. The following paragraphs provide an illustration of some of the worst violence in relation to the politicisation of ethnic identity, and evidence of how the clergy responded. While the description below is not the focus of this study, it forms the basis for evaluating religious leaders' actions and responses.

The unpopularity of Laurent Kabila instrumentalised an old and deep-rooted issue of the indigeneity of the Congolese Tutsi. In September 1998, Laurent Kabila's presidency faced opposition.[119] He decided to cut ties with his Rwandan army supporters (Prunier, 2001). Internally, he exploited anti-Tutsi attitude and sentiment, which is a mobilising factor in the DRC (International Crisis Group, 1999). Populist politics across the African continent tend to promote the exclusion of a certain groups of the country's population by exploiting an idea of 'doubtful citizenship', especially when there is a perception that such people are receiving support from a rival opposition group (Mokelwa, 2022; Mukendi, 2021; Manby, 2009).

Anti-Tutsi sentiments intensified as Kabila's hate speech campaign developed (Ndahinda and Mugabe, 2022). He enforced an extremist ideology to mobilise local support (Jackson, 2007). Through his cabinet director, Abdoulaye Yerodia Ndombasi, in the form of a hate campaign against Congolese Tutsi in the media (Rupert, 1998). He accused his potential

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[119] He was generally accused by a large part of the population, especially in the western part, of becoming a dictator who, for them, was worse than the previous leader, Mobutu. His success was short-lived, and many people became more concerned about his association with the foreign armies (Uganda and Rwanda) to topple Mobutu to power (International Crisis Group, 1999).

victims of conniving with the Rwandan army to invade the DRC and referred to them as 'scum' and 'vermin' that must be systematically eliminated (Ruhimbika, 2001; Bjarnadóttir, 2017). During this time a new rebellion, the Congolese Rally for Democracy (RCD),[120] supported by Rwanda and Uganda, started in the eastern region (Prunier, 2001). The *Radio Télévision Nationale Congolaise* (RTNC) instructed the local people across the country "to arm themselves with machetes, spears, arrows, hoes, spades, rakes nails, truncheons, irons, barbed wires, stones and the like to kill the Rwandan-Tutsi" (Ngolet, 2011: 23). Consequently, government security forces killed thousands of Tutsis nationwide, especially in Kinshasa, where very few survived (Mokelwa, 2022; Mukendi, 2021). Others were tortured and imprisoned in a concentration camp in Lubumbashi (Ruhimbika, 2001). In rebel-held territories, the RCD rebellion and their Ugandan and Rwandan allies were also responsible for large-scale killings of other ethnic groups in several areas, including Remera, Katogota, Makobola and Kasika in South Kivu (Le Marchand, 2009). Among the many victims were some members of the clergy (Nteziryayo, 2022). The different values perceived between these two classes of victim (the Banyamulenge (Tutsi) and the other ethnic groups such as Babembe, Bafuliry and Bavira) determined whether there was resulting action or inaction among the clergy and religious leaders (Longman, 2001; Nteziryayo, 2022).

On 7th November 1998, at the national level CENCO issued this statement:

> Since 2nd August 1998, we have been facing a new war. Where is this war coming from? How can it be justified? What is its aim? There was an offensive in the capital city. On 26th August 1998, one thousand people were massacred, by our aggressors, in Kasika in the western part of Uvira. The perpetrators experienced an ambush (CENCO archive, 2008: 67).

There is a significant gap between this statement and information in the national archive. It is impossible to find reference to an outcry against the systematic, targeted violence towards the Tutsis in 1998 described in the above paragraph, including Kabila's subsequent war against the RCD. At the national level, there was what many interviewees described as 'ambiguous silence' of the clergy of both the ECC and RCC. At provincial level, religious leaders in the RCC and ECC condemned the massacres of non-Tutsi people in Katogota and Makobola (Prunier, 2001), but the Banyamulenge and Banyarwanda saw the absence of public and political condemnation by the clergy as tacit approval of what appeared to be

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[120] RCD was one of the major rebellions in the DRC between 1998–2003. It had control of almost half the Congolese territory. The movement also entered mainstream politics, participating in democratic elections with little success (Longman, 2001, Prunier, 2001).

Kabila's genocidal campaign in which thousands of Tutsis perished (Mujyambere, 2020). According to an interviewee:

> While the UN Mapping Report documented all forms of violence committed between 1993-2003, RCC and ECC clergy prefer to ignore persecutions of the Congolese Tutsis that occurred before and during the wars. For the Kasika and Makabola, there is continuous public condemnation. There are three categories of responses to the violence against the Congolese Tutsi: an implicit endorsement and public support of violence, coded messages, and silence [Interview with Professor FNGBA, Goma, 7th May 2021].

7.1.4 Conflicting roles at provincial level

At the provincial level, the public and political statements of the RCC and ECC during the two wars in the Kivus reinforced further animosity and segregation between groups of Rwandophone people – the Hutu, Tutsi and other ethnic groups. The first war initially received support from people across the country; the second was widely opposed. This opposition galvanised the formation of many armed units claiming to defend their ethnic group.

Division between RCC leaders in the Kivu provinces continued. On one hand, in South Kivu there was Monsignor Jerome Gapangwa, then Bishop of Uvira, and in North Kivu Monsignor Faustin Ngabu, then Bishop of Goma. Some of the people that I have engaged with during the field study in Bukavu and Goma blamed them for failing to speak out against the violence committed by the AFDL and RCD. On the other hand, there were two further RCC bishops: Kataliko and Munzihirwa of Bukavu. While they spoke against violence during the AFDL and RCD rebellions, they perceived the Congolese Tutsi people as supporters of foreign military interventions (Prunier, 2001). This section shows how these RCC leaders were divided and lacked consensus in their response to violence; instead, some aligned themselves with their respective tribes' racial and ethnic prejudices.

Being in proximity to Rwanda during the 1994 genocide, the Archbishop of Bukavu, Monsignor Munzihirwa Christophe,[121] was vocal in speaking out for social justice. He

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[121] Christophe Munzihirwa is one of the most celebrated RCC leaders in the DRC (Allen, 2012). He trained as a Jesuit. When Rwanda invaded Zaire in 1996 as part of the AFDL rebellion, Archbishop Munzihirwa opposed this invasion and condemned the rebels' attacks against Rwandan Hutu refugees (Kitumaini, 2004). In October 1996, unknown individuals assassinated Archbishop Munzihirwa. While there was no investigation into his murder, Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) members are allegedly responsible for his assassination (Lock, 2007).

preached a theology of solidarity and brotherhood among all people. He responded proactively and charitably to the humanitarian crisis in Bukavu caused by the violence in Rwanda, with hundreds of Hutu refugees that fled from Rwanda to both South and North Kivu. In response, he declared that:

> We must act. Action is the only way to prove that we are compassionate. If we have refugees at our door's steps, we must create a climate of compassion where we extend and show signs of solidarity and resilience. Dear brothers and sisters, we must welcome, in our homes, without any segregation based on race and social class and without any prejudices (Munzihirwa, 1996: p1–5).

People listened to Munzihirwa's demands (Kitumaini, 2004). The city of Bukavu welcomed people fleeing the 1994 Rwanda genocide (Prunier, 2001). Many argue that Archbishop Munzihirwa's messages prevented what could have turned into violence resulting from the influx of over a million armed and unarmed refugees to South Kivu. The various RCC dioceses, including Uvira, under the headship of a Congolese Tutsi, as well as ECC-related agencies, either accommodated or provided shelter and food for those affected by conflict. In various cities, there were reactions of solidarity and tolerance towards these refugees (Kitumaini, 2004). However, many among the interviewees point to the contradiction between his active advocacy for the welfare of Rwandan refugees (who were predominantly Hutu) against his silence on the plight of the Congolese Tutsi (Banyamulenge) and their subsequent forcible deportations from the DRC to Rwanda (Interview with JSBMN, a former priest in the diocese of Bukavu, Nairobi, 22nd February 2001). For many people:

> Archbishop Munzihirwa seemed like a non-violent militant for peace and social justice. His influence in terms of society was exceptional. He had shown leadership in the case of Hutu refugees. However, the violence against the Congolese Tutsi did not happen suddenly. He [Munzihirwa] had a space, resources, and time to act. He welcomed the Hutu refugees from Rwanda, but he ignored the plight of Congolese Tutsi [Interview with SFR, a sinior political analyst, Goma, 17th May 2021].

Due to his hospitality to Hutu refugees fleeing the 1994 genocide in Rwanda – who Rwanda suspected were among the perpetrators of the genocide – and his campaigns against the RPF, he was perceived by the government of Rwanda as an enemy (Prunier, 2001). The Congolese Tutsi, particularly those who survived the persecution in the DRC, argued that

the "provincial office of RCC under Munzihirwa leadership was complicit or complacent with the ethnic identity-related violence in mid-1996" [Interview with an expert conflict transformation, KABIS, Bukavu, 2nd June 2021]. This view is supported by an RCC priest from the Banyamulenge community. He narrated his experience:

> In September 1996, before the tragic death of Bishop Munzihirwa, I was in the diocese of Uvira. I was one of the priests there. I was one of only two priests from the Banyamulenge people. One evening, the army raided the diocese and selectively arrested two of us (the Banyamulenge) among many other priests of other ethnic groups. We were humiliated (forced to strip off our clothes, beaten and tortured) in front of our fellow priests. These fellow colleagues had the authority and power to intervene but did not. The soldiers threw us into prison. While in our prison cells, we could see (through a small window) our deputy bishop facilitating the abusing army with transport to help in their search for other Banyamulenge people. None of our fellow priests visited or fed us in prison. Only two RCC nuns, and they were of Tutsi ethnic background, provided us with food and water.

> On the eighth day, the army decided to 'escort' us with other Tutsi families over the DRC border to Rwanda. Here, we witnessed the killing of more Tutsi people. What was striking is that we noticed that our deputy bishop had driven behind the army convoy escorting those being deported.

> Regarding Bishop Munzihirwa (from Bashi tribe), while every diocese was and is independent, Munzihirwa knew what was happening to us and the Banyamulenge in Uvira. There is a tragic incident that worth saying. We had a colleague Tutsi priest called Alexandre Kalinda Ngwuje. He was temporarily in the diocese of Bukavu, where Bishop Munzihirwa resided. At the border with Rwanda, Alexandre was murdered, while fleeing. Later, there was another tragic news: we learned that AFDL rebels killed three priests in Remera who Banyamulenge or Tutsi are not. These were Boniface Kahegezo Koko, Jean Marie Vianney Ndogole Kasati and Remi Kibugu (all from the Bavira tribe). We later heard that Bishop Munzihirwa denounced and condemned the killing of these three priests (non -Tutsis) but remained totally silent regarding the death of Alexandre Kalinda Ngwije [Interview with JSBMN, a former RCC priest, Kenya, 24th February 2021].

Munzihirwa is known for his campaigns against the war. However, in his communications, from the above comments it appears that he adopted the selective and exclusionary

approach of speaking out against ethnic identity-based violence. Though Munzihirwa claimed to aspire to end the war, his rhetorical strategy in fact contributed further to the ethnic-based conflict.

There are apparently conflicting statements which raise crucial issues: (i) the ambivalent and inconsistent application of the values of peace; (ii) the constructive action and deconstructive inaction of the RCC clergy that demonstrate a concept of peacebuilding practice that applies only to one type of people and to which others cannot benefit (I refer to this later as an inclusive and exclusive peace); and (iii) the indirect tendency to incite the existing dynamic of conflict using a language recognisable only by the targeted audience – the 'dog whistle' statements.

Several implicit communications are expressed in Munzihirwa's use of the word 'invasion' and his theory about the annexation of a specific territory of Zaire. Similar claims were made during the civil war in Rwanda before the 1994 genocide by political and religious leaders (Gatwa, 2005; Eltringham, 2006). In the context of 1996 Zaire, the 'enemy' was easily identified by erroneously referring to all political power in Rwanda as 'Tutsi' and then associating this alien power with the Tutsi's 'relatives', the Banyamulenge.

Munzihirwa criticised the AFDL rebellion and the Rwandan government's involvement in supporting this rebellion. Military members of the AFDL and their Rwandan army allies were indeed responsible for mass atrocities on both civilian and armed Rwandan refugees during their military campaigns and rapid expansion across the DRC (Emizet, 2000). Existing data on his public statements (Kitata, 2020; Kitumaini, 2003) focus on his non-violent activism, but a more selective analysis of his peacebuilding actions unveils a more complex position. One interviewee suggested that the following declaration by Munzihirwa pleaded the avoidance of generalisation:

> Dearest brothers, people of Bukavu. I urge you to avoid vengeance on innocent Tutsi that are among us. No. Those who want to fight, they should go to the battlefield. Let's come together in prayer but, we too, we must organise ourselves to defend our city (GRU, a peacebuilding expert, Kinshasa, 22nd May 2021)

There is indeed an intent here to edify the city towards non-violent actions against the marginalised minority group. However, at the same time, Munzihirwa called for people to defend the city. He inspired people by citing the pre-colonial antagonistic historical

relationship between Bashi and the ancient Rwandan Kingdom, in response to the invasion of RPF in the DRC. He reminded the people of Bukavu to resist:

> Our ancestors have never allowed an invader to control our land. Please stand and get mobilised, and do not betray this tradition of resistance. This historical journey must serve us as an example. Do not let the enemy penetrate our land. Please do not leave free access by fleeing our city, Bukavu (Munzihirwa ,1996).[122]

During my field study in the DRC, I sought to evaluate the above statement to understand three critical words in the above statement. These are: 'invaders', 'enemies' and 'our land'. Congolese scholars and members of the public suggested that 'invader' refers to Rwanda and its perceived Tutsi regime (current and historical). 'Enemies' are generally Tutsi (either Rwandans or Congolese). Whereas Munzihirwa reference to 'our land' means those claiming to be indigenous or autochthons (Interview with SMGNG, a professor of local governance and public policy, Bukavu, 3rd June 2021). Therefore, based on this translation, his use of the history of warfare in his communication can be interpreted as a dog whistle call mentioned above, for people to rise against the Tutsi people, whether they are Rwandan or Congolese.

The core of the message uses a combative approach, invoking the powerful idea of a Mushi who has always resisted invasion of the ancient Kingdom of Rwanda – implicitly by Tutsi *mwami* (kings). In the distant past, kingdoms in the African Great Lakes region launched interminable wars with each other for political supremacy. This background has established much mutual and crystallised mistrust. People tell stories and elaborate them, and these remain in the minds and spirits of the local people in Bukavu (Interview with GRU, a senior government leader and expert in peacebuilding, 24th May 2021). Without dwelling on the ancestral conflicts between neighbouring political powers in this region, it is suffice to retain an illustration of this old conflict between Rwanda and the Bushi area (the territory inhabited by the Bashi people). The balance of power always leans towards the victor, inciting jealousy, mistrust, and hatred towards the defeated (Matthys, 2017).

7.1.5 Clergy and embodiment of racial and xenophobic ethnic prejudice

The end of the 1994 Rwanda genocide, with a victory for the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF), appeared unwelcome in the Kivu (Prunier, 2001). It stirred the old antagonistic sentiments

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[122] Monsignor Christophe Munzihirwa, a letter to his priests. Subject: Stay firm and in charity. Bukavu, 27th October 1996, p.1.

described above. The war of AFDL conducted by Rwanda, Uganda and, to some extent, Burundi, in the name of the Banyamulenge, became perceived as a confrontation of the majority ethnic groups (non-Tutsi) versus the minority (Buzard, 2021). As alluded to in Chapter one, such rhetoric tends to racialise[123] ethnic groups in the idea of the 'Bantus' (non-Tutsi) against Tutsi (Buzard, 2021). Thus, creating a conspiracy theory about a Tutsi plan to conquer the Bantu people in Africa. People began to believe they must resist using all means (violent or non-violent), annihilate those considered 'invaders' and expel them (Ngolet, 2011). For some, clergy and religious leaders seemed to be reminding their followers that such a mission was sacred. The discussion in the following sections will evidence this.

In a lawless state where armed groups had become the new rulers, Monsignor Munzihirwa was murdered on 29th October 1996, many believed by elements of the AFDL rebels. His murder remains fresh today in people's minds. One of the interviewees[124] suggests during this study suspected that fighters from the Rwandan army had killed him. In Munzihirwa statues in Bukavu, artists have drawn the assassination scene and painted the suspected killers with Tutsi features,[125] collectivising the assumed perpetrators.

Munzihirwa's death raises an important question regarding the political risks that religious leaders face in engaging with issues of ethnic identity. In Africa generally, and the DRC specifically, there is a context of autocracy, where political leaders aspire to be admired and seen as being in control of a vision for the country. Government actors, when challenged or facing a political crisis, tend to choose to apply repression. While risks to the RCC clergy are rare, because of their institutional influence internationally, some report that dangers still exist, as posited by one of the interviewees:

> RCC leaders have a specific immunity from political risks due to the pyramidal leadership structure under the Vatican headship. There is a particular risk to individual religious leaders who oppose the government regarding hatred against the Banyamulenge and Banyarwanda. Leaders from the Protestant churches are more vulnerable to political risks as they do not have an external institutional authority. While there may be certain risks to clergy engaged in peace and no-violence actions, they would not face risks to abstain from promoting violence or if they work together

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[123] The categorisation of identities between Bantu and Nilotics is an old colonial myth that views these two groups as races or ethnic groups (Mamdani, 2001). The reason is more biological (physical features). Generally, people perceive the Tutsi as identifiably tall with narrower noises. Sometimes, people with similar appearances who are not Tutsi are subject to persecution (Refworld, 1999).
[124] For privacy reason, I prefer to not to add a reference on this interview
[125] The general view that Tutsi are tall with longer thin nose, relatively higher cheekbones

corporately as a body of the clergy [Interview with NKYL, a religious leader, a civil society activist, Bukavu, 4th June 2021].

With this level of risk, in the DRC religious leaders tend to assimilate into the regime or remain silent, fearful for their lives, especially with regard to the question of political rights for the Banyamulenge and Banyarwanda in the DRC. Chapter Six discussed a symbiotic relationship between Church actors and the state in an environment of ethnic conflict. Such a phenomenon is not unique to the DRC.

In South Kivu, in May 1997 the Vatican appointed the Archbishop of Beni-Lubero, Monsignor Emmanuel Kataliko, as the Archbishop of Bukavu. He was one of those who had signed the anti-violence letter of 9th March 1995 (see above). The country's geopolitical and ethnic divisions are reflected in his responses to the ethnic situation in Bukavu (Couture, 2016). In a letter to RCC bishops in the USA, Kataliko declared that:

> The victory of the Tutsi in 1994 in Rwanda has thrown almost two million refugees on our territory. Two years later, in 1996, a small rebellion of the Banyamulenge (Tutsi people of Rwandan origin who have resided on Congolese soil) embraced the whole region and the entire country under the pretext of claiming citizenship. It is only a pretext; as we know, the main objective is to destroy the refugee camps (Mararo, 1998: p6).

Advocacy for the Rwandan Hutu refugees became a priority for Kataliko. The historical question of citizenship that has divided the social fabric of Congo seemed both inflamed and avoided by his comments. As argued in the introductory chapter, this question constitutes a significant cause of today's conflict in the DRC. Some statements purporting to deter the violence committed by the RCD rebellion on the non-Tutsi were characterised as militantism and the inciting of hatred against the Tutsi population. Kitumaini suggested that:

> Foreign powers, in collaboration with some of our Congolese brothers, are organising wars using the country's resources. These resources should enable the development and education of children, assure our health care, and assure that we have a dignified and humane life. But they are using these to kill us and destroy our country. We have become objects of exploitation that is supported and sustained by a strategy of terror (Kitumaini, 2003: 73).

Kataliko was operating in a period when the Rwandan army (RPF) was involved in assisting its Congolese allies. These Congolese partners of RPF were from all ethnic backgrounds, but because the RPF leadership was perceived as Tutsi-led, the Congolese Tutsi were also portrayed as key collaborators with the RCD. Kataliko mobilised people to the Rwanda's invasion, citing the power of their Christian faith. Kataliko became a fearless activist against the presence of RCD rebels and their Rwandan backers (Prunier, 2001).

However, for the Congolese Tutsi people, he was understood to be tacitly endorsing the activities of the Mai Mai militias and other exclusionary discourses in Bukavu (Interview with KATABIS, a civil society expert, Bukavu, 17th February 2022). Between January and February 2000, church-led NGOs prepared a series of strikes to protest against the war. During political demonstrations in Bukavu, demonstrators used various slogans, including the Swahili expression of '*Hatuchanganyike*'.[126] Peace for them was viewed as a situation that excludes enemies. There were other similar catchphrases, such as 'we must send the Jewish of Africa back to where they come from'. The failure by the clergy to confront these exclusionary statements, even now, can be understood as maintaining an environment where interethnic violence is accepted as a facet of everyday life. Kataliko was ultimately forced into exile in Italy by the RCD movement, which had Tutsi individuals in its leadership.[127]

The following sections reflect on the second category of clergy, those who are perceived as having engaged in peace advocacy on behalf of groups other than those for whom Archbishops Kataliko and Munzihirwa supported.

Two RCC leaders differed from those previously discussed. They were Monsignor Faustin Ngabu,[128] Emeritus Bishop of Goma, and Monsignor Jerome Gapangwa Nteziryayo, Emeritus Bishop of Uvira, the bishop who was forcibly pushed into exile in Italy in early 2000. They were widely known to have fought against hate speech through their preaching, and they welcomed the 1994 Rwanda Hutu refugees in their dioceses (Buit, 2012). Their approach was more diplomatic than public and political statements [Interview with JSBMN, former priest, Bukavu, February 20210]. They issued only a few written messages but engaged in advocacy for both the Hutu and Tutsi in North and South Kivu.

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[126] We do not mix with other people (unity is not permitted with between the non-Tutsi and Tutsi)

[127] Bishop Kataliko was forced by the Congolese Rally for Democracy (RCD) rebel movement (which was supported by Burundi, Uganda and Rwanda) into exile in February 2000. He was barred from returning to his diocese until September 2000. The RCD rebels accused him of inciting violence, mobilising RCC adherents to support to insurgencies.

[128] In an earlier analysis, there were several references to Bishop Faustin Ngabu. It was in his different capacities (either president of the national council of bishops or in his interaction with conflict in North Kivu). A further reference to his practice relates to his activism in eastern Congo and the region.

The massacre in Ntonto in early 1993, in Walikale, triggered more interethnic conflict in North Kivu. Ngabu spoke out against this in March 1993, saying, "almost all the victims are members of the Hutu and Tutsi communities".[129] He engaged diplomatically with the central government of then Zaire to remove the governor and his deputy in North Kivu, who, according to him, were the masterminds of this massacre. In an open letter to his congregation and the people of North Kivu, he wrote:

> The authority supposed to protect all the victims of violence appears to do the opposite – incite violence. Entire families forcibly fled from their homes and abandoned their livestock and crops. Some have fled to foreign countries. The only reason for such victimisation is their ethnicity. People are under the threat of death. These crimes are justified and legitimised with narratives such as 'you are not one of us, you have no right to live here, your brothers and sisters are either immigrants or recently arrived in the region. You are a minority, or you are an illegal majority.' People in Gishari and Nyamabo have faced a war founded on tribalism; many have escaped death and mutilations (Le Soft, 1993).[130]

This massacre occurred in Bishop Kataliko's diocese but, according to a journalist, BMBY, who investigated these killings, and the consulted CENCO archives, there is no evidence of Kataliko seeking protection of the Banyarwanda (Hutu and Tutsi). Ngabu's advocacy here illustrated courageous advocacy [Interview with JSBMN, former priest, Bukavu, February 2021]. For other interviewees his actions suggested advocating for the Banyamulenge and Banyarwanda, therefore representing those viewed as 'enemies'.

With regard to Monsignor Gapangwa, former Bishop of Uvira, there is no written record of his public declarations or engagement with the media. He actively communicated his thoughts on peace and conflict through the pulpit (Little, 2007). Being a Banyamulenge (Ndahinda and Mugabe, 2022; Genocide Watch, 2021), according to a Congolese historian who I interviewed:

> He became a sole advocate for his people through political engagements for his people within the CENCO through sermons and interactions with the local authorities. In response to conflict, he preached a message of tolerance and community cohesion [Interview with BMBY, Kinshasa, June 2021].

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[129] In Le Soft n°153, Thursday 17 June 1993, p. 12
[130] Ngabu Faustin, Evêque de Goma, Message de paix aux Chrétiens et aux hommes de bonne volonté, Goma, 20 April 1996

One civil society leader I interviewed, GRGN, argued that Gapangwa was in fact being passively complicit. GRGN suggested that Gapangwa avoided denouncing the violence committed by the RCD rebellion because of his sympathy for their cause [interview with GRGN, a peacebuilding expert, Kinshasa, June 2021]. However, Nteziryayo (2022) discussed individual accountability for various mass atrocities citing Gapangwa's public letter of 2012 to the people of his diocese:[131]

> Between 1996 and 2003, some of the mass traumatic atrocities included Baraka, Nundu, Lweba, bwegera and Kamanyola 1996. Kasika and Makobola in 1998. To this carnage, there was an addition of Gatumba in 2004 and other victims of intertribal violence where it is difficult to quantify (Monsignor Gapangwa, letter to the people of Uvira, 2012, cited in Nteziryayo, 2022: 148).

While this statement from Gapangwa's letter merely provides a chronology of violent events, it is significant politically as it acknowledges victims from all ethnic groups – a nature of declaration that is usually absent from public messages by the clergy. In his engagement with intra-community peacebuilding, he challenged his own community, the Banyamulenge, to forgive [interview with the leader in humanitarian affairs, WLBNG, Bukavu, 5th June 2021]. Like Kataliko, Gapangwa was forced into exile during the RCD rebellion (Prunier, 2001, Longman, 2001). It is possible that he feared some form of retaliation following the assassination of Archbishop Muzihirwa (Interview with GRU, senior government official and peacebuilding expert, Kinshasa 24th May 2021).

In the 1990s, Monsignor Ngabu shared his episcopal life in the diocese of Goma with the Catholic seminary of St Kizito in Zaza in the province of Kibungo in Rwanda [interview with GRU, a peacebuilding expert, Kinshasa, 23rd May, 2021]. While this might suggest his support to the Rwanda RPF government, evidence suggests that he accommodated hundreds of Hutu refugees, including priests, who had arrived in the DRC in 1994 (Longman, 1998). A general view from the non-Congolese people, as these two leaders did not express their anti-Rwanda/Rwandans/Congolese Tutsi sentiments, states that they were supportive to the AFDL and RCD rebellions which were supported by Uganda, Burundi and Rwanda supported (Longman, 2001). However, they had both survived several assassination attempts [interview with FNGB, a senior RCC clergy member, Goma, 24th May, 2021]. While they were perceived as having a close relationship with the leaders of

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[131] Monsignor Gapangwa, letter to the people of Uvira, 2012. Le jubilé d'or du diocèse d'Uvira (1962-2012) : Le diocèse d'Uvira a 50 ans.

these rebellions, their lives were equally endangered during AFDL and RCD movements. Bishop Ngabu's support for non-violence persisted in North Kivu but his voice and influence at the national level became gradually insignificant (Interview with MAYSH, a religious leader and theologian, Kigali, 15th June 2021).

In summary, between 1996 and 2003, the RCC clergy in both Kivus generally failed to unify their approach, rarely acting together to denounce the widespread rhetoric based on the politics of identity and ethnic violence. Instead, they generally acted independently, expressing the ideological positions dominant in the country at the time. These included those promoted by both government and rebel movements, creating an exclusive peacebuilding (Sandal, 2017). Here, on one hand, there was a focus on galvanising unity and popular support against Rwanda and its associates; on the other hand, while most of those who collaborated with Rwanda were from non-Tutsi tribes, the Tutsis became marginalised and accused of being associated with Rwanda [Interview with BMBY, a historian and journalist, Kinshasa, 22nd May 2021]. Some of these leaders issued statements against violence and conflict. However, they failed to act as inclusive voice of peacemakers (Prunier, 2001). An influential ECC pastor acknowledged the church faced by clergy:

> As religious leaders, we can achieve so many things, but we have failed to confront the issue of tribalism. We have failed to not take side or address the question of hatred. We failed because politicians do not want this to happen [Interview with BJRR, Senior clergy of the ECC, Bukavu, 7th June, 2021].

7.1.6 Clergy and dissemination of conspiracy narratives

Notions of Balkanisation, foreign aggression and infiltration within the DRC are widespread (Muzalia and Rukata, 2022). Such views have become a deep-rooted theory frequently emerging in political narratives (Verweijen, 2020). The media, civil society, some clergy, and the general population regularly use this narrative as a resource with which to mobilise support and incite violent resistance based on identity politics [interview with Prof BMCW, Bukavu, 6th June 2021]. These ideas are rooted in and informed by narratives of who is indigenous and who is not, and the related debate on the historical precedence of occupying the land (Mathys and Verweijen, 2020). Such discourses continue to evolve and have contemporary, updated interpretations. For example, there is an ongoing hate speech by national political leaders to exploit such a belief and narratives (Ndahinda, 2022). The RCC and ECC have been active in the use of such conspiracy theories. Thus, in his Pentecostal sermon on 31st May 2020, the Bishop of Bunia, Monsignor Dieudonné Uringi, declared:

Today, if we die in Djugu, it will be because of a plan to Balkanise the DRC so that the North Kivu and Ituri region become another country. It is a politics of conquering lands. It means that the Rwandese and other foreigners can occupy our country and exploit our resources, such as oil in the Lac Albert, without us benefiting. It is an international and national political system. Even certain authorities of our country are complicit in such a plan – they have already accepted.[132]

Similarly, during his visit to Beni (North Kivu) in January 2020, Cardinal Fridolin Ambongo, Archbishop of Kinshasa, issued a statement that embedded the notion of Balkanisation[133] and infiltration and the theory of people settlement:

These are well-planned actions. The main objective of all these behaviours is to implement the Balkanisation of our country. We know that there is a process of inserting new people of Kinyarwanda and Luganda expressions who are mobbing into some areas previously inhabited by indigenous populations and now forced to move out from these areas. This issue is making things more complicated.[134]

His claim seemed to, on one hand, endorse the myth about Balkanisation[135]. On the other hand, being a senior RCC clergy member, his views supported the notion that the some of the citizens in North Kivu are outsiders and invaders (Ndahinda and Mugabe, 2022). Later, Ambongo recognised how inflammatory and unfounded his statement was [interview with BMBY, a historian and journalist, Kinshasa, 23rd May, 2021]. He withdrew his speech following a meeting with Hutu and Tutsi community leaders in Kinshasa. As the country's leading moral authority, in his rhetoric he contradicted the neutral stance expected from the clergy that is critical to maintain, and the need to edify society in collective consciousness

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[132] Declaration of Bishop Dieudonné Uringi, available online https://actualite.cd/2020/05/31/rdc-jetais-en-allemagne-mavait-montre-une-carte-sur-laquelle-notre-pays- etait-divise-en accessed on 12th March 2023

[133] There is overwhelming evidence to argue that this idea is a myth and an old conspiracy theory. See Muzalia and Mukata (2022), Verweijen (2022). There is not a known group that wants complete independence for these regions and there are no known pockets of people that actually would be happy with independence. In the DRC in popular thought, if you are against any conspiracy theory against Rwanda, or Rwandan or Tutsi, you are perceived as an enemy or committing treason. There is a risk that such an individual is persecuted even if they are not Banyamulenge or Banyarwanda

[134] 'En visite à Beni le cardinal Ambongo alerte sur un risque de «balkanisation»', www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20200104-rdc-beni-cardinal-ambongo-risque-balkanisation-massacres-nord-kivu

[135] RDC : « La théorie de la balkanisation peut être une réalité si le peuple baisse la garde » (Cardinal Fridolin Ambongo). Available online at https://rtr-beni.net/rdc-la-theorie-de-la-balkanisation-peut-etre-une-realite-si-le-peuple-baisse-la-garde-cardinal-fridolin-ambongo/ [accessed on 12th May 2023]

and unity in applying the claimed values of Christianity, where generally people share a belief in the Christian God.

In South Kivu, RCC clergy have also adopted the notion of Balkanisation (Huening, 2013). In October 2020, the installation ceremony of a local decentralised territory, *Entites Territoriales Decentralisées* (ETD) – otherwise known as a non-customary authority – in Minembwe, an area largely inhabited by the Banyamulenge on the high plateau area of South Kivu, sparked tensions across the country (Este, 2020). The enaction of Minembwe as a rural municipality was possible through a government decree of 2013, as part of a decentralisation law (Ndahinda and Mugabe, 2022). However, a few years later, due to nationalistic politics that exploit the contention grievances of autochthony, it was disseminated by the provincial authorities as evidence supporting the existence of a hegemonic conspiracy (Mathys and Verweijen, 2020). The idea of Minembwe being a municipality had already worsened interethnic conflicts and generated more violent incidents. National elites seized on this opportunity to rally communities against each other (Ntung and Shepherd, 2022). The current Bishop of Uvira, Monsignor Muyengo Sebastien-Joseph, became the focus of several controversial responses protesting the inauguration ceremony of Minembwe becoming an ETD.

Muyengo (2021) expressed his concerns through the media, the publication of a book and public statements. He argued for the rejection of the municipality, claiming that it created animosity across the country for several reasons, including the process of Balkanisation of the country (Mathys and Verweijen, 2020). In one of his inflammatory declarations, he suggested:

> Yesterday, they claimed citizenship. Today, they are claiming lands. We can issue citizenship to those that applying for it and deserve it, but we cannot distribute the land under any circumstances) (Campaign for Peace, 2020).

While these views do not explicitly call for violence, they are seen by many Congolese, claiming being native and having natural rights as 'autochthonous' (Muzalia and Rutaka, 2022), as partisan discourses of identity and of being a nature that triggers violence against the Banyamulenge people (Ntung and Shepherd, 2022). To an outsider researcher, his comment does not seem coded or suggestive. However, to an insider understanding, his reference reinforces the idea that this community is foreign to the DRC and should refrain from claiming services of the 'native' rights. It also incites violence on basis that the Banyamulenge are about to acquire customary power, and reinforces the idea of

Balkanisation of the DRC. It is a form of dog whistle communication already mentioned (to which I return in the next section). According to Banyamulenge leaders:

> Monsignor Muyengo denies us the right for a municipality that can only allow people to get married without travelling three days for a civil wedding. He denies us the right to register births. He is trading ethnic hatred and behaviour rooted in the ideology of extremism that aims to eradicate Tutsi in the DRC. He is an RCC clergy whose opinion fuels violence across the country. There have been many cases of fatal attacks, including lynching and three incidents of cannibalism. Bishop Muyengo's series of hate speech contributed to such violence [Focus group with Banyamulenge community leaders, Bukavu, 6th June 2021].

The general population, which Muyengo claimed to represent, saw the enaction of Minembwe municipality as providing local political representation for the Banyamulenge (Muyengo, 2021). The process was divisive, pitting the Banyamulenge against their neighbouring ethnic groups. Each of these other ethnic groups (Babembe, Bavira, Bafuliru) had their respective traditional chiefdoms or localities, which automatically provided them with political representation, a right denied to the Banyamulenge, since their customary power was removed by the colonial authorities (as stated above).

Muyengo's diocese oversees areas inhabited by all the above societal groups. From my observations, many Congolese see Muyengo's stance as fulfilling his patriotic mission and defending a majority. However, he is a leader of the RCC, a universal church that is expected to embrace people from all backgrounds, regardless of their ethnicity (Rutagambwa, 2020). While, as a religious leader, he has a responsibility to speak against government policy that marginalises certain social groups, as a moral authority in the Congolese people perception he is required to oppose all violence to all people or adopt the Ghandian philosophy of complete non-violence, which is justifiable from a Christian standpoint (Tiwari and Tiwari, 2017).

7.1.7 *The use of dog whistle[136] language – a socially divisive form of statements*

Analysis and discussion on 'dog whistle' statements emerged from the data analysis. The evidence is clear that prominent political and religious leaders in the DRC effectively use it to sustain hatred or instigate violence and confirmed, among other sources, by Professor SMG:

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[136] See the meaning of this term in the introduction, it connotates with hidden messages

You must understand what the clergy say. These leaders are aware that the world outside the DRC is observing them. Therefore, they don't want to incite violence noticeably. Instead, they use a coded message only understood by the local people. [Interview with SMGG, Bukavu, 7th June, 2021].

It is therefore critical to provide some examples of this coded socially divisive form of public statements. I argue that, in conflict resolution, identifying the embedded cultural meanings of narratives supporting conflict and violence is essential. This section reflects on the recent violent events and how clergy have responded.

In 2021, the March 23 (M23) rebellion defeated in 2013 re-emerged in North Kivu and re-opened hostilities towards the national army (FARDC). Its members are predominantly Hutu and Tutsi, but there are adherents from other ethnic backgrounds. Since its resurgence, various youth-led civil society movements in eastern Congo have mobilised against the M23 in violent street protests (Jänsch, 2022). On 1st December 2022, the Archbishop of Bukavu, Monsignor Maroy, initiated one of these protests in South Kivu to show support for the army.[137] The protest involved Catholic secondary schools and members of other Christian churches in the city. It involved many thousands of people. The demonstration became violent, with infamous slogans such as '*Fashi, Fatshi funguwe mulango, barudiye kwabo[138]*' ('President Tshisekedi, open the door so that they can go back where they came from'). This narrative is not clear but it revives the historical notion of '*Rwandais*' (meaning foreigner not a Rwandese), which stigmatised the Congolese Tutsi population as 'settlers' or 'unwanted' (Verweijein, 2020). According to a former RCC clergy, KATABIS, eyewitness of violence:

Protesters patrolled all vehicles to verify the physical features of the passengers so that those stereotypically looking like Tutsi could be removed and lynched. Social media widely demonstrated images that seemed like horror movies. It was surprising that Archbishop Maroy remained silent, implicitly endorsing these violent events [Interview with KATABIS, a former clergy, political analyst, Bukavu, 20th February 2021].

Maroy interrupted his silence only to issue what could be defined as a coded message to RCC congregation members:

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[137] United National radio, Okapi, report, www.radiookapi.net/2022/12/01/actualite/securite/bukavu-marche-pacifique-de-leglise-catholique-contre-lagression
[138] https://linterview.cd/guerre-dans-lest-larcheveque-de-bukavu-appelle-a-une-manifestation-le-01-decembre/

The wind of war and insecurity moving in the country's eastern part is not new. It is always the same actors, the same motives and with same allies that demand negotiated solutions, shared power and maybe a partition of the country (Vatican News, June 2022).[139]

Considering that the local people and authorities generally view all armed groups (except those involving members of the Tutsi people) in the DRC as *Wazalendo* (patriots). In this context, Maroy's message may seem on the surface to be a plea for peace. However, in referring to 'the same actors', 'same motives' and 'same allies', without naming them, he does not refer to *Wazalendo* but he rather suggests that those perceived as outsiders and are to blame. From the analysis earlier, we know that 'outsiders' means the Banyarwanda and Banyamulenge, mainly the Tutsi people within these two groups. It is poignant to note that, according to a Congolese/USA scholar, some of the victims of this hate campaign do not even know that they are Tutsi [interview with a Congolese scientist FMK, USA, 2nd March, 2022]. Maroy's audience would recognise his intentions – the collectivisation of those perceived as enemies of the country.

Maroy's statement reflects a generalised phenomenon in the politics of identity in eastern Congo. In October 2020, Monsignor Muyengo, in his protest about the installation of Minembwe's mayor, described the non-Tutsi communities as 'our population'[140] (meaning those who claims natural rights to indigenousness) and the Tutsi as 'People of Rwandan origin'.[141] Both statements again question the nationality of the Banyamulenge, and intensify frustration with killings of members of this community, as well as the violent impacts on others.

Two further examples of dog whistle rhetoric from religious leaders can be seen in events from 2017 and 2019. In 2017, as a group of nomadic cattle herders travelled from the Kivu region to Kwango province in central Congo, RCC Bishop Timothée Bodika Mansiyai used concealed language to urge people to remain 'vigilant' of 'the infiltrated' the presence of suspicious people with certain physical features[142]. While he avoids clarifying those individuals, as stated above, the word 'infiltrated[143]' is a well-known word to the insiders and

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[139] See 'Le plaidoyer de l'archevêque de Bukavu pour le retour de la paix en RD Congo', www.vaticannews.va/fr/afrique/news/2022-06/le-plaidoyer-de-l-archeveque-de-bukavu-pour-le-retour-de-la-paix.html

[140] 'En RD-Congo, l'évêque d'Uvira s'exprime sur la nouvelle commune de Minembwe', https://africa.la-croix.com/en-rd-congo-leveque-duvira-sexprime-sur-la-nouvelle-commune-de-minembwe

[141] APARECO, 'FLASH/Déclaration choc de l'Evêque d'Uvira Joseph Muyengo sur la commune de Minembwe', 9 October 2020, www.youtube.com/watch?v=YmabqMdLbss

[142] www.matininfos.net/kikwit-mgr-timothe-bodika-lance-cri-dalarme-aux-autorites-de-republique

[143] In the DRC, this is part of language of conflict. Tutsi (Rwandan or Congolese) are the only group referred to as 'infiltrators'. Recently, in December 2023, the main strapline of President Tshiskedi's presidential election

local people to refer to those perceived as 'others' and 'foreigners'. However, the othering and foreignness do not concern all non-Congolese but those perceived as not "indigenous" to the DRC (Jackson, 2007). They are often branded as immigrants (Mamdani, 2001). Response to such dog whistle rhetoric tend to generate popular uprising to take up arms against the othered groups and call for their expulsion from the country (Buzard, 2021). There is a general assumption that Tutsis are taller and slightly thinner. As is common, these words spread and became critical headlines in the national media. Such misrepresentation of nomadic pastoralists again reinforced the tendency to dehumanise, hate and fear the Tutsi people, regardless of their occupation.

Similarly, in 2019, on a visit to North Kivu, Cardinal Fridolin Ambongo urged people to remain 'vigilant', warning that "there is an intrinsic connection between what is happening in Beni, in Ituri, in Rutshuru and the territory of Fizi in Minembwe. A risk of Balkanisation of our country is on the move".[144] The term 'vigilance' was one of the intentionally provocative words used by inflammatory media rhetoric during the 1994 Rwanda genocide (Muke, 2016). Additionally, the areas cited by Cardinal Ambongo are geographically disconnected and not the only places affected by violence in the country. According to a former RCC priest, JSBMN:

> He selectively excludes other violent affected areas from the theory of Balkanisation. There is a concealed message he aimed to convey: the stigmatisation of a particular type of people who inhabited these territories and have been subject to the issue of political identity [Interview with SMYMB, a civil society leader, Goma, 23rd August 2021].

According to Kivu Security Tracker (2020: 1),

> despite the prelate's careful language, which also confirmed the Congolese nationality of some Rwandophone communities, including the Banyamulenge, the dissemination of this argument could heighten mistrust of these communities.

Many inhabitants of the localities named by the Cardinal continue to experience a war of ethnic cleansing.[145] In connecting the situation of Beni with North Kivu and Minembwe,

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campaign was the notion that 'Tutsis' have infiltrated the army (see "Tshisekedi : Une campagne présidentielle qui condamne les Tutsi/Banyamulenge à la potence" available online at https://www.campaignforpeacedrc.com/post/tshisekedi-une-campagne-pr%C3%A9sidentielle-qui-condamne-les-tutsi-banyamulenge-%C3%A0-la-potence [accessed on 17th January 2024]
[144] Radio Moto: www.radiomoto.net/2019/12/30/rdc-cardinal-fridolin-denonce-un-plan-de-balkanisation
[145] See publication by ACCORD – Austrian Centre for Country of Origin & Asylum Research and Documentation,

Ambongo associates predicaments of the Banyarwanda and Banyamulenge with the Balkanisation of the country, and labels them as the potential initiators of plots to annex the country to a foreign nation (Muzalia, and Rutaka, 2022; Kivu Tracker, 2020). Again, such claims undoubtedly encourage violence.

Some Protestant ministers similarly stigmatise groups according to their ethnicity in their political statements. The divided and less influential Protestant churches are more limited in their impact but can remain harmful. For example, a medical specialist known for his work as a surgeon and for helping victims of sexual violence against women, and also Pentecostal church minister, Dr Denis Mukwege, issued do whistling statements on a regular basis during the period 2017–2023[146]. Despite his religious leadership and reputation as a Nobel Peace Prize winner, he chose silence as a form of coded rhetoric in response to some ethnic violence (Kagire, 2020). For example, Mukwege was silent about local attacks between 2017–2023 on the Banyamulenge that were attempts at ethnic cleansing (Kagire, 2020). This violence caused mass displacement, the destruction of livestock and hundreds of deaths, including lynching (Genocide Watch, 2021)

On 16 July 2020, a tragic and violent incident occurred in Kipupu (Hintjens and Ntanyoma, 2022), in the territory of Fizi, between a coalition of armed groups and a Banyamulenge community self-defence youth. The conflict is part of the ongoing and historical contested status of Banyamulenge as Congolese nationals (Niyongabo, 2021). Several people died, which triggered responses by political actors at both provincial and national levels. Mukwege declare that: "these are the same people that continue to kill in the DRC. The macabre events in Kipupu directly connect with previous massacres committed in the DRC"[147].

This paragraph evaluates Reverend Dr Mukwegwe's statement. Firstly, the massacre was attributed to the Banyamulenge community in conflict with other local communities[148]. This claim was endorsed by a Catholic bishop, Sebastian Muyengo, of the diocese of Uvira (Muyengo, 2021: p61). Secondly, as discussed earlier in this chapter, the 1996 war is attributed only to the Congolese Tutsi because the Rwandan Army (RPF)[149] was involved (Prunier, 2009). Thirdly, generally, by definition, the Banyamulenge are framed as an

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www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2071779/ACCORD_DR+Congo_Situation+of+Banyamulenge.pdf
[146] Panafrica review. Interview with an international human rights lawyer, Bernard Maingain, by a French journalist, Jean-François Dupaquier. Available at https://panafricanreview.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Interview-with-Bernard-Maingain-by-Jean.pdf [accessed on 19th January 2024]
[147] Radio Canada : Le Prix Nobel congolais Mukwege au cœur des tensions avec le Rwanda. Available online at https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1731440/nobel-paix-menace-denonce-nouveau-massacre-rdc-rwanda-mukwege [accessed on 18th January 2024]
[148] Idem
[149] Generally, the authorities and people in the DRC see the current Rwanda regime as Tutsi's. Therefore, as the Rwanda army was involved in two wars in the DRC, the Congolese Tutsi are blamed for these invasions.

aggressive, militarised ethnic group or 'race' (Ndahinda, 2013: 485). In this case, the statement by Mukwege that 'these are the same people that have conducted killing in the DRC since 1996' is a subliminal message aimed at the Congolese, who can decode and retain the intended meanings. For the local people, by referring to "these are the same people who continue to kill", Mukwege associates the killing to the Tutsi communities (as a Canadian radio reported)[150]. Paradoxically, Reverend Dr Mukwege is frequently active in condemning violence affecting communities other than Tutsi.[151]

The phenomenon of dog whistle rhetoric and its hidden messages is neither related to a certain period of conflict nor associated with a specific event. However, there is consistency in these coded statements. They are public statements and form part of a sustained narrative from clergy and religious leaders throughout a large part of the time frame covered by this study. On 16th June 2022, the national president of ECC, Reverend Andre Gedeon Bokundoa-bo-Likabe, issued an official declaration against the M23 rebellion resurgence. As part of the message, he reassured those targeted because of their physical features or language by stating that:

> We remind people that aggression in our country by Rwandan authorities does not involve our Rwandese brothers and sisters in the DRC. We urge Congolese people to refrain from using violence against these people, to abstain from using hate speech and adopting a xenophobic attitude towards Rwandese.

To an outside observer, the above portrays a constructive response and an attempt to deter violence against Rwandan nationals. However, for an insider, the statement can still be understood as inflammatory and divisive. Those targeted in North Kivu are generally Congolese of Kinyarwanda expression (Genocide Watch, 2021; Mugabe and Ndahinda, 2022). There is no record of statements by either CENCO or ECC on this violence. Silence can also play a role in dog-whistling, as a lack of opposition to significant violence, known widely in local, national and international media, may often implicitly suggest endorsement.

On 5th September 2023, Dr Denis Mukwege, a senior clergy leader of the ECC, protested in writing the nomination of a senior military official as interim governor of the North Kivu province. For context, in May 2021 the central government decided to put North Kivu and

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[150] Radio Canada : Le Prix Nobel congolais Mukwege au cœur des tensions avec le Rwanda. Available online at https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1731440/nobel-paix-menace-denonce-nouveau-massacre-rdc-rwanda-mukwege [accessed on 18th January 2024]
[151] See Election-net, www.election-net.com/article/massacre-a-kishishe-par-les-m23-la-colere-de-la-belgique-et-du-dr-denis-mukwege

Ituri provinces under martial law to combat various armed groups and rebellions. Two years later, this martial law became controversial as the population in these regions had yet to see results. An extract in Dr Mukwege's statement reads:

> In the past, we have clarified the pressing need for the current government to demonstrate its capacity in an ethic of responsibility and assurance of the principle of coherence. Our concern is growing following a massacre committed by the national army, which continues the threat to our local people. As the aggressors continue infiltrating the army, it will sustain an existing political economy of wars in eastern Congo (Statement by Dr Mukwege, 5th September 2023).

In the above message, Mukwege practices dog-whistling to appeal politically and tribally to his internal audience without affecting his international reputation. To the local and civilian population in eastern Congo, by using the terms 'our' and 'aggressors' and 'infiltrated', Mukwege exploits the popular narrative and perception that Congolese Tutsi officers within the national army have infiltrated the security institutions. By the word 'our', he suggested those defined as natives versus others. This statement not only calls to exclude these officers but also criminalises these officers as being responsible for the massacre and reinforces the notion that peace is impossible if Congolese Tutsi people remain part of DRC society and participate in public services.

7.2   Conclusion

This chapter aimed to examine the nature of the clergy's involvement in the politics of violence and war in the eastern DRC. The evidence strongly suggests that the RCC and ECC elite produce official declarations regularly in response to violence and about peace. I have shown how profoundly the moral authority and statements of the clergy matter in situations of conflict because of widespread mistrust in the government. In spite of what might be a self-evident expectation that religious leaders from different faiths live the values of human rights and hold the belief that every human being was made in the image of God, this is not the case in practice. This chapter has shown that these Christian ethics and values of peace do not easily transcend the claims on religious leaders that arise from their other identities (territorial, tribal and ethnic). The hope that the clergy can act as regulators of peace and social cohesion between diverse ethnic groups appears to be superseded by other aspirations: economic, religious and political power. The dichotomy between commitments to the claimed Christian values of peace and a struggle on the basis of tribal

affiliations seems to create inconsistencies in responses, limiting these leaders' opportunities to deter violence.

The issue relating to the nature of each leader's peace activism remains. The approach of spiritual leaders of all kinds is unsurprisingly multifaceted and depends on perceptions of victimhood and rights and their sympathies for perpetrators or sufferers. They may endorse or compromise with identity politics or remain ambiguously silent. I have found no evidence in archival documents that, when the citizenship and ethnic identity crisis emerged in the 1990s, RCC and ECC clergy and religious leaders spoke out against the legislative measures that abruptly denied rights to specific communities, such as Kinyarwanda speakers, especially the Tutsi. The reason for such a lack of response to a major crisis is that, on one hand, these leaders embodied the racial prejudices of their respective communities. On the other hand, the issue of the Tutsi people's citizenship rights served then and serves now as a mobiliser of the masses and remains thus in Congolese popular thought. Furthermore, detailed analysis has shown that certain clergy and church leaders endorsed ethnonationalism views and practices. In other cases, a kind of silence was observed that constitutes a form of political neutrality. The research here also uncovered the risk associated with activism in non-violence: Campaigning for peace and the right of Kinyarwanda-speakers often means that the campaigner would be labelled as supportive to the Banyarwanda and Banyamulenge and therefore those advocating for peace may be at risk too.

Church leadership is inevitably political.[152] The public statements of church leaders would seem to be ideological and limited in objective analysis. The conflict, the ethnonational political environment and social trends in ethnically divided societies inescapably influence clergy and church leaders' positions concerning ethnic identity conflicts. Religious authorities frequently accommodate declarations and policies made by populist actors in government and go along with a rhetoric of 'othering' some marginalised minorities as 'aliens'. The most frequently expressed concerns of the clergy can appear to focus on partisan causes. Since politics in the DRC is predominantly tribal-based, and church leaders come from tribes, it is unsurprising to find partisan allegiances.

In Chapter Six, I have shown that conflicts are largely political and economic phenomena. I have also shown that ethnonationalism plays a significant role in rallying people and civil

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[152] Activities involved in getting and using power in public life, and being able to influence decisions that affect a country or a society. Small 'p' as not party political because they do influence decisions and do affect the life of the public.

society to mobilise around a specific set of economic grievances, and the church has played a significant role. It is evident that many have seen Christianity as an instrument with which to achieve political and economic goals. This chapter demonstrates multiple positions and facets in response to ethnic identity conflict. The house metaphor enables us to understand this compartmentalised mindset. Linking this phenomenon with this chapter, my interviews, observations, and archival research on the clergy have shown them firm in their inaction towards speaking out against conflict and violence.

Finally, I have dwelt on the difficult issue of silence, which, in divided societies, in an environment of systematic and targeted oppression of a particular social group, is itself a political act. As I have found, silence in these circumstances appears to be as potentially devastating as the most hateful rhetoric and can endorse catastrophic violence just as effectively. The next chapter provide an interpretation, reflection and evaluation of this thesis findings.

Chapter 8: Discussion and interpretation of the data

The previous chapter analysed the actions of the Christian clergy, alongside their actions, rationales, attitudes, behaviours, motivations, and public and political statements in response to the politics of identity conflict. This chapter follows on from that discussion and is divided into two parts: the first part aims to discuss and interpret the findings presented in the previous three analytical chapters. Using this study's framework and lens, as described in Chapter Three, it will critically evaluate how this thesis has addressed its objectives, and will demonstrate how its results confirm, contrast with, or challenge some of the key existing and relevant literature. I will also discuss how new knowledge emerging from this study relates to, supports, or contrasts with existing literature and models.

The second part will introduce an original framework referred to as 'multiple allegiances', illustrated by the structure of an onion, evoking a familiar African metaphor to convey the idea of "religious syncretism". It is defined as an expression of the compartmentalisation of multiple identities, interests, and allegiances in the lives and minds of religious leaders in the DRC. The framework is presented to explain the limitations and absence of impartiality among the religious actors involved in the conflicts in eastern DRC. Later, the overall conclusion of this thesis will reflect on the initial assumptions, discuss limitations and implications for research, examine the original contribution to existing knowledge and recommend potential areas for further research.

The main questions, articulated in Chapter five, six and seven, are as follows:

What role that religious leaders play in peacebuilding? And specifically,

   i. *What role (if any) do Catholic and Protestant clergy play in ethnic identity conflict in eastern Congo?*
   ii. *Do these leaders play a role in deterring violence and edifying a peace that elevates shared religious identity over the dominant nationalistic narratives where the ethnic identity and citizenship rights of the Banyarwanda and Banyamulenge are contested? If they do not, why not?*
   iii. *What have been the actions of Catholic bishops and Protestant church leaders as they engage with issues of indigeneity and ethnic identity politics in eastern Congo, and how are their actions manifested? What is the nature of their responses (for example, sermons, symbolism and political statements) and how do these contribute to deter, or sustain ethnic violence?*

Throughout this thesis the emphasis has been placed on religious leaders and their responses to eastern Congo's autochthony and indigeneity. The analyses in the preceding chapters have assessed clergy interactions with conflict and politics and how members of the clergy adjust Christian politico-religious interpretations to promote peace or to inspire conflict. Overall, the discussion has developed a complex view of the role church leaders play in divided societies like the DRC.

Three key themes emerge from the analytical data. These clarify obstacles faced *or constructed* by religious leaders involved in conflict resolution:

1. The symbiotic relationship between clergy and political power
2. The nexus of ethnicity, power and church leadership in peace and conflict
3. The ambiguous and destructive responses in conflicts of indigeneity

The data confirms that the clergy are influential among high numbers of the DRC population. They play a significant role in politics, and related widespread religious trends have had major political influence. The clergy occupy a potentially unique position to foster inter-ethnic social cohesion and non-violent action across ethnic and cultural groups. However, the data suggests that despite their strength, religious leaders have been unable to deter conflict or promote peace. They have made little impact on the current nationalistic narratives of hatred and the exclusionary politics centred on tribal identity. I have explained the nature and reasons of their failure in previous chapters.

In the next few sections, I will provide interpretations of the above findings and unpack their significance against the literature and theoretical frameworks that I introduced in Chapter Three. I will start by interpreting the results described in Chapter Five, then will move onto the reflections on the data presented in Chapters Six and Seven.

In reflecting and interpreting data, as proposed in the Theoretical Frameworks in Chapter Three, I consider aspects of Fraser and Owen's (2018) five-dimensional model related to the role of religion in peacebuilding and conflict-resolution and I also draw from the house metaphor presentations. As previously indicated, of the five dimensions, three were considered to feature outstandingly in the context of the DRC: namely, religion as a set of ideas, religion as a community, and religion as institution. However, later in this chapter, I will also draw on the house metaphor framework as introduced in Chapter Three.

8.1 Evaluation of the findings

8.1.1 The nexus of power, ethnicity and church leadership in peace and conflict

In this section, I discuss the data on relationships between churches and ethnicity – the key issues that emerged from Chapter Five. The main focus in this part of thesis was on the ethnic-religious nexus and related societal barriers, attitudes, and behaviours that throw light on clergy inefficiency in religious peacebuilding. The main finding of this chapter is that Church leaders' neutrality, independence, and impartiality in peacebuilding are compromised by their secular allegiances and ethnic identities. The data contains evidence of phenomenon illustrated in the house metaphor which shows that, among religious leaders, ethnic loyalty, and tribalism overlap with manifestations of Christian belief and are often more important. We have seen that churches can mobilise considerable resources and provide various public services beyond the religious sphere to adherents and other members of Congolese society. These functions provide platforms of influence and acquisition of modern material wealth. It also establishes a framework of interactions with other forms of power in the secular world. When observed, Christian religious practice appears less about forming a cohesive community than mobilising around a *papa pasteur* who provides answers to their needs (prayer and related rituals). Many religious leaders compete for adherents, power, and influence. Their rivalries inspire desires to address personal needs and struggles rather than to establish communities with a shared religious identity. The findings also demonstrated an ongoing and dynamic phenomenon originating from the Christian evangelisation and colonial period involving construction of ethno-religious territories (geo-politisation of the religious) persists and serves as mobiliser of resource for religious power base. The recorded interviews highlight an increasingly polarised paradigm of territorial and ethnic identity allegiance within the churches.

From this evidence, I claim that both allegiance to tribalism and the territorialisation of ethnicity hinders church leaders from responding objectively and neutrally to inter-ethnic conflict. In summary, ethno-religious power-based ideologies affect the autonomy and independence of clergy and hamper the resolution of ethnic identity-based conflict. On a positive note, despite the failure of church leaders to promote peace, the evidence suggests that Christian clergy do have the potential to produce identities that cut across ethnicities and territorial identities. I now want to unpack this claim and further examine the inconsistency arising from the church's complacency towards violence while it preaches a

gospel of peace and goodwill. To assist this examination, I use another of Fraser and Owen's dimensions – *'Religion as community'*.

Fraser and Owen see religion as a community of adherents, believers, and followers that offers a sense of identity and belonging beyond selfish interests. Their conceptualisation of religion appears to align with Émile Durkheim's view (1858–1917) of religion as a body of shared moral ideas that brought together adherents through a united system of beliefs and practices. The function of this body of shared believers is to establish integrative relationships and supportive communities (Schilisser, 2020). According to this notion, religion establishes and supports the institutional structures of a society, including ways of promoting harmony and stability in a specific community. There are expectations here that a religious community can create an overarching personal and shared identity among those with different norms, moral ethics, and spiritual convictions. I argue that this view does not reflect the DRC phenomenon. Belief in Christianity does not necessary act as the glue that brings the believers together in unity. The type of Christian religious belief in the areas explored in this research focuses on addressing personal problems and the search for meanings and solutions to everyday life struggles, personal accomplishment, health, and material success. This phenomenon produces a very diffuse religious community of diverse practices within what might be seen to be a shared belief system with shared places of worship.

As in many other parts of Africa, the DRC is a highly religious country. As stated in the Introduction, over 90% of its population are active, church-going Christians. While in other parts of the world, including the West, many claim to be Christians, the difference in the DRC is that people really do go to church. Congolese people would rarely engage in debates on whether God exists or not. Instead, what leads to questioning God is often when those devoted to practising Christianity fail to exercise virtues associated with the Christian faith, such as humanity, compassion, love, and justice. Not only are most victims of the current conflict Christians and the clergy, but many have also been killed in churches and in places of worship. Many of the key actors in violence call themselves Christians and have frequent contact with Christian leaders. Partiality in violence goes beyond taking part in the killings; complicity can also involve producing and sustaining the right conditions for violence and publicly restating hate between communities. There is a parallel with other parts of Africa: in the last few decades, evangelical Christianity has developed rapidly and widely, but the phenomenon of Christian religious-based violence remains significant in countries such as Nigeria, South Sudan, and the Central Africa Republic. Similarly, adherents of Christian churches may be both the victims of violence and the passive accomplices of its

perpetrators. A shared religion does not necessarily create a unified community that transcends ethnicity. In the DRC case, there exists a culture of religiosity in an environment of conflict where religion is not the primary driver of violence. Church leaders have been ineffective at maximising the virtues of a shared Christianity, unable to confront hatred based on ethnic identities or deter related violence. Considering their moral and spiritual legitimacy and political influence in the Congolese society, such attitudes arguably endorse a politics of identity acceptable to local people.

Understanding the role of the clergy in conflict involves examining the nature of relationships between churches and communities. Churches have both religious and societal functions and, as demonstrated throughout this thesis, churches in the DRC often provide essential public services. For many in the DRC, as stated above, being a Christian centres on an individual's personal material and spiritual needs. It involves expectations of benefits to the individual believer alone without any necessary preoccupation with the principle of community – which was the essence of the pre-Christian African religious worldview, as Ter Haar (2009) argued. Therefore, the evidence brought together in Chapter Five does reflect neither Fraser and Owen's nor Durkheim's theoretical assumptions.

Congolese Christianity emphasises the personal relationship between an individual and God and offers a personal life after death and escape from Hell's fire through personal good moral behaviour. Kroesbergen (2019) suggested that this individualistic version of the Christian faith is multiplying across Africa and has the effect of mobilising people without bringing them into brotherly/sisterly communities. Consequently, Africanised Christianity becomes less likely to deter discrimination, hatred, violence, and other forms based on tribalism. This form of Christianity does not see bridging links between ethnic groups to promote peacebuilding as part of its prophetic sacred mission.

Much of the evidence collected in my field research indicated that during crises involving ethnic identity, the clergy expressed attitudes of loyalty to territorial identity, tribal mutuality, or ethnic group. Ethnicity, religion, and politics have overlapping manifestations in much of Africa. Generally, ethnicity is expressed through ways of life that are comprised of cultural features such as attitudes to life, behaviour, language, family lineage, or genealogy and customs. Religion may be defined as being mainly preoccupied by a search for and interactions with God (Stewarts, 2009), but also involves its own language, customs, and behaviours. Religious and ethnic loyalty goes beyond supporting one's own social group, however. In the DRC, as I have argued in this study, ethnic allegiances have become a resource with which to conquer, preserve and legitimise political, economic, and religious

power. Power itself results from negotiation between politics, ethnicity and religion, and religious and political elites embody the characteristics and resources of each of these three spheres of African life as expressed by the house metaphor.

The interplay between the clergy and ethnicity must be understood through the broader African traditional and cultural landscape, whereby religion has a link with politics and the notion of ethnic belonging. What emerged from the data is that church leadership and politics are principally about power. However, religion profoundly influences how people see and understand the world, so the spiritual realm serves to achieve aspirations for power in the DRC. The multifaceted positions of the clergy's role in Congolese society are part of these complex dynamics, which themselves derive from the links established between Christianity and political power during the colonial period. However, the Christianisation of the Congolese people cannot be viewed entirely as a hegemonic strategy because of the various recognised social welfare benefits and sometimes uncoercive and shared economic interests-based partnerships between the European missionaries and the local chiefs. I argue that it may be an overstatement to link the behaviour of today's clergy directly to the actions of yesterday's missionaries. As Chapter Five shows, there was a link between ethnicity and traditional chiefdoms in the pre-colonial era, establishing the structures of resource control and the nature of power among ethnic groups. In the following two paragraphs, the discussion in this section reflects briefly on another explanation linking these findings to a disconnection between the Christian faith and its claimed values of peace.

Analysis of the data show a disconnection between the Christian faith and its claimed value of peace-making, such as "Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God" (Matthew 5 verse 9). Based on the findings from both the literature review and my own empirical data gathered in the field, it appears that the Christianisation by many missionaries in the DRC appears primarily concerned with the multiplication of adherents. What I have observed is that religious leaders are visibly present and active in public life and generate a rapidly growing mass of believers. However, these clergy do not necessarily apply their religious convictions and claimed values of peace. Despite the fast growth of Christianity, there is a lack of transformative faith with the potential required to impact a continent where tribalism, violence, conflict, and poverty affect large parts of the population. In support of this reflection, Kä Mana, (2000) suggests that Christianity in Africa has primarily become about religious emotions rather than living the humble, rational, and imaginative life of the peacemaker.

In the DRC, Christianity manifests many aspects contrary to the fundamental messages of the Gospel. These central principles summarised in Biblical passages such as the '*Sermon on the Mount*' and the *Beatitudes*, (Matthew chapters 5 – 7) and Jesus' answer to the question, 'Who is my neighbour?' (Luke Chapter 10 v. 29) are often adapted, reinterpreted, or ignored by Congolese Christians.[153] For example, some sermon leaders may interpret reference to 'who is my neighbour' as only those perceive to share the 'same' cultural heritage. This interpretation tends to exclude those labelled as the 'other'. Distortion of a gospel of peace and love was, however, equally evident as Western powers promoted themselves as a force for good while brutally crushing opposition during the colonial period. The twin historical aims of conquering Africa and disseminating the 'word of God' could not be achieved without one deforming the other. The western missionaries faced the ambiguity of preaching universal love through Jesus knowing that their own culture was acting in ways that contradicted their message of neighbourliness, compassion, and charity and beyond the moral and ethical dilemmas of Western colonialists, African societies were not passive in adopting the thoughts and dealings of the oppressors.

8.1.2   *The symbiotic relationship between clergy and political power*

The data analysed in Chapter Six showed that the interdependence between political and religious actors explains both the ineffectiveness of the clergy's role in addressing the politics of identity conflict and their effectiveness in benefiting from politics. Drawing from the house metaphor, this chapter has shown that the religious elite of the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) and the Council for Protestant churches (ECC) in the DRC have, historically, been subservient to and assimilated into the prevailing political power, or in opposition to it. These religious leaders tend to be entangled with the Congolese state and are sometimes extensively compromised by being associated with it. They may act as brokers of political dialogues at the national level or be antagonistic to the government when other functions are unavailable. This continuous mutual dependency between the church and state produces multifaceted roles for RCC and ECC elite in their interactions with power. The dynamic political and religious positions held by many priests, pastors, and bishops have generally resulted in the absence of a constructive role in Congolese ethnic identity conflicts. Because they are often seen as embodying ethno-nationalistic stances, the clergy are rarely seen as independent or impartial in ethnic identity crises. Their private interests and actions, which

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[153] See Chapter Five which demonstrates that ethnicity is a much stronger form of a sense of belonging than the shared Christianity identity. Chapter Seven also points out specific examples of public and political statements or sermons to support the views expressed here.

often involve the pursuit of material wealth, arguably conflict with church values or their playing a prophetic role.
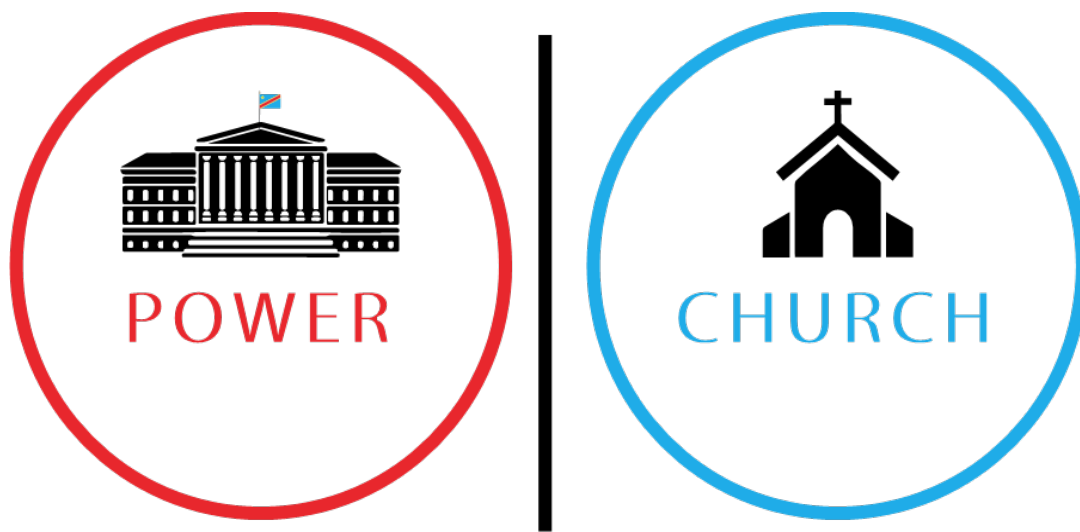

Figure 8-1: Church antagonistic to the state

For this discussion on the interplay between religious leaders and politics, I will use the dimension of '*religion as institution'* by Fraser and Owen's (2018). As argued in Chapter Three, the chosen frameworks help convey the paradoxical phenomenon whereby the clergy are significantly important and influential in Congolese society but remain indifferent to the application of moral and ethical positions in their interactions with political actors. Consequently, the clergy are frequently unable to edify society or deter ethnic identity-based violence.

To understand the tacit support of the clergy in ethnic violence in the DRC, it is important to consider the interplay between the clergy, the church as institution, and state actors. These linkages enable us to understand religious leaders' lack of a constructive role in deterring ethnic identity politics and related conflict. Outside government, the church remains the most influential and powerful institution in the DRC through its network of adherents and provision of public services. I have reflected on the historical competing and symbiotic relationships between church leaders and the state elite since the colonial period (see chapter six, page 135). The struggle over institutional power and control, and competing influence over Congolese society, define their interactions with the state. These dynamics produce a situation in which the clergy have become uncritical about the destructive nature of ethnonationalist politics and crises. Furthermore, I discovered that issues of ethnic identity mobilise support for religious leaders from particular groups of local people, and also strengthen the struggles and collaborations between church leaders and state actors.

Political power in the DRC is negotiated and shaped through the actors and systems that combine formal and informal understandings of the state. The data indicates that relationships between actors and their networks (political and religious) can rapidly change from collaborative to conflictual, depending on circumstance, influence, and economic interests. The results suggest the existence of a kind of political transhumance where members of political parties can move their membership allegiance from one coalition to another depending on where there are financial and economic interests or who has paid a bigger bribe. The Churches are not immune from such processes or unaffected by this phenomenon.
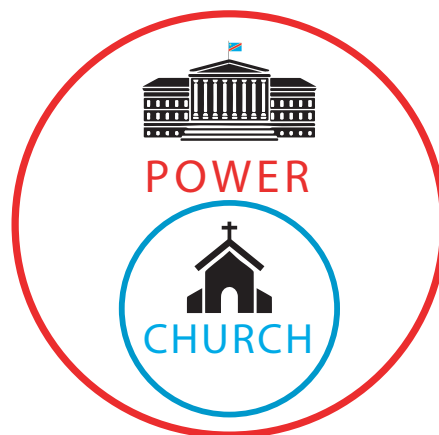
Figure 8-2: Church assimilated and subservient to the state

Using Fraser and Owen's dimension of religion as institution, we can consider church behaviours and practice throughout various key phases of politics in the DRC. Through the 20th century, the Church and state worked symbiotically to establish an overlapping power system. This overlap between the religious and the secular is clearly indicated by the data in Chapter Six and, in the context of Africa generally, this is not surprising. As explained by Ellis and Ter Haar (2004), in Africa today, for most people, religion and politics are frameworks through which individuals and communities explain their everyday experience.

As explained in the literature review, this phenomenon demonstrates the continuity of power relationships between church and state from the colonial period until now. We have seen how the RCC was one of the triple pillars of colonial power, alongside the colonial administration and the large trading companies. The continued involvement of the RCC in matters of state was established and analysed in Chapter Six. The RCC remains the most credible political opposition group that can topple a government. The data evaluation in Chapter Six alluded to examples that demonstrate RCC and ECC influence and how their clergy act as a resource for the leverage of political power.

Religious and state actors work in a symbiotic relationship. While the RCC's leaders have constituted a framework for political consultation and collective action to support people in their grievances against secular state actors and institutions, in other cases they have collaborated with state power or condoned its actions. Similarly, considering the sociological importance of the churches in the DRC, political actors understandably view the clergy as a resource through which to achieve their electoral and political aspirations. The interplay between church and state has become a powerful means to influence political power. Such interlinks also act as the means to achieve economic opportunities. The clergy are not different to other holders of power in their exercise of power and authority within a wide economic landscape. I have argued that matters of national political interest have for most church leaders been of greater interest than the welfare of marginalised and persecuted communities.

The analysis in this chapter has generated three key issues to explain the ineffectiveness of these leaders in peacebuilding:

i. National politics and national elections preoccupied Catholic church leadership and its political action throughout the period under study. The dominant pursuit of playing a central part in national politics led to the church's alignment with autocratic regimes, and this has constrained their potential function and responsibility in what they call 'prophetic'[154] roles. The clergy acted as a mediator, subservient or antagonistic to political power. Involvement in national politics became a priority over ethnic conflict and violence.

ii. Church leaders tacitly support the politics of ethnonationalism to avoid losing their influential role in politics and from their supporters. This phenomenon has significantly affected their independence and impartiality in responding to conflict.

iii. The interplay between senior churchmen and the head of state has involved the pursuit of material wealth through politics, which obstructs their independence to act as peace-makers.

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[154] This term has been explained earlier in this chapter. As a reminder, in the DRC, generally, people expect the Church leaders to play defend evangelical principles of peace and loving one another. This position is not neutral but is rather about equity. It brings the Church in place without taking sides or remaining neutral.

Chapter Six contributes significantly to addressing each of the research questions. Church elites act as institutions in their own right too. Their relationship with the state compromises independence in peacebuilding. I have shown through the data analysis that some of the more established clergy of the ECC and RCC increasingly embed their politics of indigeneity in responses that generate popular support, bolster their power, and maintain political influence. Generally, from my observations, the clergy of all Christian denominations perceived ethnic identity conflicts as spaces within which they could avoid relinquishing their societal control and sustain the status quo.

The discussion in this chapter shows that the interplay between clergy and politics is problematic – incompatibility between religious and secular spheres, or between spirituality and political power, inhibits their constructive role in the identity crisis.

8.1.3 *Ambiguous and destructive responses in conflicts of indigeneity.*

The third and final analytical chapter (Chapter Seven) critically analysed interactions between the clergy and the politics of identity conflict. It examined how church leaders publicly expressed their contesting views on Congolese Tutsi citizenship rights. The chapter examined the nature of public and political statements issued by the clergy of both the RCC and ECC in response to the crises of ethnic identity that have dominated the last thirty years. It focused on their reactions to specific events relevant to this study, whether in deterring or sustaining conflict. This phenomenon produced a range of mutually exclusive and multifaceted positions. Drawing from the house metaphor and Fraser and Owen framework, the data shows that the RCC and ECC clergy have been ambiguous, silent, and complicit/complacent regarding the violence against Tutsi communities, particularly throughout the 1990s and in relation to the more recent violence in North and South Kivu. The Catholic clergy have also engaged in 'dog-whistle'[155] practices in recent years.[156] Evidence in Chapter Seven showed three reasons for the clergy reticence to speak publicly against violent events targeted against the Banyarwanda and Banyamulenge: first, a fear of losing public or government support; second, while there are exceptions, many clergy continue to embody the racial and xenophobic ethnic prejudice of their respective ethnic

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[155] This term has been explained in the Chapter One. However, as a reminder, a dog whistle is the use of coded or suggestive language in political messaging to garner support from a particular group without provoking opposition.

[156] They often use coded public statements that are generally more recognisable by the local people. The approach helps to generate protests and ethnonationalist rhetoric. Some of these are, for example (as evidenced in Chapter Seven), 'we welcomed them, but now they want to grab or steal your land', 'they are coming to balkanise our land', 'people remain vigilant, the country is about to be sold', 'your land is under threat'. In other cases, clergy remain silent in response to extreme violence known at the national level. Some of these forms of communication can incite or endorse ethnonational views (Ndahinda & Mugabe, 2022, Muyengo (2021).

communities; finally, the clergy lack a unified voice to respond to conflict. As individual actors they often depend on populist themes and the tacit support of tribalism to mobilise local support.[157] By keeping to a relatively safe position, the clergy are widely understood to have endorsed the resurgence of the ethnic identity crisis. This is evidenced in the numerous quotations used in this final chapter. Overall, the data strongly suggests that church leaders could have done more to deter violence by providing persuasive public statements to counter the dominant narratives of conflict and the ideology of racialisation of ethnic identities. In the next section I apply Fraser and Owen's third dimension of analysis, '*Religion as Ideas*: *Language, Power and Weltanschauung*'

Fraser and Owen (2018) framed religion as a set of dogmatic principles – types of shared teachings, ethical norms, values, religious interpretations, stories, myths, cultural accounts, and a 'Weltanschauung'[158] that enables one to understand, respond and act in a society and conflict situation (Schliesser, 2020, p. 54). The idea of discourse is used in a broader context to include semantics and diverse forms of communication – verbal and written statements and sometimes expression and 'body language'. Religion is seen by Fraser and Owen as a discourse involving interpretations of social reality. This observation enables a rationale with which to analyse the public and political responses to ethnic identity conflict made by the clergy. The documentary research and interviews in my data reveal evidence of particular uses of political and religious language by the clergy as they comment on conflict situations and ethnic violence. The data also provides many examples of how the ideas put forward by these influential and authoritative leaders are understood by their followers.

The legitimacy of religious leaders' influence and authority is established through the quality and effectiveness of their discourse: the sermons and 'prophetic words'. A large church and the leader's ability to attract influential people are perceived as socially powerful. I discovered that public recognition and acceptance of such power is associated with charisma, articulation, and a preaching message focused on providing answers and meaning to the topics of everyday personal struggle, social and political situations, and life after death. This form of power derives from acting as medium between God and the people, giving an ability to interpret and address various spiritual threats (evils and misfortune) and social issues including poverty related suffering and illness. These fears and insecurities are interpreted by church communities as signs of the absence of power: this may help to

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[157] See analysis of data in the Chapter Seven and the work of an RCC Bishop Muyengo
[158] This German term, translated into English as 'worldview', denotes a perspective and interpretation of the universe and its events held in a sustained way by an individual or by a group (Ashmore, 1966, p. 215)

explain why leaders are consulted as a means of searching for protective power and achieving a holistically stable life, success and prosperity. Some of these religious leaders claim that they possess the power to unlock the economic success of their church members and make them a useful resource to those who are faithful to him.

Analysis in Chapter Seven shows that both RCC and ECC leaders regularly issue public and political statements in response to violence. However, they frequently lack unity and support from their institutions and networks to establish a shared approach to speaking out against ethnic violence in any setting and between any groups. Internal ethnic and power-based divisions between both RCC and ECC leaders affected the Church's capability to apply its 'prophetic' mission and voice in peacebuilding. RCC clergy, autonomous within their dioceses at the provincial level are often placed in their native provinces. When this is the case, they tend to maintain loyalty and allegiance to their respective tribes. It is clear that a minority of priests and senior pastors engage publicly in active support for ethnic violence, but the evidence I gathered suggested that the message of compassion, common humanity and love for all fellow human beings is also largely absent in teaching or public messages of other church leaders. Instead, the most dominant character and rationale of their communications is rooted in historical and racist theories that are used to enable and endorse tribalism, ethnic differences and hatred.

As in the case of political actors, religious leaders too exploit the above notions relating to the politics of identity. Chapter Seven described various narratives, including 'Balkanisation', 'doubtful' nationality, and the myth of Hamitic versus Bantu[159] in the claims of indigenous 'natural rights'. These ideas appear embedded in private and national discourses, and clergy sometimes use them in public and political statements (see Chapter Seven, page 175). Today, some religious leaders continue to use these racial concepts either as dog-whistle messages or as direct communication aimed at the public to legitimise divisions. External categorisation led to internal prejudice and dissent.

As demonstrated in Chapter One, identity in Eastern Congo fuses around these questionable notions of ethnicity and continues to be instrumentalised by those in power in church and state. With a general emphasis on ethnonationality politics, people's worldview tends to generate instead a perception of realities not as they are but rather how they appear (Coseru, 2012) and through a generated language of conflict and 'othering'. Such

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[159] Those designated by 19th and early 20th century anthropologists as 'Bantus' consider themselves collective landowners and indigenous. Whereas those perceived as 'Nilotic – Hamitic' people are viewed as interlopers from the Horn Africa (Elgringham, 2006).

language enables one to present certain social groups as a vital threat to one's ethnicity or tribe (Este, 2019). This stereotypical view and exclusionary practice are not only created by an opportunist political elite but has become generally part of local people's perceptions, feelings, and understanding of conflict. Evidence in chapter seven shows that clergy are social actors in the conflict discourse. The use of discriminative narratives, ultimately resulting in ethnic violence, is not simply an expression of tribalism and xenophobia but forms the very basis of perceptions of citizenship. I argue that if these attitudes persist and flourish unconstrained, such conditions cannot offer a suitable environment for peace to succeed.

I now want to introduce an original framework based on the onion metaphor that visualises the diverse compartmentalised pluralistic allegiances that form the different layers of the mindset of a typical Congolese church leader. It represents concealed interests, aspirations, and motivations of clergy to explain obstacles in their role in deterring ethnic violence.

8.2   A Framework for Multiple Allegiances

There is no unique, inclusive theoretical approach that enables us to adequately understand all the interplays between religion, politics, conflict, and peace (Haynes, 2023). Indeed, the Christian clergy, in the context of peace and conflict, cannot be understood in isolation from other societal issues linked to politics, governance, and political economy.

I use an onion (see below onion shaped diagram, page 214) to represent the allegiances formed by the Congolese clergy. The reasons for calling upon this unusual metaphor are fourfold. Firstly, both onions and religious leaders are fundamental to Congolese life. Secondly, just like the onion, the presence of the priest/pastors undoubtedly flavours all around them. Thirdly, when carefully examined, both priests/pastors and onions can be seen as having multiple and somewhat loosely linked outer layers. Lastly, at the core of person and plant is the indispensable bud evolved to ensure growth and propagation. The third and fourth aspects of this novel framework will be used to introduce the concept of 'multiple allegiances and the central core of ethnicity' I argue to be in the mindset of many Congolese clergy and religious leaders. In the context of seeking more effective routes towards a peace process, understanding the mind of religious leaders is essential to understand the behaviours, motivations, and interests that hinder their effectiveness as potential agents of peace. I believe that using this conceptual structure could help achieve a sustainable outcome of any agreement between opposing sides by acknowledging and addressing their concealed aspirations. I propose that if these layers of allegiance are kept in mind, it would

be possible to design a realistic peacebuilding framework in the DRC through involving the churches' leaders at a more central level.

Metaphors can help us understand abstract truths more easily. The plan of arrangement of rooms in the former DRC president's residence (see Page 66, Chapter three) illuminated the compartmentalisation of the multiple identities, interests, and allegiances clearly evidenced in the lives and minds of religious and political leaders of the DRC. I have evidence of similar compartmentalisation in the minds of religious leaders. In this, I use the term "religious syncretism" to capture the merging of beliefs from one religious' tradition into another and adapt this concept to include the inclusion of unrelated, non-religious beliefs and practices into a quasi-religious narrative. In this amended form, the notion of religious syncretism may offer specific relevance when seeking to understand the behaviours, motivations, and interests of church leaders in the context of peace-making. I argue that the clergy seek protection by forming various allegiances.

A peacebuilding model which encompasses religious actors ought to recognise the complexities outlined in this chapter. I have argued in this thesis (Chapters Five and Six) that in the DRC religion and ethnicity define and legitimatise power, authority, and influence. I have demonstrated that the religious sphere, representing the spiritual side of conflict and politics, should be understood by peace studies scholars as part of the paradigm of power. Similarly, reflecting on the original house metaphor (in Chapter Three, 65), I have noted a disparity between the conceptions of local and Western peacemakers on conflict and its cultural environment. One of these misconceptions is a lack of understanding of the role that religious actors play in politics, power, ethnic politics, and conflict. So long as the links between religion, politics, ethnicity, and conflict dynamics remain unrecognised or minimised, external peacebuilding efforts towards a sustainable peace will fail.

In this framework of multiple allegiances, I consider three strands of ethnicity, power (political and economic), and religion. Each of these concepts is an angle through which Congolese people interpret the world. These notions rotate interchangeably: one might be active in a specific situation and inactive in other. The layers of loyalty are connected but work either interchangeably or independently and do not necessarily conflict with each other.

A multifaceted and compartmentalised mind may be common to all humanity. Reflecting on the house metaphor, I have demonstrated the lives of political leaders and religious clergy, but I will recapitulate this here because of its particular salience to my current argument. When I visited several private homes of some of the most influential political or religious

leaders,[160] I observed common patterns in the interiors of their homes that expressed something of their private religious and cultural identities (see Chapter Three page 56). In this situation individuals are observed to adopt a multiplicity of allegiances that can be employed in appropriate situations. I use here a familiar African metaphor of an onion (see photo 8:3) to express the multiple allegiances of the religious leaders in the DRC.
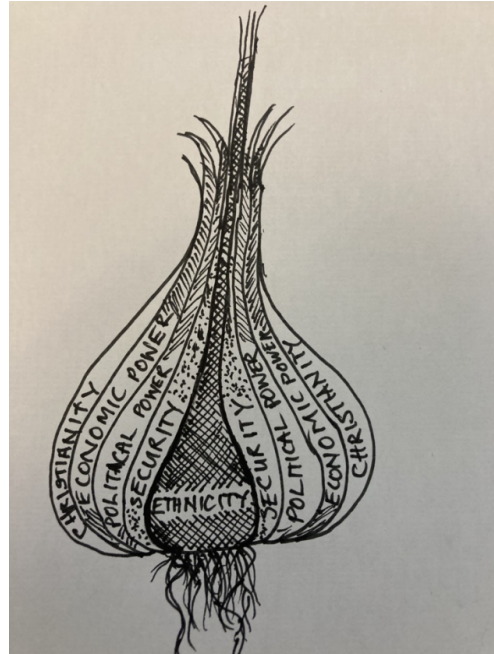
Figure 8-3: Onion model of multiple allegiance.

The onion is also commonly understood in the metaphoric language of the DRC. It is grown around a traditional typical African house (hut) or in the backyard garden and is an essential part of most cooked meals. In conflict resolution/mediation, it can be considered to symbolise layers of the interests and positions of the actors. The outer layer represents the more visible 'position',[161] the second and third layers (invisible to the public) are personal and private interests held by an actor, whereas layers in the central part represent the vital interests. The fourth layer represents physical and psychological spiritual well-being and can include aspirations. Here, there is an emphasis on the proposal that different kinds of power overlap and are interrelated. In Congolese society (including religious leaders) there is a constant quest for spiritual power and protection over both physical and psychological well-

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[160] I observed the houses of senior political and religious leaders for over two years during my study. This is the same setup that was observed in all the private houses that I have visited (about 20). It is most likely that every single private house reflects the features being described here.

[161] Visibility of Christianity is based on various displays of symbols as well as public religious practice. The clergy wear many Christian symbols, including a cross on their suit/shirt for ECC and RCC. RCC bishops are recognisable through their mitre (cap), crosier, ring, pectoral cross, skullcap, or choir dress, worn by RCC bishops when presiding religious ceremonies. All religious leaders perform various rituals during family events such as Christenings, baptisms, marriages, and funerals. They perform other religious practices in public such as prayers.

being but against invisible evil power that may threaten personal material success. Generally, people tend to expect of God's favours regarding riches and physical health as a reward for church giving. The fifth layer is the core and at the heart of the onion model of multiple allegiances. It concerns tribal loyalty, and it transcends and crosscuts all other four layers in the sense that it links with the trilogy of underlying factors of politics of indigenousness or autochthonous (land, ethnic identity, and customary power). In this view and expectation, one cannot claim to have an ethnic identity without having land; there cannot be rights to land without rights to customary power. This allegiance is, therefore, more important because it encompasses a systematic group of beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours of identification but a basis for seeking power and maintaining power. The onion represents the publicly displayed and concealed motivations and interests of clergy/religious leaders.

The image illustrates the relative degrees of priority of the different identities, starting from a core of ethnic identity that for many quietly but insistently influences all thought. In the context of the eastern Congo, physical, physiological, psychological, and economic security are generally the second most important priorities.

The onion diagram expresses the layers of contrasting institutional systems in the DRC. In the secular world too, the same individual, in different contexts, is a member of a certain ethnic group, a partisan of a certain organisational belief and committed to other allegiances. Members of the religious elite or clergy can be tradesmen/women, merchants, or business investors at the same time. As Haynes (1995: 93) argued:

> clergy are the same: economic stringency religious actors who behave in distinctly secular ways. That is, they will attempt to use their network of contacts to advance their own interest; this gives them access in the same way as businessmen and women to contacts with the political elite for mutual benefit.

While the public would expect a certain level of ethics and moral standards, it does not necessarily or any longer expect them to stand outside politics and business as it is the case often here in the UK/Europe. The Church, like civil society agencies, is becoming a route into politics.[162]

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[162] The Church enables leaders to establish credibility and influence in the local community, which later becomes an endorsement for participation in public policy debate and politics.

The onion diagram deliberately suggests that perceptions and behaviours of a religious elite and church adherents are neither set in a unique way nor simply determined by belonging to a church or religious group. Instead, the concept of micro-identities expresses my contention that, depending on the circumstances, church leaders will contribute to the structuration of political and/or economic positions and judgements (Haynes, 1995; Lahire, 1998). Religious elites may commonly therefore be involved in superimposed positions. Belonging to a shared Christian religious identity becomes a lower priority than belonging to a tribe or being a supporter of a certain political ideology. Opportunism and circumstance determine what sphere converts into allegiance.

In peacebuilding, I would suggest that it is a mistake to focus on just one of these allegiances – all are relevant to the owner. The whole of the onion must be considered. As we have seen, the Congolese essentially live two lives, blending two religious belief systems. The different loyalties of Christianity, aspirations for economic and political power, consciousness about physical and spiritual security and ethnicity do not mutually exclude each other. They are expressions of the diverse aspects of social life and events in DRC life.

8.2.1   Allegiance to Ethnicity

Loyalty to ethnicity is a commitment to one's tribe and to a sentiment of being different to others. Religious elites in the DRC are loyal and attached to their tribal affiliation as a form of social capital, political mobilisation, and foundation of their aspirations. The idea in the post-colonial literature that defining claims to certain ethnicities constitutes a feature of backwardness is misleading. Tribalism operates continuously, strategically, and intellectually through various internal and external actors to support the dynamic function of internal religious and political governance spaces (Assana, 2021). Unlike Christian identity, loyalty to a tribe is not publicly displayed, it usually remains personal and private. As demonstrated in Chapter Five, before Christianity, ethnic and racial differences were part of an individual's identity. Before becoming Christians, these individuals were members of their respective cultural and ethnic groups. Christianity neither replaces an existing social identity nor destroys people's cultural identity. Instead, Christianity becomes an additional identity. Therefore, within the onion diagram, ethnic allegiance can be understood as being core and central to a religious leader as it serves as a resource to preserve and establish power and mobilise support.

Ethnicity can enable, for example, the expression of political and economic grievances. This is more frequent in the driver of conflict that links identity, land, and customary authority

(Mamdani, 1996; Huggins, 2010). The concepts of power, religion and ethnicity converge in a broader social and political environment where church leaders and religious ideas become closely linked with power and have the effect of sustaining inter-ethnic conflict rather than peace. Where this has happened, economic and spiritual concerns interact within a rapidly changing environment in which many Congolese people use religious beliefs to resolve their everyday material and secular problems (Haynes, 1995: 101).

The clergy can be seen as part of the above context of ethnicity that involves negotiated interest and symbiotic conflict. While church leaders are expected to apply impartiality and independence, and remain autonomous in situations of disputes or conflict, it is difficult to avoid the reality that they operate in an environment where loyalties to the political system that instrumentalises ethnicity as a political resource to mobilise popular support. Religious elites are a product of their societies. These leaders often claim to commit to values of peace and wish to be seen as working to create a peaceful society. Allegiance to ethnicity is a fundamentally significant layer of identity upon which other identities are constructed. In this case, in my onion diagram, living up to a perceived Christian identity and its shared values ("body of Christ"[163]) represents merely the outer layer.

In summary, the 'neutrality' expected from church leaders is often compromised by ethnicity-derived politics. Generally, their avoidance to deter or speak out against incitements to violence aims to ensure that there is no contradiction in terms of the ethno-nationalist positions of the dominant ethnic group in the congregation. I move now to the second form of allegiance – beyond ethnicity and to the layers of security, represented in the next layer of the onion model.

8.2.2 Allegiance to conditions of security – physical, psychological, and spiritual

The second onion layer relates to both individual and family levels. It concerns physical and psychological uncertainties and what might be termed 'spiritual security'. The previously discussed mutual influence between spiritual and socio-political environments is significant here (see Chapter Five page 108-118). Chapter One and Two have highlighted briefly on the well-documented failure of state administrative bodies which create social and economic uncertainty and insecurity that impacts on the ability of local communities to overcome social, cultural, and economic challenges. In public services, a culture of corruption, conflict

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[163] It is a term used to describe one identity of believers (oneness) and their unity in Christ. The term in the DRC is used to refer to a church a unity of Christian believers. It affirms that Jesus is the main authority over the church: it is a union of all Christians into a spiritual body with Jesus Christ as their main leader. The concept is also borrowed from 1 Corinthians 12. In teachings of Paul (the apostle) the church is associated with a human body where different parts play their role to enable good functions of the body.

of interest, and the expectation of political and financial favours remain an endemic problem and are well evidenced. These factors again lead church leaders to prioritise financial interests over religious attitudes and values (Mutombo-Mukendi, 2011). Church leaders tend to be concerned about their political and security environment and how these affect their church business, themselves, and families.

Among some there is a hybridity or multifaceted loyalty to these different belief systems but what unites them is a continuous awareness of the visible and invisible force of evil. Most powerful people in politics or religion have police guards for their homes as well as CCTV cameras and intelligence systems – but also employ people dedicated to prophetic prayers to warn of spiritual threats. This dual allegiance results in an important dilemma, an ambivalent lifestyle. Every unsuccessful project or initiative or illness in the family is associated, for example, with the god of misfortune.

A spiritual and superstitious culture pervades all. Spiritual security allegiance relates to the pluralistic belief system discussed in Chapter Five. A conflict between old and new belief systems appears significant. People believe both in God and in the power of evil (Satan). It is believed that a supreme being acts in everyday human life and that good and evil have similar forms of power. This allegiance is constantly at the back of people's minds and concerns. In my field observations, a large percentage of prayers by church members or clergy involve casting out demons and seeking protection over family and promoting children's health.

8.2.3 Allegiance to economic and political power

The third and fourth layers of the metaphorical onion represent allegiance or aspirations to political and economic power. Church leaders operate in a context of competing economic resources, corruption, and the rivalry between ethnic and religious groups already described in Chapter Five and Six. We have seen how positions on the principles of peacebuilding are compromised by the pursuit of personal ambitions and preoccupations with living a modern lifestyle and accumulating material wealth. Elite church leaders use their position to act as representatives of people deprived of or detached from the processes of national civil and political life. This self-nomination as 'moral' spokespeople provides priests, pastors, and bishops with a voice in the political influence (power) and sets in place an environment for the politicisation of ethnicity in religious as well as political spaces.

Economic status became a major aspiration for some church leaders, who used their Christian identity as a cover for achieving their materialistic ambitions.[164] The competition for political and economic power among those who replaced the missionaries reinforced the politicisation of ethnic identity as a resource for such aspirations, already described in Chapter One. The race for power restricted any role that Church leaders might have taken to address inter-ethnic conflict in eastern Congo. As demonstrated in the house metaphor, the dynamic social and political environment creates a situation where multiple social positionalities are perhaps inevitable. One of the scholars in religious studies summarised this phenomenon in the quote below:

> There is a symbiotic relationship and multidimensional personal bond between religious leaders and political actors and their followers. These links are based on mutual aspirations of economic advantages. Political leaders enable clergy to access certain resources in return for support and collaborations. [Interview with MSSREN, a senior pastor of a mega evangelical church. KGL, June, 2021]

Politics and economic opportunities are interconnected. Politics is an important allegiance and is seen as a source of wealth. During my field work in the headquarters of both Catholic and Protestant churches, I have gathered evidence of many symbols of political influence and prestige; displays of state-related medals, gold painted coffee tables and photographs with the president. Discussions with leaders were characterised by frequent references to finance-generating projects and services or the need to seek Western partners who might facilitate the acquisition of building assets. The financial wealth generated from such sources enables access to the political sphere.

Expectations that the church should be apolitical is unrealistic in the DRC (Kitata, 2020). I discussed in detail the symbiotic relationship between church and political power in Chapter Six. At a national level, RCC leaders oppose the government in terms of alternance of leadership.[165] The analysis in Chapter Six shows religious and political authorities aspirations to achieve personal enrichment, and that they of course have control of the economic system (Mutombo-Mukendi, 2011) and the rationale of religious elites is neo-patrimonial,[166] clientelist, and tribalist (Oyatambwe, 1997) as a basis to mobilise support with a goal to establish influence and personal enrichment. These church leaders have the same
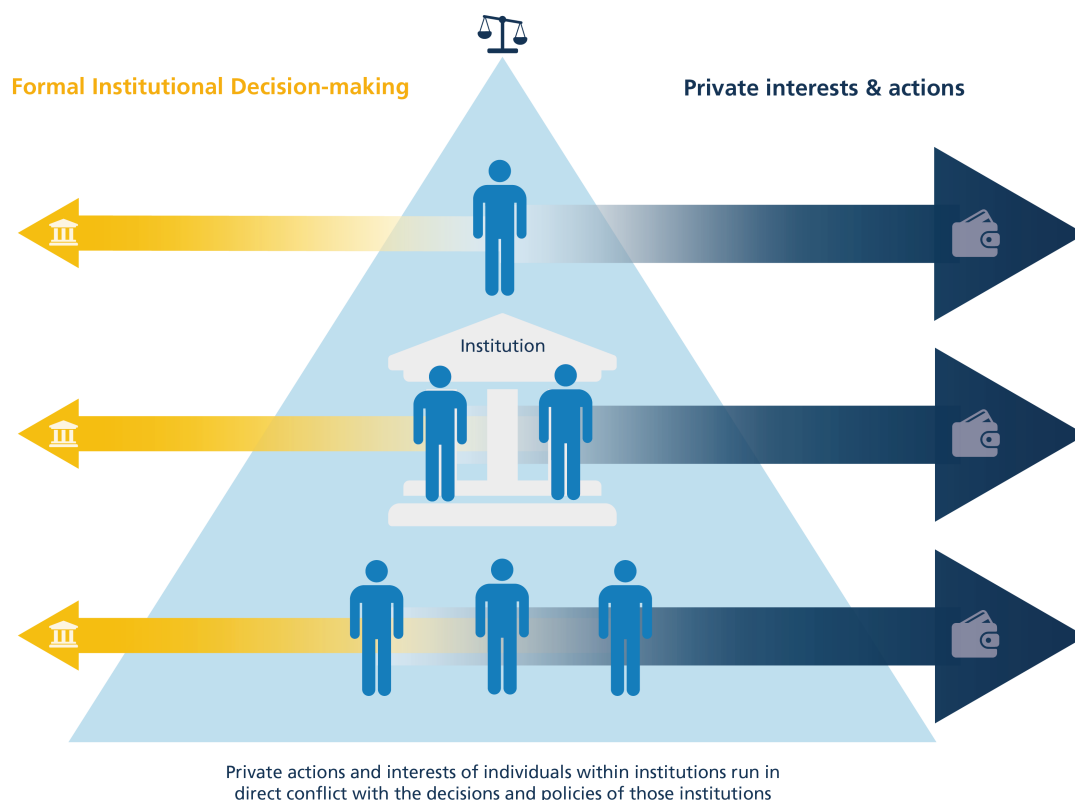
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[164] Idem
[165] La Croix. [Available online https://international.la-croix.com/news/world/church-in-africa-is-obliged-to-take-a-stand-on-political-issues/5459 accessed on 24th June 2023]
[166] A system of social hierarchy where patrons use state resources to secure the loyalty of clients in the general population.

ambitions as political actors: a nice car, a house, and to send their children to expensive schools. To ensure that these aspirations can be achieved, they tend to create conviviality and cordial relationships with political elites or align with the majority, even in situations where the opinions of many do not relate to what might be thought of as Christian values and Biblical principles (Mokelwa, 2017) that form the basis of the church as institution. In this case, individual religious leaders' private interests and actions directly conflict with their institutions' values and policies/vision. This context opens a space where clergy appear more potent than their organisations or become another form of institution. The below figure illustrates this phenomenon.

Formal Institutional Decision-making   Private interests & actions

Institution

Private actions and interests of individuals within institutions run in
direct conflict with the decisions and policies of those institutions

Figure 8-4: Private interests vs. formal institutions.

As offerings and donations from church members generally do not sustain the churches, other financing channels have to be considered. Political actors have realised the high value of financially stable churches and the morality of contributors to church finances is considered irrelevant by many church leaders and congregations.

Churches and their leaders play an essential and often ethnically-based role in elections. To access power, politicians have to ensure that they have the support of church leaders.[167] For example, current President Felix Tshisekedis' closest unofficial advisors are Pentecostal religious leaders. He needs their support to increase and mobilise internal consensus and establish or maintain positive relationships with Israel and the United States.[168] These relationships between church and state are widespread. All ruling parties ensure that a president of the national electoral commission comes from a church that would favour them during presidential elections. This issue is discussed widely in Chapter Six.

While political actors influence the churches' position in society through financing church leaders or the churches, the congregations are sensitised to the political position of the main funders. It is common for churches to receive large gifts such as the construction of a new building, roofing, refurbishment or extensions, and comfortable chairs – especially at election time. Such gifts tend to be made "sacred" through prayerful and bible-based public presentations. There is little doubt that these interactions and interdependencies hinder religious leaders' impartiality in conflict resolution.

In order to mobilise the maximum amount of funding, church social actions have tended to become increasingly secularised. Therefore, in the context of this study, actions led by the churches may not necessarily be motivated by religious values or a normative principle. Within the interactions described above each participant would see themselves as acting "morally" and spiritually. Church leadership is no longer perceived as being incompatible with parallel responsibilities in politics. I conclude now with the final, outer layer of the onion – the allegiance to the Christian faith and tenets, which seems to be positioned not at the core but at the flaky periphery of this hierarchy of commitment.

8.2.4 Allegiance to Christianity

Believing in the Christian God for many interviewees involves adherence to a 'a more publicly acceptable' and unconcealed interpretation of power. Christianity and affiliation to a church is but one of the many identities of an individual. This identity is shown as the outer layer of the onion diagram because it is the one most commonly seen by others. It is also the outer skin because it often serves as a 'cover' for other aspirations like economic and

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[167] Political opponents tend to rebuild personal and private relationships with influential church leaders during elections. I interviewed one of the most influential pastors nationally. He revealed that no single political presidential candidate had yet to visit him.

[168] South World: Accessed online at https://www.southworld.net/dr-congo-the-presidents-pastors/ accessed on 26th June 2023]

physical protection. This surface skin is indeed what others see and it is tougher, but also prone to flaking and peeling off when under pressure as the commitment to other allegiances is stronger and an alternative source of economic and cultural security. It is an important and strategic layer as being a Christian offers advantages as it is supported at some levels by modern liberal world views. To many ordinary Congolese, the way that church leaders have achieved financial stability or material wealth and played significant roles in politics is a feature of the success of the church in the DRC. Having a Christian faith is perceived as providing an 'economic' insurance for life before and after death. Haynes (1995: 98) argued that this is one of the key motivations that led many Africans to convert to Christianity, and is also relevant in the case of the Islamic faith. While the notion of a supreme God existed and was embedded in the cultural belief system (Rukundwa, 2006; Ka Mana, 2000), the old gods were perceived to be weak and unable to 'provide' similar levels of service to the new one. The new Christian religion brought modern material advantages and prosperity and undid their allegiance and commitment to the old religion (Haynes, 1998).

Christianity was also an attractive allegiance because it provided answers to the big questions of life. It was perceived as delivering more effective support for illness, better protection against evil and enemies, more secure finances, heightened personal success, support in personal and family tragedies, plus the assurance of life after death. In the narrative of most European missionaries, evangelism was disconnected from the earthly life of economy, politics, and societal issues. Although African Traditional Religions (ATRs) also addressed the same human issues, this was done in the context of a traditional God that is less powerful as Christian God. There is a perception of the latter in providing education, hospitals, and employment. Whereas, the former offered solutions and methods that are currently portrayed, and eventually seen, as primitive and ungodly.

As illustrated in the House Metaphor, Christianity for some will have seemed like a modern and international ATR with universal values and offering a simple transfer from a weak God to a stronger God: a God of miracles, a healing God, a God that speaks through prophets, a pragmatic[169] God. Church leaders and Christian prophets replaced traditional healers (*Wafumu).*

The ways in which political leaders consult clergy to seek prophecy illustrates the tightness of the interplay between ethnicity, power and religion. I have also outlined the multi-layered

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[169] A God that can be involved in different situations of everyday life. A God that is practical and can 'fix' issues as they emerge, providing practical solutions.

nature of the religious allegiance within that trinity. I have shown here that religious leaders can be multifaceted and show a compartmentalised response to either conflict or peace.

The onion diagram presents religion as a multifaceted phenomenon, demonstrated as sacred doctrines, cultural traditions, and foundations of ethnic identity, as well as a factor in economic aspirations and church organisation. I want to extend the onion discussion and provide a contextual background and rationale. I reflect on the concept of power and authority drawn from the traditional religious belief systems and customary power structures.

The struggle to access power remains at the heart of discrimination, ethnic exclusion and conflict in the DRC. As discussed in the analytical chapters (Chapters Five and Six), religious identity provides a legitimacy and a networking resource to achieve ambitions of political and economic power. Having a large church membership is seen by the community as a symbol of power and influence; it is a form of grassroot and elite level politics. In this context, religious leaders' moral and challenging voice is weakened because of the fear of losing members. Addressing the exclusive behaviour, ethno-centric views and positive responses to violence that can be observed in some church members is avoided by church leaders. Therefore, in seeking the protection that can be gained from political influence, the actions of many are not necessarily led by a lifestyle or interiorisation of Christian 'ideals' of peace. In the search for modern materialism, Christian values of peace are in conflict. However, it is important to note that there is a minority of religious leaders who think and act differently by promoting peace, and their congregations appear respond positively to such challenges. The qualities and actions of these religious peacemakers will be discussed later in another diagram.

The phenomenon of interaction between power and cultural and religious structures is not new: those who have used/use power have had to seek legitimacy within their communities (Eggers, 2013). Interactions involving power and authority with different agencies were dynamic, flexible, and multifaceted to avoid a potential relinquishment (Haynes, 1995). The holders can adapt their loyalties/allegiances and accommodate different circumstances and changing needs and situations. For example, as with the house metaphor framework that I have introduced in chapter three, there were multiple facets in the relationship between customary power, its constituents and the colonial state. On the one hand, the colonial power relied on traditional chiefs to act as a resource to contain local resistance, but these customary leaders had to rely on the colonial institutions and forces to operate.

On the other hand, these chiefs sometimes maintained their loyalties to the local people by relinquishing their personal interests (finance and protection) expected from the colonial power (Eggers, 2020). In specific contexts, despite their authority, which seemed autocratic, these leaders were insecure about their subjects' abilities to mobilise spiritual and secular discourses as mechanisms to claim accountability (Loffman, 2017). For example, sometimes, local religious movements or groups have often had abilities to resist against the traditional rulers (Isaacman, 1977). However, such resistance by the grassroots communities is not necessarily a resource for an anti-hegemonic power against the local and national political or customary authority as Western observers usually assume. As in other parts of Africa, since the pre-colonial era, in the DRC, societies have evolved, and there is a continuous negotiation between the holders of power and individuals and communities. Considering such historical context, the challenges to traditional forms of authority often led to either integrating religious actors/ideas in the customary power system or assimilating the latter into the former as one of the resources to seek or ensure legitimacy. The discourses of power and authority were constructed in the historical context.

There is a hierarchical order within Congolese society that establishes a source of authority. Such a vision relates to both the manifest and latent (spiritual) world which exists in time, space and meaning. In an ideal situation, both spheres of existence influence each other 'harmoniously' and both are used to interpret social realities and conceptions of the universe itself. Life in the visible world is understood to be meaningless without a spiritual power (Pobee, 1987). The latter is believed to stem from God, from the ancestors (via spiritual mediums), and from nature and malevolent spirits. In the visible sphere, the hierarchy involves the kings, clan leaders, family heads, and members of the families (Nkurunziza, 1989), animals and plants. Traditionally, at various levels of society, those holding authority are expected to model holistic life in a collective manner (Mbiti, 1969). In African traditional society and other societies with related religious beliefs, those who live in certain close connection to what is regarded as a foundation of life (community, ancestors, universe and supreme God) are legitimised as having both authority and power over others because such sources of influence are understood as being sacred (Ande, 2010). Individuals with traditional authority were perceived as gifted and chosen by God to ensure people's welfare[170], an understanding that is quite close to what Max Weber (1947) described as a form of power known as 'charisma'. Traditionally charisma in certain, unusually skilled

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[170] How one becomes an authority is socially constructed. In the pre-colonial period, traditional leaders possessed several abilities to defeat enemies, including oratory and military skills. In other cases, through social status or inheritance. Since the colonial period, anyone could become an authority depending on whether the colonial power favoured them. Similarly, in the post-colonial, it has been a question of 'luck' and opportunism: anyone can become an authority if selected or endorsed by influential national political leaders.

individuals, gave them greater status and influence, with which they might lead or direct others (Mwaura, 1999). Such abilities traditionally were regarded as granted bestowed or inspired by God.

In the ancient cultural and traditional religious context in central Africa, community leaders were part of an association that fought the invisible forces of evil (Ande, 2010). The latter were viewed as malicious enemies that disturbed the harmony of society. It was recognised that these threats possessed a spiritual power. The holder of such a menace was considered a living individual involved in witchcraft. As such, traditional leaders needed to be 'equipped' with wise inspiration and knowledge to counter forces and the effects of evil. This wisdom was again considered to be given by God. In this context in the DRC 'authority' did not necessarily signify the legitimate possession of power, rather those that possessed power also held authority.

8.3   A New Model of Understanding Religious Leaders in Conflict

Expanding from the onion-based metaphor framework of multiple allegiances framework, I want to develop further the above description to introduce what I refer to as *Militancy in Peace and Violence* diagram which provide a novel approach to an analysis of positive and negative influences of church leaders in peace building**.** It evaluates clergy categories of actions, behaviours and attitudes. Whereas the above onion framework of multiple allegiances offers not only an interpretation of the overall issues emerging from the thesis but explains clergy mindset and concealed aspirations, interests, and motivations. It expresses a religious syncretism that I believe explains why religious leaders have failed to build a common identity in shared Christianity rather than maintaining the existing identities of ethnicity. The onion framework of multiple has argued that seeking more effective routes towards a religious peace-making, understanding the mind of religious leaders is essential to comprehend rationale for the above-described behaviours, motivations, and interests of clergy and what explains their ineffectiveness or ambiguity in become potential agents of peace.

The *Militancy in Peace and Violence* diagram that I am about to introduce is an analytical model for understanding the multifaceted and contradictory categories of actions and behaviours that clergy display. The Militancy in Peace and Violence consists of two mutually exclusive strands encompassing multiple positions of clergy in response to ethnic conflict. The approach designates and interprets these two opposing characteristics of clergy discourse in ethnic violence. In some cases, as illustrated by the house metaphor, some

clergy can be part of multiple categories at different times. This diagram conceptualises mainly how a more multifaceted and complex set of actions taken by the clergy in conflict and peace.

Key themes emerging from my collected data have enabled the design of an original approach that allows an evaluation of enthusiasm in church leaders for peace-making versus their role in the tacit support of violence. The diagram helps to address one of the research questions that sought to understand the practices of RCC and ECC leaders as they engage with issues of indigeneity and ethnic identity politics in eastern Congo. Chapter Two summarised a significant consensus for many scholars (for example, Appleby, 2002; Basedau and Koos, 2015; Little, 2005) that religious leaders have the potential to play an essential role in mobilising people to engage in either violent action or peace. These opposing choices do not describe the highly nuanced categories of behaviours, values, and attitudes held by different by religious leaders. The existing literature does not clarify the rationale and interests behind the choices of these leaders in supporting or opposing racist and often violent action. The binary framing in the leading literature does not determine levels of commitment to violence or peace. It is therefore important to establish critical indicator of support for peace or violence through the various actions, attitudes and behaviours of church leaders. The *Militancy in Peace or Violence* diagram that I have developed illustrates the variety of selves that influence Congolese church leaders bring to their role in society. It categorises various categories of clergy motivation attitude and behaviour and their sometimes-conflicting influence on responses to peace or violence. The *Militancy in Peace or Violence* diagram shows a range of nine categories (arising from the data) of church leader response to issues of peace or violence in the DRC. I want to summarise the relationship between the onion diagram of multiple allegiances (above) and the *Militancy in Peace and Violence* (below). The former conveys clergy interests, aspirations, and motivations. The latter explains the categories of actions and behaviours resulting from clergy interests and motivations.
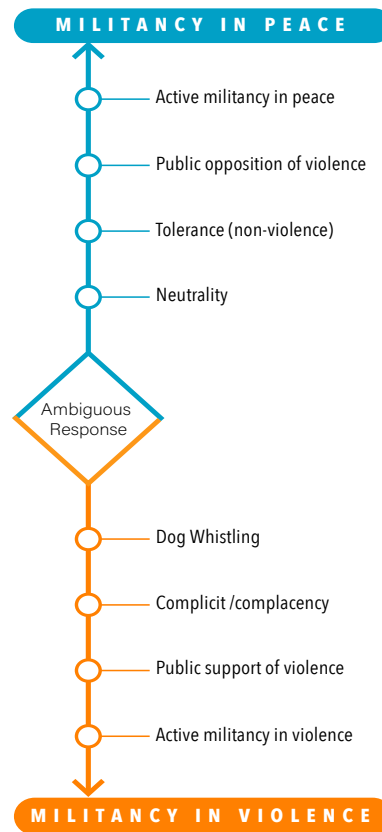
Figure 8-5: Militancy in peace and Violence Diagram that I have designed to illustrate clergy multifaceted roles

8.3.1 Active militancy in peace

A minority of clergy active in militancy in peace tend to use their influential position and Christian spiritual resources to edify people involved in conflict to forgive and see humanity in the lives of all others. These leaders tirelessly demonstrate actions in living their claimed Christian values of peace and have a developed theology of peace.[171] Their concerns are expressed through messages that promote unity between people from the grassroots through to the political level. They are known for their authenticity, independence, and autonomy in response to state and religious powers and authorities in situations where loyalty to politics and a tribal base is present. They use pulpits and public and political declarations to challenge popular narratives that fuel conflict and violence. They tend to cite Biblical scriptures that mobilise people towards living in harmony with their neighbours. They recognise other societal, cultural, and political institutions but act independently, objectively,

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[171] Ongoing actions and commitment to ensure harmony between God and people, among people and between people and the Earth (Little, 2007). Theology of peace is centered on love between all human beings, actions to bring people from diverse backgrounds together by love.

and rationally concerning ethnic conflict regardless of whether in a political or other sensitive context. Their convictions are to pursue social justice as their sacred mission. They speak out against hate speech, tribe-based discrimination, and division. Their sermons focus on reconciliation, social cohesion, and peace.

These clergy are perceived by others as selfless, and do not align with their tribe in situations where others are excluded. They are courageous enough to hold a position against political authorities when the latter are involved in divisive and ethno-nationalistic politics that condone abuses and any exclusions. Finally, these leaders' side with the victims of oppression even when it is politically unacceptable, risky to their own lives and costly to their power-based interests. They thrive to appeal to the political leadership's conscience through rational and ethical teachings and moral conduct. In the context of identity politics, many of these leaders are subject to abuses by government authorities, who may stigmatise their peace-building position as being in opposition to the government authorities practice or popular narratives.

8.3.2 Public opposition of violence

It is politically unpopular and risky to name and publicly defend human rights abuses against ethnic groups. A small minority of leaders can display qualities of courage that oppose ethnic identity-based violence. Unlike the above category of active militancy in peace, these specific leaders do not actively work on peacebuilding themes but can speak out against targeted violence when it occurs. These leaders tend to consider that the church as an institution has a function to remind adherents about certain norms towards inter-ethnic coexistence. They have limited power to elaborate peacebuilding or policy-based programmes but abstain from associating their church with politics for economic and political interests. They may sometimes speak of the potential dangers of tribalism or excessive behaviours and actions of hatred as these happen, or they may protest through sermons when there are inhumane treatments of those viewed as non-indigenous and foreigners. While these leaders may not necessarily possess the highest levels of cultural and intellectual abilities or resources, their attitudes toward non-violent actions inspire methods to create the right conditions for peace to emerge. As an illustration, I refer to a bishop FNGB[172] (as discussed in Chapter 7 page 185). He regularly often calls listeners to choose peace and peaceful coexistence between all communities. The latter leader spearheaded a campaign for peace and used various initiatives to challenge ethnic identity-based

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[172] FNGB is highly respected religious leader who is known for his actions in conflict resolutions and active militancy in promoting peace.

discrimination. He has shown exemplary and exceptional courage considering the risks associated with public opposition to violence, including hatred some local communities.

8.3.3 Tolerance (non-violence)

This is a category of religious leaders who use their pulpits to preach peace by pointing out certain principles that can guide unity in society. They discuss tolerance in general terms but are fearful to point explicitly to the communities or individuals who are victims. Their fear is based on an awareness that there is a risk of losing members of the church by siding with the discriminated. These religious leaders rather use the history of people's movements in the DRC to demystify the focus on differences. They tend to be inspired by rational, intellectual, and humanist attitudes in challenging people to understand the diversity of ethnic groups in the DRC. While these leaders are against tribalism and tribal-based armed groups, they often avoid topics viewed as politically controversial and contentious, such as the contestation of ethnicity and nationality of Banyarwanda and Banyamulenge. This category mainly uses their church to preach about the need to tolerate one another. They use a broader, educated approach to eradicate radicalism, but avoid naming the underlying cause of violence or naming the victims.

8.3.4 Neutrality

Most authors see the principle of neutrality as avoiding partiality to enable effective mediation between conflicting parties. Such a view does not fully reflect clergy neutrality in response to violence in the DRC, however. Neutrality is not necessarily about impartiality but has instead a multifaceted political position. It potentially contains diverse positions that represent changing political interests. In general, neutrality disguises an avoidance of speaking against tribal or political violence. With specific reference to ethnic identity in eastern Congo, it is a controversial matter; therefore, these leaders tend to use silence as a strategy to ensure the survival of their leadership. They avoid attempting to change the social and political injustices around them. However, their type of 'neutrality' is constructive in the sense that their silence does not promote hate. The main barrier for them is that they see the violence of tribalism as political and, therefore, controversial matters that, if confronted, may affect their power-based interests and positions.

8.3.5 Ambiguous response

As with the category of 'neutrality' and tolerance, this type of clergy does not condone or speak against violence. However, the ambiguity of religious leaders in this category tends be viewed as an endorsement of popular narratives of violence. The silence is generally seen as compromising with ethnonationalist views and tribal partisanship. In other cases, these leaders tend to be vocal in promoting peace and harmony in a different context of violence. They can preach against violence affecting some groups but tacitly endorse exclusionary politics through silence or subtle messages. This behaviour of silence to respond to a publicly known event of the nature of hate can be either a conspiracy or avoidance to confront the effect of tribalism, which may be contentious to their leadership. Such evaluation of silence as an action is based on religious leaders' previous public statements, which would have denounced other types of persecution and killings. While committed to promoting peace, as in the case of neutrality, these leaders consider that speaking against ethnic identity politics is politically incorrect, unpopular, and can threaten their popularity and influence. This category of religious leadership fits closely with Appleby's (2000) argument of what he refers to as the 'ambivalence of the sacred'. As an illustration, the National Council of Catholic Churches (CENCO) has been rational, consistent, and firm in condemning violence between the Teke and Yaka people in the Kwamouth territory in the western part of the DRC (Atemanke, 2022). However, they applied different approaches in response to violence in both South and North Kivu between 2017 and 2023. The senior clergy's responses and actions involved a high-profile tour of the area affected by violence, visiting the victims' families and challenging political leaders for manipulating antagonism between ethnic groups and, mostly, educating people across the region about peace. These religious leaders used rational models to challenge conspiracy rhetoric that served as the basis for justifying violence.

8.3.6 Dog Whistling practice

This category of clergy uses coded statements and messages in their engagement with the people to reinforce existing support for ethnic identity politics. Their vague and suggestive communications are aimed only at Congolese consumption. These leaders fear that such unethical messaging could be damaging to their wider moral standing if outside audiences, such as Western partners or the Vatican, are aware. To the external world they want to maintain a positive image as peacemakers and inclusive leaders. Their communication is therefore aimed at locals, and they must use a particular implicit and non-verbal approach

that protects their public image abroad. Their accountability is often to partners in the global North. Such a conflict of interest often leads to two kinds of public statements: a coded message directed at the local population, and a compassionate declaration for external consumption. In other cases, their measured silences and 'dog whistle' responses to violence targeted on ethnic groups are perceived by many as political statements that endorse or tolerate the killings. In these discourses, there are often references to inflammatory terms such as "generosity of Congolese people", "the killers are known", "be vigilant, your land is about to be stolen", "our land is not to sell", "we know very well who is behind this".

8.3.7 Complicity/Complacency

For this category of clergy, two major factors drive their position. Firstly, ethnic identity conflict relating mainly to the contestation citizenship of the Congolese Tutsis is itself embedded in their politico-religious practice. In their congregations, there is a use of biblical teachings to justify violence against the Congolese Tutsi or the latter tend to apply some sacred scriptures to justify their stigmatisation and resistance. Members of armed groups on both sides of conflict are part of their churches because Christianity, as it was introduced to them, had many references to support and legitimise violence, the contestation of the existence of others and battles for power and territory. In the Old Testament, written in pre-Christian times 3,000 years ago, ethnic identity was usually the basis of these conflicts. Not only do current day complicit clergy have allegiance to one side of the ethno-nationalist position, but they also lead themselves to spaces of conflict over religious, political, and economic power. Secondly, this category of few leaders is afraid to confront identity politics and related violence as there are three levels of risk: political risks; losing members of their congregations; and losing their political allies. All these reinforce partisan positions and endorsement to exclusionary views.

8.3.8 Public support of violence

The data collected contain many examples of high-profile religious leaders using unsupported narratives to support conspiracy theories of "Balkanisation". Some religious leaders also use biblical and theological teachings to justify religiously their position or perpetuate black-on-black forms of racism (see Chapter Five, 113-114).

Black-on-black racism appears generally accepted and tolerated as a belief. The state has failed to play its role as a regulator of negative social relationships. Both religious and state

institutions appear to endorse attitudes that outsiders might see as bigoted. Religious leaders supporting violence use an 'othering' rhetoric and feel the need to awaken their churches against certain ethnic groups. These leaders may preach and make public statements against violence affecting other tribes, but endorse ethno-nationalism. These clergy tend to consider an algorithmic approach to the analysis of crimes which consists of three criteria:

1. Good and bad victims
2. Good and bad perpetrators
3. Good perpetrators and bad victims.

They selectively condemn violence involving what they see as 'bad perpetrators', accused of killing the good victims, but cannot condemn the killing of the 'bad perpetrators' perpetrated by 'good perpetrators. In this case, a massacre would be unreported if a mob of the 'good perpetrators' committed violence against the 'bad perpetrators'.

8.3.9 Active militancy in violence

My data shows some clergy actively use social media platforms to brand Tutsis 'others' and 'foreign invaders'. In their public and political statements, they emphasise a perception that Tutsis are determined to form a separate state and break up the DRC (see Chapter Seven, page 188). These discourses reinforce the dominant narratives of indigenousness. Some in this category of religious leaders preach universal brotherhood and claim not to be actively involved in disseminating the ideology of violence, but continue to encourage hatred against the Rwandophones, especially the Tutsis (see Chapter Seven, page 195).

Documents and verbal statements citing historical precedence are regularly produced in the public domain of the DRC to incite hatred and violence against the Tutsis, but the clergy and churches rarely criticise or oppose these public hatred campaigns. Silence can be seen therefore as another form of active militancy in violence. I want to explain how silence can be active. In the DRC, it is a common claim of clergy that they hold a public mission in society as '*veilleurs et éveilleurs'* (custodians and awakeners of conscience) and that they a conciliatory resource for the people (Kitata, 2020). As demonstrated in Chapter Seven, they regularly issue statements in disapproval or approval regarding certain types of violence. However, many church leaders remain silent in response to similar violent acts committed when perpetrated, for example, by members of their own community or those they side with.

My experience is that most of the community will interpret such silence as endorsement, condonement or complacency such violence.

From my investigation, I would state unequivocally that most clergy leaders fit the middle categories from both positions – that is, from *Militancy in peace and violence*. Very few religious leaders operate at the extreme classifications of the diagram but what is general common characteristic is an absence of a message of compassion, common humanity, and love of all fellows' human beings. I now want to reflect on how this diagram was constructed and its potential applications and limitations.

The Militancy in Peace and Violence diagram was designed to show the complexity of religious actors in peace and conflict contexts. Inductively, it provides nuances to the dominant arguments suggesting that spiritual leaders can either be a powerful driving force of violence, fuelling prejudice, legitimising violent actions, and mobilising communities into conflict. Or serve as powerful social capital and sources of inspiration for peacebuilding, enlightening people to adopt transformative and constructive behaviours towards peace. The diagram rather evaluates a diverse position in enthusiasm in church leaders for peace making versus their role in tacitly supporting violence. The debates in this diagram simultaneously display pluralism within both the positive and negative categories of religious leaders' activism in peace and violence. This diagram was constructed by drawing primarily from extensive ethnographic research with religious leaders in the DRC, contextualised within broader scholarly discussion on the interactions between religion, conflict, and peace. The diversity of positions arose through the various themes that emerged from the data. I have demonstrated the analytical process in methodological section (see page). The diagram categorises the themes that emerged from a specific question on the clergy's responses to the ethnic identity related violence and their public and political statements.

The Militancy in Peace and Violence diagram serves as an analytical model to understand the pluralistic positions of religion in peace and conflict. However, it can also serve as a development model for those leading churches or potential religious peacemakers. Such the programme could use a meaningful religious site and involve an extended learning, meditation and spiritual transformation process of living Christian values of peace. The expected outcome of this educational retreat would be to enable clergy to shift positions from levels zero, one, and two of militancy for peace to levels three and four. Those operating at levels four, three, two, and one of military militancy in violence can be introduced and provided with in-depth theory and principles to shift to level four of peace.

While the diagram and its descriptors could potentially be a dynamic force for improving religious peacebuilding, I recognise that this proposal may present some limitations. It may be challenging to persuade religious leaders who are interested in their power and wealth, who incite violence or remain silent about it, to change into a gentle activist of peace who would renounce violence, political power. Though, the diagram captures the current phenomenon and has potentials to be tested and applied.

8.4   A summary of contribution to the literature

In conclusion, I offer a brief evaluation of the ways in which the new knowledge presented here is supported by or conversely contrast with existing literature and models.

The findings contradict the claims of a trend toward secularisation within DRC society and predictions that the influence of religion would decline because of modernisation and progress, as discussed in the work of Basedau et al. (2017) and Omer (2015). This decline was assumed to be inevitable across the African continent by 20th-century social scientists such as Durkheim, Comte, and Weber (Basedau et al., 2017). In the DRC no such decline has occurred, and their assumption has thus been proven to be invalid: the church continues to dominate every level of Congolese society, and still has the ability to influence, collaborate with, and indeed topple the government. While there is a superficial adoption of secularism at the state level, Christian churches in fact act as regulators in social and political spheres.

The data partly supports the scholars Appleby (2000), Little (2005), Sandal (2017) and Ter Haar (2004) concerning the need to involve religious actors in conflict resolution due to their distinctive ethics and moral standing. In the case of the DRC and despite some contrary findings, the omission of the religious elite would be likely to undermine the efficacy of peacebuilding efforts. However, on the other hand, and notwithstanding that Congolese society generally expects the clergy to respond independently in conflict situations, this thesis strongly suggests both that the clergy are major social actors in ethnic conflicts and that they have developed an interdependency with state actors. The findings here suggest that clergy who collaborate closely with political leaders cannot easily play an effective role in peacebuilding.

The findings align somewhat with Kä Mana's (2000) concept of *African* Christianity. He framed Christianisation in Africa as a manifestation of capital, that is, as inspired by market ideology. He linked the work of missionaries with the spread of the global capitalist system. European Christianity was indeed introduced in the DRC as a direct result of King Leopold II

of Belgium's colonialism motivated by dreams of expanding power and the economic exploitation of rubber and minerals. These economic and religious interests quickly involved industrial-scale forced labour, whipping, mutilations and massacres (Arden, 1968: 26). In the colonial project, the early missionaries were mostly subservient actors, unconsciously assimilated into the trinity of colonial power (civilisation, commerce, and Christianity). He argues that colonial Christian religious leaders became concerned with integrating their congregations into the economic order and transformed Christian converts into subalterns of the new economic system. However, Kä Mana's assumption lacks acknowledgement of the resistance on one hand, and participation on the other, of pre-colonial African customary powers in the slavery movement (Soboro, 2022). Therefore, the coercive nature of links between Christianity and the colonial economic project may not fully explain the behaviour of today's clergy in the DRC. His perspective assumes too that African society was, and would remain, static and immune from desires for material wealth even without Christianisation.

While acknowledging the relevance of Kä Mana's arguments, this thesis demonstrate that the notions of authority and power were already embedded in pre-colonial religious traditional systems and customary structures. These concepts were interwoven and consistently anchored within their local social-cultural environments and enmeshed in the local economic, religious and political spheres of influence and control. Hence why those who have used/use power have had to seek legitimacy within their communities. The original framework that I have proposed shows an existence of sophisticated ways that those aspiring or holding religious power apply by adapting their loyalties/allegiances and accommodate different circumstances and changing needs and situations.

There is a consensus among social scientists on the use of social identity in conflict. Tajfel and Turner (1979) explained the relationship between self-identity and the social groups to which one belongs. In political science and conflict studies, academic contributions, especially those from western traditions, have generally approached religion as a facet of identity that sees an individual as part of a social group (Ter Haar, 2014; Philpott, 2012; Ysseldyk, Matheson and Anisman, 2010), like a church. Religion is understood by most sociologists and anthropologists to link people through shared belief systems, and (sometimes) to the state. Although religious ideas can act as a basis for political mobilisation and disputes, I have argued that theological issues play little role in encouraging or restraining violence. Identity may be based around religious groupings, but not religion itself. Religious affiliations are argued by many social scientists to stand at the heart of antagonisms between communities in their struggle for political or religious power and these struggles often quickly lead to exclusion, dehumanisation, and genocide (Malvern, 2000).

However, these theories are not supported by my observations of conflict and violence in the DRC. While religious beliefs may sustain and even inspire violence, the conflicts along the eastern border of the DRC are not between Christian denominations or religions. The underlying factor of Congo's conflicts are more complex and deeper seated.

Christian church leaders have been involved in mass atrocities and genocide for centuries and across the world. There is significant evidence of the role of clergy in the 1994 Rwandan genocide (Longman, 1998, 2001; Gatwa, 2005). US policy framed the violent war on Iraq in the name of God (Froese & Mencken, 2009). Christian Popes, Archbishops, Bishops and Kings funded, supported and led the massacres of the crusades (Riley-Smith, 2002). The indifference and complicity of churches in slavery (Tutino, 2020), the persecution of Jews (Ericksen, 2007) or South African blacks during the apartheid regime (Struby, 2018) is well attested. Various studies have covered consistently Christian support of the abuse and dehumanisation of Congolese natives by Belgian King Leopold II and the Belgian state (Doyle, 2016). This thesis attempts to bridge the gap between these studies by providing an understanding of the role of Christian churches in deadly and unprecedented ethnic violence in the DRC (Beneduce et al. (2006). It also demonstrates the links between the introduction of Christianity in Africa, the post-colonial struggle for power control in the DRC and multifaceted positions and allegiances of clergy towards the state and particularly inter-racial conflict. My thesis dwells on the importance of the interplay between religion, power, and politics in the understanding the role of religious leaders in conflict in Congo.

Finally, the thesis has established the existence of a symbiotic co-existence between religion and modern politics, which serves to elucidate the challenge and obstacles of Christian religion in peacebuilding. Bayart (1989) and Ter Haar and Ellis (1998) have written extensively on interactions between religion and political power outside peace and conflict. For these authors, the two spheres are inseparable. Politicians aspire to access power, and the religious have interest in secular as well as spiritual powers. Power itself may arguably be understood as a spiritual concept (Ellis & Tee Haar, 2004). The Christian church and clergy discussed in this thesis fit this general framing in multiple ways. As stated earlier, the European missionaries collaborated with the state in introducing Christianity to Africa. To some extent, this interlinkage had a secular worldview. Following independence, as with other African countries, the DRC expressed the need to separate church and state. This became a spoken policy rather than a reality. As stated above, political and spiritual power remained intertwined, and church leaders became either vocal critics or partners of the government during the democratisation – providing a high and influential profile in the public view. Beyond clergy rapid growth, as demonstrated in Chapter Six, they are also politically

influential. In the DRC context, I argue, the church and religious sphere represent the spiritual side of conflict, and politics should be understood by peace studies scholars as a paradigm of power.

Sandal (2017) developed theoretical ideas on inclusive and exclusive theological behaviours in her study on religious leaders in Northern Ireland. She argued that the clergy do not always generate or disseminate inclusive and peaceful public statements and their interpretations. Appleby's (2000)'s 'ambivalence of the sacred' has influenced the major studies in religious peacebuilding. This thesis however moves away from the binary understanding of clergy engagement with peace and conflict. The analysis rather shows a multifaceted approach that results from the changing interests, politics, and actors – an expansion of Appleby's theoretical arguments. This thesis rather closely relates to Sandal's findings. As with Sandal's argument, this study recognises religious leaders' high potential in peace-making and their function as epistemic communities, but unlike Sandal's theory, my findings also show complex, multifaceted, interchanging, and contradictory roles. Firstly, this thesis offers a framework of multiple allegiances. This original conceptual framework, I argue, helps in understanding the mindset and concealed interests and motivations of religious leaders in the DRC – a pre-requisite to peacebuilding approaches. Secondly, it extends from the multiple allegiances framework to define different categories of actions, behaviours and attitudes of choices in either militancy in peace or violence. I refer to this as *Militancy in Peace and Violence*.

Overall, the literature review showed that there is a growing scholarly interest in interactions between religion and peacebuilding processes. Certain successful examples are used to argue for the constructive role of religious actors in peacebuilding. In analysing the data I have presented, this discussion applies a wider perspective that also learns from unsuccessful cases where the role of religion in ending violence was not effective. Some studies have focused on one particular case study of conflict transformation (Alfani, 2019) in Goma, North Kivu. Others have either explored the effective role of church networks (Ayo and Whetho, 2009) in civic engagement or the involvement of Catholic Church leaders in successful socio-political actions (Kitata, 2020).

The findings of this study bridge a gap in existing literature. Autesserre's (2010) findings have enabled us to understand why the international peacebuilding model has failed in the DRC. In addition, Hoffman (2019) demonstrated that the customary authorities (traditional chiefs) and structures failed to produce approaches that promote stability and harmony. Finally, Leeuven (2008) revealed that local civil society organisations are so deeply

entrenched in local and regional conflict politics that their constructive role in conflict resolution is limited. Analysis here enables further links in the existing literature that explain the limitations of religious actors in peacebuilding in the DRC.

More widely the evidence suggests that such power-seeking negatively affects these leaders' potential for constructive and interdependent roles in society, especially in the area of peacebuilding.

8.5   Conclusion of the discussion

This discussion chapter uses Fraser and Owen's (2018) five-dimensional model to interpret the analytical chapters in this thesis. As already introduced in Chapter Three, of the five dimensions, I have considered three which feature outstandingly in the context of the DRC: namely, religion as a set of ideas, religion as a community, and religion as an institution. The thesis has established three key factors that explain the clergy's failure to play an influential role in deterring ethnic violence: the symbiotic relationship between the clergy and politics, the ethnic-religious nexus in peace and conflict, and mutually exclusive and multifaceted positions: ambiguous, silent, and complicit/complacent regarding ethnic violence. Following the interpretation of these findings, this chapter introduced a framework of multiple allegiances to represent Congolese religious leaders' mindsets. Extending from this framework, this chapter developed the *Militancy in Peace and Violence* diagram to analyse various categories of clergy's behaviours, rationales, practices and attitudes towards ethnic violence. It is a novel approach that provides essential positions within clergy choices to pursue either militancy in peace or violence.

My concept of '*Onion framework of multiple allegiances* illustrated by the structure of an onion, evokes a familiar African metaphor to convey the idea of "religious syncretism", defined as an expression of the compartmentalisation of multiple identities, interests, and allegiances in the lives and minds of religious leaders in the DRC. These terms and metaphors are presented to explain the limitations and absence of impartiality among the actors involved in the multiple conflicts in eastern DRC. I have argued that the theoretical model constituted by the layers of allegiances, discussed above, provides a basis for understanding the behaviours and decisions of leaders in the context of peace-making. My overall and key theoretical argument here is that if clergy operate within inclusive principles[173], supported by their religious institutions and networks, and uninfluenced by

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[173] They are founded on inclusive actions that treat everyone humanely and equitably regardless of their backgrounds and circumstances. It is based on the need to alleviate suffering wherever it happens. The

other allegiances and loyalties, they have the potential to act as effective, impartial peacemakers in identity conflicts in the DRC. For sustainable peacebuilding in the DRC, it is essential to deconstruct the long-lived narratives and build on the common shared allegiance – replace the core of the Onion framework of multiple allegiances with Christianity. Religious peacebuilders ought to persuade actors in ethnic identity violence towards deconstruction of their dominant histories of identity and embrace a shared form of identity. I have clarified the relationship between the onion framework of multiple allegiances and the *Militancy in Peace and Violence* diagram. The former expresses clergy-concealed interests, motivations, and aspirations. The latter conveys categories of their public displayed actions, behaviours and attitudes.

The analysis has demonstrated that the underlying causes of violent conflict appear to be anchored in the politicisation of ethnic identity and struggles over religious, economic, and political power. The discussion has identified that ethnicity has become a pivotal resource in aspirations for economic, religious, and political power. Violent conflicts in the DRC are an outcome of the destructive use of ethnicity to preserve, control, and legitimise power.

Peacebuilding is the responsibility of all key actors, traditional leaders, central and provincial governments, and the church. I have demonstrated in this chapter that the Christian clergy have significant potential in conflict resolution because of their crucial influence upon the lives of the Congolese people. A significant body of literature seeks to promote a constructive role for religious leaders in the peacebuilding process, but I have shown that the multifaceted and interchanging nature of various allegiances present obstacles to impartiality, neutrality, and agency in living the claimed values of peace inherent in the Christian religion. This, I believe, is an original and deeper analysis, validated by my insider status and privileged access to many of the key religious players in current events in the DRC. Religious leaders have the potential to effectively influence peace if they are able to act independently from their ethnicity. Indeed, the potential for religious peacebuilding to succeed may depend on the ability of clergy to affiliate with those religious teachings that diminish the significance of other allegiance.

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overriding ethics and actions must ensure that all lives are protected and that the needs of all human beings and their way of life are respected.

Chapter 9. Conclusion

This study considered the role of Christian clergy and religious elites in the DRC in resolving conflicts relating to indigeneity and ethnic identity or in exacerbating violence that occurs along ethnic lines. It has focused on understanding and analysing the actions, concerns, behaviours, and responses of these religious leaders. It has studied their public and political statements, practice, personal rationales, and their interactions with politics, power, and ethnicity. While the thesis is mainly situated within the areas of religious peacebuilding and international conflict analysis, it is interdisciplinary in nature and draws from the disciplines of sociology, anthropology, theology, politics, and philosophy. This study's research questions are:

What role that religious leaders play in peacebuilding? And specifically,

What role (if any) do Catholic and Protestant clergy play in ethnic identity conflict in eastern Congo?

Do these leaders play a role in deterring violence and edifying a peace that elevates shared religious identity over the dominant nationalistic narratives where the ethnic identity and citizenship rights of the Banyarwanda and Banyamulenge are contested? If they do not, why not?

What have been the actions of Catholic bishops and Protestant church leaders as they engage with issues of indigeneity and ethnic identity politics in eastern Congo, and how are their actions manifested? What is the nature of their responses (for example, sermons, symbolism and political statements) and how do these contribute to deter, or sustain ethnic violence?

The main objectives of this research and analysis were, firstly, to contribute to the new scholarship and literature surrounding religious peacebuilding with a comprehensive and grounded examination of the historical and cultural roots of past and present conflict in eastern DRC. There is extensive literature that demonstrate limitations and challenges faced by national and international actors and leaders of traditional institutions. What is not known is the nature of Christian clergy/religious elites in resolving or exacerbating conflicts. Secondly, by identifying clergy role in the ethnic identity conflict, to explore whether locally rooted approaches, such as faith-based inspired peacebuilding, might complement existing efforts to resolve conflict. The thesis intended to enhance the existing body of knowledge with an understanding of the DRC crisis.

The thesis draws on over six months of ethnographic fieldwork conducted between October 2020 and February 2022, mainly in the DRC, Belgium and Rwanda. It adopted a qualitative

and interpretive methodology involving fieldwork, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, observations and archival research. These approaches enabled the generation of rich data and the production of an analytical framework to understand the role of the clergy in peace and conflict.

This thesis used two frameworks to interpret the findings: Fraser and Owen's (2018) five-dimensional model related to the role of religion in peacebuilding and conflict resolution. Of the five dimensions, this thesis considers three that feature outstandingly in the context of the DRC: namely, religion as a set of ideas, religion as a community, and religion as an institution. Secondly, the theoretical analysis also has drawn on an original framework of a house, which enlightens the discussion section of this thesis.

This chapter summarises the key learning from this inquiry, and the novel perspectives generated by addressing the research questions. The thesis draws on wide-ranging field study, and therefore relies on qualitative data. I have claimed that the root of conflict in North and South Kivu is the contestation of citizenship and ethnic identity of the Banyarwanda and Banyamulenge communities, particularly the Congolese Tutsi people. I have demonstrated that links between clergy and the dynamics of this conflict are under-studied and unrepresented.

I begin with a short recapitulation of the research background and initial assumptions. I then summarise the significant findings, contributions to knowledge, how the research aligns with existing literature, and outlines both its limitations and its implications for further academic research and for developing future policy.

The idea to embark on this study's journey started with my experience participating in peace talks in the DRC in 2012/2013. My involvement in this process included informal observations of the influence of religious leaders and their religious practices. My enhanced awareness[174] galvanised an interest in further investigating whether, and if so how, Christian religious leaders might contribute more constructively to resolving the longstanding and contested issue of the citizenship and ethnic identity of the Banyarwanda and Banyamulenge in the DRC.

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[174] At one specific point, the dialogue between various actors was very long and led to tensions that had turned into verbal attacks. It became tense to observe. Later, as the peace meeting became challenging, an elderly religious man who had not had a chance to speak stood up. The uncontrollable interactions and words exchanged stopped. The room was quiet again. Everyone listened to this man sharing a religious message. He used authority and various persuasive techniques based on the claimed Christian values of peace.

9.1   Summary of the main research findings

My research findings demonstrate, firstly, that the interplay between politics and religion presents a fundamental challenge to peacebuilding. This relationship is a source of ambiguity, antagonism, collaboration, and subversive actions, creating either clergy passivity or neutrality in the context of the widely believed maxim of the "church at the centre of a village". In this case, neutrality becomes a political statement rather than impartiality because there is an avoidance to compromise interests by articulating disapproval of ethnic violence or ethno-nationalism. In other cases, there an expectation to exercise political function as a link between political parties in conflict. These trends produce allegiance to sometimes contradictory or compromising interests, notably ethnic and territorial identity, and economic and political aspirations.

I have established that religious leaders in the DRC act as brokers of political dialogues at the national level or can be antagonistic to the government when other functions are unavailable. The conflicting political and religious positions held by many priests, pastors, and bishops have diminished their constructive role in Congolese conflicts of indigeneity, and because they are often seen as embodying ethno-nationalistic stances, and rarely seen as independent or impartial in the ethnic identity crisis. Consequently, clergy have failed to maximise on their credibility in Congolese society or their political influence to act impartially to deter ethnic violence. For many the desire for material wealth acts as an obstacle to playing an independent role in conflict resolution.

Issues concerning church leaders' relationship with politics and peace are not new in political religious scholarship. The great challenge is to understand how senior clergy can independently promote humanitarian virtues of peace and human rights and live up to their claimed 'prophetic function'. The type of relationship that religious leaders establish with the state at any given time determines if and how they can play a role in peace-making in eastern Congo.

The political elite views clergy as a resource. I have established throughout this thesis that the Churches' influence can either act as intermediary between state and people or can legitimise or endorse politicians at the local level. Indeed, any separation or antagonism between secular and religious spheres has tended to create unenthusiastic responses in public opinion, because of expectations that the Church *should* play a socio-political role. Currently therefore, church leaders either antagonise or strongly influence the state in

secular decisions or the state influences the church leadership in accessing the people and endorsing their avoidance to relinquish power.

This research has demonstrated that ethnicity and tribal loyalties can take precedence over fundamental religious tenets. Cultural belonging remains a more important feature of people's identity than their religious affiliation. Concepts of ethnic identity and indigeneity were applied to the peoples of the Congo before their conversion to Christianity. During the Christianisation process, customary power often competed with the Christian religious authority. Indeed, faith appear to play little role in mobilising antagonistic groups around shared prejudices that instigate violence or hatred. Members of both Protestant and Catholic churches share the same basic faith, the same Bible, culture, and sometimes, language. At its core, this shared Christian religion is founded upon Jesus' message of peace, loving one's neighbour and doing good to those that hurt you. Nonetheless, many priests have aligned themselves with opinions developed by their ethnic group instead of building upon a shared religious identity. This is not a new phenomenon. In Europe in all wars, Christian groups fought against each other using sometimes opposing interpretations as to what the core beliefs of Christianity were. Such rivalries have tended to inspire desires to address the personal needs and struggles of religious leaders, rather than establish a community with a shared sense of religious identity.

The central puzzle addressed throughout this thesis is the paradox where Christianity – a claimed religion of peace, and an influential sociological presence – has failed to prevent or even speak out against deeply-rooted and multi-sectorial ethnic identity-based violence. Widespread violence thrives in a popular culture of Christian religiosity where there is no evidence that conflicts are religiously motivated.

This thesis has shown how colonial political administrations were the original channels for missionaries to evangelise across the South Kivu region. They established leaders of church denominations and their strategy of evangelisation based on tribes' segmentation reinforced strong ethnic and territorial affiliations. The geo-politicisation of the churches continued in the post-colonial era and resulted in an increasingly polarised paradigm of territorial and ethnic identity allegiance within the churches. My analysis has highlighted the complexity of the interplay between religion, ethnicity, and territorial identity that hinders church leaders from responding objectively to inter-ethnic conflict.

Notions of power and authority are varied and multi-layered. They are not exercised through politics alone. Other forms of power and authority, often based on religious and spiritual

power, are equally legitimate and have had positive and negative influences on the political realm. I have demonstrated a continuity of the role of pre-colonial Congolese traditional religious practices through to the advent of Christianity and its current practice. From the past to the present, those in power and authority have always been ambivalent in their aim to balance societal well-being and personal prosperity. Achieving such successes has always involved religious populism and depended upon the mobilisation of loyalties and allies.

Bargaining for power between the elites remains significant. This observation is at the centre of the contemporary experience of power and remains in the background of dialogue between leaders and civil society. Competition for influence is also a consequence of the challenges posed by modernisation and economic insecurity. Seeing power as being in the hands of both religious and political leaders has been key to understanding contemporary political and religious elites in the DRC. The acquisition of popular influence is partly linked to the degree to which different spheres of power connect.

Holding power provides religious leaders with various social and economic advantages, management of resources and spiritual guidance to church followers. Church power has become a sphere of influence that requires the use of a wide variety of different strategies to manage and maintain it. One strategy is tribalism. Tribal discrimination, populism and the politics of ethnonationalism often related to violent practice, have become an 'asset' to generate support.

The above context continues to shape social life in the DRC and affect the inefficacy of religious elites in the areas of autochthony, indigeneity, and conflict resolution. While the contestation of citizenship and ethnic identity of Banyarwanda and Banyamulenge is a legacy of colonialism, during the period covered by this study, it has become a powerful factor affecting aspirations and power relations of actors in the conflict. Therefore, Christian clergy have become ineffective in playing an impartial role in ethnic conflict resolution because so many aspire to establish and maintain power and authority for personal and private advantage.

Further challenges relate to clergy who choose to live their claimed religious values of peace or those who continue to accept ATR's *Ubuntu* values related to our common humanity. Clergy and their institutions recognise their role in rebuilding DRC society as part of their traditional and prophetic mission. They can enlighten society and those affected by conflict or perpetrators of violence through civic education and various religious practices and

beliefs. But their effectiveness may *only* be possible if their congregations see them acquiesce to compromising behaviours, comply with ethnonationalism, and aspire to political, religious and economic power.

This thesis has shown that RCC and ECC clergy have been ambiguous, silent, complicit, or complacent concerning violence against Tutsi communities, particularly throughout the 90s and in the more recent violence in North and South Kivu. There is evidence that Catholic clergy have also engaged in using coded language to mobilise particularly favoured groups against the Congolese Tutsi. This thesis has shown their reticence to speak publicly against targeted violent events against the Banyarwanda and Banyamulenge due to, firstly, a fear of losing public or government support. Secondly, though there are some exceptions, clergy tend to embody the racial and xenophobic ethnic prejudice of their respective communities. By keeping to a relatively safe position, the clergy effectively could be understood to have endorsed the crisis of ethnic identity, and this is evidenced in the numerous quotations used in this thesis. The discussion chapter has presented a model to suggest and explore various categories within an overall concept of militancy in peace and violence. This finding provides new and original nuances on existing binary theoretical view about the role of religious leaders in conflict. I show that the role of religious leaders is multifaceted and contradictory. There are more positions of militancy in violence and peace as preconised Appleby (2000, 2005).

9.2   The contribution of this study and implications on the existing literature

This thesis contributed to bridging the gap between the existing studies by providing an understanding of the role of Christian churches in deadly and unprecedented ethnic violence in the DRC (Beneduce et al. 2006). It has also demonstrated the links between the introduction of Christianity in Africa, the post-colonial struggle for power control in the DRC and multifaceted positions and allegiances of clergy towards the state and particularly inter-ethnic conflict. My thesis dwells on the importance of the interplay between religion, power and politics in the understanding the role of religious leaders in conflict in the DRC .

This thesis has developed an original onion metaphor-based framework of multiple allegiance. It represents priorities of interests, aspirations and motivations at the heart of Christian clergy's mindset in the DRC. I have argued that understanding the layers of, sometimes contradictory, consciousnesses in the minds of the clergy is, essential to comprehending the dynamics of politics and ethnicity in religious words and actions in the DRC. I have proposed that if these layers of allegiance are kept in mind, it would be possible

to design a realistic peacebuilding framework in the DRC through involving the churches' leaders at a more central level.

In extending from the framework of multiple allegiances, the thesis proposed a *Militancy in Peace and Violence* diagram. It consists of various categories of actions, attitudes, behaviours that are publicly displayed by religious leaders in response to ethnic violence. The *Militancy in Peace and Violence* diagram that I have created (see Chapter 8, page 211) can serve as an analytical model to understand the pluralistic actions, positions and behaviours of clergy in peace and conflict.

I have shown the link between the onion framework of multiple allegiances and the *Militancy in Peace and Violence* diagram. In these, with the framework of multiple allegiances, I argue that once the priorities of interests, aspirations and motivations are established, an understanding of categories of their public displayed actions, behaviours and attitudes is important for an inclusive analysis. Hence the proposed *Militancy in Peace and Violence* diagram. The framework of multiple allegiances, I argue that layers of a sometimes-contradictory consciousness and often unconscious bias in the minds of the clergy is essential to comprehending the dynamics of politics and ethnicity in religious words and actions in the DRC. The Christian religious elite appear to be multifaceted in their allegiances and use of power. This phenomenon is concealed and rarely understood by external scholars and policymakers[175]. As in politics, these leaders can manipulate power by effectively blending African traditions of exercising power with 'enlightened' Western values. Both modern and traditional spheres are inhabited by the same people, at different times, depending on those requirements that can be met best in a specific sphere. My research has suggested that power and leadership can been viewed as representing two spheres: the search for material comfort and prosperity through modern politics and an adherence to multiple religious allegiances. These two pressures play an important role for the Congolese in sustaining power, but remain concealed in the eyes of the modern world beyond the DRC. With the *Militancy of Peace and Violence* diagram, I demonstrate various categories of behaviours, motivations, practices and attitudes to explain the multivalent positions of the clergy when they chose to pursue militancy in peace or violence.

I have shown the link between the onion framework of multiple allegiances and the Militancy in Peace and Violence diagram. With the framework of multiple allegiances, it establishes the priorities of interests, aspirations and motivations to enable an understanding of

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[175] My insider position has served as an effective research tool to uncover such a phenomenon, as discussed in Chapter Four, 82)

categories of their publicly displayed actions, behaviours, and attitudes (developed in the Militancy of Peace and Violence diagram). A combination of these approaches offers an inclusive analysis to explain the obstacles and limitations of clergy in peacebuilding.

The Militancy in Peace and Violence diagram can potentially be applied as a development model for those leading churches or potential religious peacemakers. Such a policy-based peacebuilding programme could draw from St. Egidio's approach in Mozambique by involving external senior and highly respected and values-based clergy to shadow the Congolese religious leaders. To ensure effectiveness, the programme participants might use a meaningful religious and sacred venue or holy sites in developing an extended process of religious peacebuilding education and spiritual transformation aimed towards holding and living Christian values of peace. The desired outcome of this educational retreat would be to enable clergy to shift positions from destructive behaviours of militancy in violence to constructive actions as reflected in the *Militancy in Peace and Violence* diagram.

Similarly, those operating at different categories of military militancy in violence could be introduced to and provided with in-depth theory and principles to shift to levels of peace makers. The diagram of the *Militancy in Peace and Violence* and its descriptors could be a dynamic force for improving religious peacebuilding.

This doctoral research has several original and unique factors. These include the examination of the central role of church leaders and communities, the use of a wide range of ethnographic tools, illustration with a number of meaningful central African metaphors, the development of original frameworks and approaches, my own position as an insider in the geographical area of conflict, and the creation of a new model of activism. These research approaches in combination have not been used previously to the best of my knowledge. I believe the findings of this thesis enlighten an understanding of the relationship between clergy, politics, and conflict centering on ethnic identity.

The findings contradict some dominant literature in religious peacebuilding (Appleby, 2000, 2001, Sandal, 2017) by showing an original perspective in understanding religious leaders in conflict and peace. The thesis supports existing conceptual and general methodological approaches to peace-making and conflict resolution. It enhances the theoretical underpinnings of international relations, peacebuilding, and religion. It is grounded on a unique analytical model which uses metaphors familiar to ordinary people in the DRC and my intimate familiarity with locally understood languages. The academics working in the disciplines of religion, peace and conflict resolution are often influenced by Eurocentric

theories, but this thesis offers an internal African legitimacy aimed at making and sustaining peace in the DRC. Using the multi-layered approach described above has helped me as a researcher to understand myself and my conflicted views on the situation in DRC.

I believe my findings have the potential to influence policy and practice. The empirical evidence gathered and analysed in this study can both support and expand upon the existing findings from previous studies. The frameworks developed can serve as a model of understanding challenges and opportunities to religious peace-building and enable policymakers at regional and multilateral level and within the United Nations to take more informed reorientation of policy measures that consider the root causes of conflict.

The findings demonstrate significant obstacles for clergy involved or wishing to be involved in peace-making, and an understanding of their sometimes-conflicting mindsets, interests, needs, positions, and loyalties. However, in that religious leaders play a significant role in society, I have argued that they have potentially great influence in the resolution of peace and conflict. My claim is that clergy could potentially play a constructive role in creating an environment that enables peaceful coexistence if they were able to act independently of allegiance to ethnicity, politics, and power. This doctoral research contributes significantly to the existing scholarly debate in the fields of religion, peace and politics. Finally, and just as importantly, it will hopefully excite and further scholarly debate in religious peacebuilding, international conflict analysis and politics. I now moved into demonstrating implication to the existing literature.

There is a fundamental contradiction in the involvement of a religion of peace in violent actions. The implication of churches in what is a fundamentally temporal and ethnic identity conflict did not seem fully developed in the existing literature. Existing theories of religious peacebuilding as presented in the introduction of this thesis did not fully explain the phenomenon of religiously condoned violence in ethnic identity-based conflict. While the ambivalent stance of religious leaders had been widely debated by Appleby (2000, 2006), this study has dwelt on the particularities and nuances of the phenomenon of religious contradiction. I have generated an exploratory theory arising from ethnographical data and conveys more complex and multi-layered meanings to assist in understanding the behaviours, minds, and actions of the religious actors in the context of peace and conflict in the DRC. These nuanced conceptualisations have contributed to bridging the gap in dominant theory as to how conflict, ethnic conflict and religion might intersect.

This thesis has added nuance and depth to Gopin's (2002), Hertog's (2010) and Sandal's (2017) arguments.   While they recognise religious leaders' strong influence on their communities, my research demonstrates the diversity *within* each religious character.   The pluralistic nature of the personal identities of these actors and their diverse and contradictive interpretations of peace came to the fore in my recorded interviews and conversations. A major implication of this analysis is the non-transcendent nature of religious identity and a multifaceted interest, motivations, behaviours and actions within and between these religious leaders.

While the expected outcome of this thesis is an addition to existing theories, it is important to acknowledge that the field of international conflict analysis and religious peacebuilding is policy oriented. This thesis recommends that religious peacebuilding research should contribute to both theories and innovative, practical action to equip religious leaders with well-founded knowledge on the spiritual and scripturally inspired imperatives to non-violence. This involves utilising the traditions and spiritual resources of each community well founded peacebuilding resource. The need for all such interventions to be contextual and based on honest understanding of the unique challenges faced by religious leaders is highlighted, but the sacred values of love, peace, non-violence, inclusivity and respect remain central.

9.3   Recognising the limitations of the current study

I undertook this research in conflict zones of the DRC. This is an area that hosts hundreds of armed groups and where violence is endemic. The fieldwork took place during a period of intense political transition and instability and in a country under authoritarian and militarised governance. Some of the aspects of the study were politically contentious. I also conducted my study in a culturally and linguistically diverse society. This context presented significant challenges.

I considered my field study carefully to minimise likely risks. I consistently had to make contingency plans to mitigate possible threats to my safety and those who offered to share their real-world, experience-based knowledge. I needed to consider various ways to use locally and culturally informed techniques and methods to navigate politically sensitive matters and avoid socially and culturally insensitive interactions with ordinary individuals and the political and religious elite. While protecting data is the duty of every researcher, and especially in areas affected by security issues, extra precautions were required to prevent

any adverse impacts on interviewees. While people were generally comfortable talking to me, most did not wish to be digitally recorded for two reasons. Firstly, they feared that they would not be authentic when they were conscious that digital recording was happening. Indeed, those who did agree to recording often spoke about their experience in abstract terms. Secondly, respondents were cautious and fearful about sharing information that criticised those holding political power. For these reasons I was driven to rely, more than I had planned, on ethnographic notes.

Despite a complex research environment, it is still possible to undertake good and rigorous research. The DRC is a country I know well. I have had prior connections with members of the political and religious elites through international development consultancy work funded by various European donors. My cross-cultural and linguistic competence enables me to navigate the subtleties of different languages and cultures and other highlighted challenges. Generally, my acute awareness of the cultures, traditions, lineage, and history of the ethnic groups that occupy the eastern Congo helped in introducing and explaining my research topics. People were willing to share information, many of them hoping that my findings might reveal new solutions to the strife affecting their country, or simply inform the world about what was happening in the DRC. The ethnographical methods I chose undoubtedly led to knowledge difficult to acquire through other research approaches. My new research knowledge emerged from the systematic application of the study tools and a fast-developing awareness of various strategies by which I could traverse this complex, violent, male-dominated environment. Ethically, I adopted a self-managed type of immersion[176] to maintain a distance observation approach to avoid being drawn into the local politics.

The research process was emotionally draining too, due to the sensibilities and risks involved in questioning the dynamics of conflict. Firstly, there was significant pressure to represent even those with whom I fundamentally disagreed, in an even-handed, objective way. While it is probably impossible to be wholly objective and without unconscious bias, I attempted to counteract bias by taking a break from the interviews and reflecting on my views and what outsider researchers would make of my own or the interviewee's views. The perception from certain research participants that I should hear their stories as means for advocacy abroad was for me a monumental and disproportional expectation for a PhD research exercise. Secondly, the research was sometimes dangerous. Two high-profile

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[176] I used two techniques: firstly, I often purposely temporarily interrupted my interviews and observations to take stock and critically engage with the generated data against my values, the judgement of the interview and personal experience. The reflection process was essential to allow me to develop a positive attitude, understanding and recognition of various points of view. Secondly, due to how cultural familiarities and personal connections can develop, observations were hybrid to maintain my researcher position to avoid knowing more than what I needed to know – which may lead to a blurred situation where I am drawn into everyday politics.

interviewees that I engaged with were later arrested and sent to prison. Many sources, including human rights organisations, suggested that the reason for their arrest was their active militancy in peacebuilding. Their work had become a threat to the security and military authority as it either exposed abuses or established credibility within the local communities more than the one of political authority. Such, not uncommon, events illustrate clearly the risk of being a religious peacemaker and challenging the power and influence of the compliant religious and political authorities. In conflict zones like the DRC, it is vital that these ethical issues are carefully considered when conducting research. In the next paragraphs, I want to reflect on academic limitations.

The value of academic research depends partly on evidence of the researcher's ability to generate reliable and credible answers to their research questions. In Chapter Four, I discuss the methodology techniques and acknowledge the potential limitations of ethnography and related methodological approaches. I highlighted various mitigation strategies in my study design to ensure the reliability of the data that arose from interviews, observations and desk studies. The wide-ranging use of observations and archival methods enabled the examination of societal and cultural aspects. On-site interviews, recorded conversations and fieldwork provided opportunities to engage with religious leaders in their social settings, evidencing complex patterns and trends in their interactions with peace and conflict issues. I analysed, thematically, the data arising from the research participants' expressed views and interpretations of their role in peace and conflict. My analysis and thinking increasingly focussed upon the crisis of ethnic identity as the research developed.

The links between indigeneity, politics and power remains one of the most contentious issues in attempting to understand the issue of conflict in the DRC. Chapter Five, I briefly summarised the history of ethnic competition for political power in the DRC and its prominence in the identity politics and associated inter-communal violence of the eastern states. I presented multiple layers of evidence to demonstrate ways in which ethnic differences are exploited by political and civil society leaders, and how ethno-nationalistic, xenophobic, and related prejudices have resulted in violent attacks on diverse communities. As this subject remains at the heart of present-day contention and controversy in the DRC, participation for some respondents was challenging and required great sensitivity. Involvement in focus groups and even recorded presence in observations became a limitation for some participants who did not feel free to talk honestly about what was in their minds. For such individuals, I offered one-to-one interviews and observations at their workplaces or family home. The above was unexpected limitation.

Another limitation of ethnographic study is the potential risk of researcher bias. Maintaining the necessary distance in observation when examining social interactions was an on-going challenge. The social sensitivities necessary to conduct the reflective and inter-personal aspects of social research required the involvement of two research assistants from different ethnic backgrounds to ensure other perspectives to the evaluation, understanding, analysis and representation. However, I remain aware that being engaged in examining a social phenomenon during a period of heightened and ethnically directed hate speech towards Congolese Tutsi could potentially influence follow-up questions, perhaps limiting opportunities for diverse nuances and alternative interpretations.

There was a significantly small sample of women in religious leadership. Not only did this provide an ethical barrier for research, but it also powerfully demonstrates the limited voice of women in efforts to build peace. Women and girls, half the population of the DRC, are affected most by conflict. The rape of women has been used as weapon of war both by members of armed groups and the regular national army.[177] Culturally, the marginalisation of women in the DRC draws from a cultural practice that associates motherhood and physical weakness and vulnerability with inferior status as a human. Because of this, women's capacity for any agency in large scale reconciliation remains unrecognised and unpromoted.

On the ethics of researching conflict, while such research must maintain rigour and reliability, I argue that it is equally important to develop an authentic connection with the society under study if the research bids to effect positive change. In responding to violence and humanitarian crises, I maintain that the researcher must take and justify a moral stand and commit to promoting and contributing to better conditions in areas of their research instead of maintaining scholarly disconnection. This thesis has shown that neutrality is another form of subjectivity. It becomes impossible to remain neutral in a situation of injustice. As either an insider or outsider investigator, a commitment to social justice is necessary if researchers are to act as a bridge between research-based knowledge production and policy. I want to move on to talk further on the question of generalisation.

This study has been critical to Christian churches clergy in their responses to ethnic violence. However, it is important to acknowledge that transformational change depends on many factors, including the country's institutional governance system and culture. The

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[177] Members of the national army, FARDC, are widely reported among the key perpetrators of violence. In fact, according to a European Parliament report, 50% of the human rights abuses' cases reported to the Human Rights Office at the UN representation in the DRC between the year 2010 and 2013 were associated with the FARDC or other state actors.
European Parliament report, available online https://www.europarl.europa.eu/EPRS/EPRS-AaG-542155-Sexual-violence-in-DRC-FINAL.pdf accessed on 10th November 2023.

behaviours of the clergy are influenced by the conflict environment and the need to assimilate into the country's political economy system and leadership. There is a correlation between religious leaders' actions and the condition of either conflict or peace. For example, in 1994 Christian churches in Rwanda were complicit with the state's genocidal ideology (Gatwa, 2005). During the post-Rwanda genocide period, churches joined the government in promoting peace and conflict transformation (Muke, 2016). In the DRC in an environment of failed institutions and powerlessness in response to poverty, many Congolese found refuge in a faith that offered supernatural hope to alleviate their everyday experience. People generally expect the delivery of public services to be the result of (the Christian) God's interventions rather than a responsibility of the government authorities, although the Christian God is not the only source of solutions with divine assistance sought from other sources of metaphysical understanding. There are two emerging issues here: Firstly, it is crucial to understand that the potential for Christian religious leaders to inspire peaceful co-existence or deter ethnic violence depends on the rights conditions and environment created by the country's governance institutions. Secondly, the culture of religiosity in the DRC in a situation of proliferations of independent Christian churches, democratisation of religious ideas and structures and fragmentation of religious inspired armed groups means that the Christian believers have abilities to adapt the peaceful messages from clergy to their circumstances, needs and positions.

In academic research it is essential to assess where results from data gathering are generalisable, reliable, and representative. These criteria take into account sample size, protocols, and procedures for collecting data, including methods of selection of research participants. I recognise potential critiques for embracing a relatively large sample size and involving interviewees from two different Christian organisations (RCC and ECC). Those critical responses could potentially argue that these institutions have different dogmas, theological principles, traditions and leadership structures. It is important to note that this study's emphasis was not on the role of religious institutions but on religious leaders – these are equally powerful.

I have shown strong evidence that these actors share approaches in their engagement with politics and issues of ethnic violence. In the analysis, I have clarified which aspects applied to RCC or ECC leaders. Furthermore, the very few studies (see Alfani, 2019 or Autesserre, 2015) on religion, peace and conflict on the DRC focused on the work of single local churches in a specific city or local area or a community. Their findings present a significant issue of generalisation – their findings are based on either intracommunity peacebuilding initiative or are too localised and irreplicable. Avoiding this risk, my study has

intentionally considered the intersectionality of religious and cultural patterns and common, cross-ethnic perceptions across religious leaders. The selection of cases has been based on representatives of the two religious' groups with the greatest number of adherents. These major forces in DRC society groups as I have demonstrated are the most familiar, listened to and influential among the general population and media. Furthermore, the choice of a specific type of ethnic violence was intentional to apply to other forms of state-induced racism or tribalism.

9.4 A reflection on this thesis case study and future avenues for research

The underlying conflict in the DRC has become systemic and structural and requires radical changes, cultural transformations, and innovative approaches to address the human and socio-economic crisis it is facing. My research has resulted in my view that the root causes of conflict should be recognised and acted upon to define an appropriate model that will create a different dynamic centred on good governance, equity, justice, and peace.

I have demonstrated in this study that RCC in the DRC still claims moral authority as the people's representative and uses this position to impose or endorse political influence on the national ruling class. I have shown that it is almost the only organisation in the country with the moral authority to act as a mediator, and it can apply significant pressure on political leaders and is more influential than any political party at holding the government accountable. Despite such influence, this study outlines the obstacles that have prevented RCC from playing a constructive role in deterring ethnic violence. In parallel to this, we know from various studies, that the Christian church generally has been complacent and complicit in conflicts elsewhere in central Africa (Longman, 2001; Gatwa, 2005). Considering the pyramidal and hierarchical leadership system of the Catholic Church, future research should seek to investigate the capacity of the Vatican to influence and hold their bishops and cardinals accountable in promoting genuine and faith-led paths toward conflict resolution, reconciliation, justice and peace for disenfranchised and marginalised minorities throughout Africa.

I recognise that the proposal made earlier in this conclusion on using the *Militancy in Peace and Violence* diagram presents significant and profound challenges. Future research might include initial work on an educational programme based on the diagram, exploring how realistic it would be to persuade religious leaders who are interested in their power and wealth, who incite violence or remain silent about it, to change - ultimately - into a gentle activist of peace who would renounce violence and political power.

Finally, this study has focused on religious peacebuilding with specific emphasis on the role of clergy deterring or exacerbating ethnic violence. It has applied a specific case study of the contesting citizenship and indigenous rights of the Banyamulenge and Banyarwanda in eastern Congo. This crisis has been prominent since the democratisation process across Africa during the 1990s. Chapter One has demonstrated a consensus among various scholars to suggest that this issue remains the underlying factor of conflict. This crisis has led to the rise of ethnonationalism and the stigmatisation of some groups as foreign, stateless. I have illustrated how ambitions for political, economic and religious power have driven these developments.

How should academic researchers respond to these issues? Firstly, the concern of identity politics in Africa should be distinct from the general study of inter-ethnic conflict. The latter is generalised and tends to emerge through the failure of the government institutions to deliver public services, creating tribal-based grievances and competition over access to resources, social economic conditions, and power. The former is ideological and associated with the failure to build nation-states inspired by colonial racial theories, leading to a form of black-on-black type of racism. It has fuelled extreme animosity and genocides and tends to be exploited by political and religious leaders to inspire popular support.

The conflation of these two phenomena leads to methodological issues and misleading policy responses. While antagonism between tribes also plays a critical function as a political instrument during elections or clergy seeking popular support, it should be differentiated from the contestation of citizenship.[178] The latter has mainly attracted the interest of human rights and international law scholars, but more emphasis should be placed on this issue in conflict studies. The distinction between tribal and the political disputes of ethnicity and indigeneity raises essential questions in the analysis of international conflict in terms of how related research can help build a sense of shared identity in the aftermath of colonisation, decolonisation, dictatorship, and wars.

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[178] For example, in the case of local elections in Nigeria, national elections in Kenya in the 1990s and 2000s or the DRC in cases of conflict between Baluba and Lulua in Kasai and Katanga provinces. In these conflicts, antagonism is not based on the idea of one being a non-national.

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APPENDIX 1: Confidentiality form

Thesis title: Religion, Politics and Conflict Resolution in the Democratic Republic of Congo: An Ethnographic Study of the Role of Christian Clergy in the Ethnic Identity Conflicts in Eastern Congo 1990 - 2023.

Name of the researcher: Alex Ntung
Participant Identification Number for this project:

Please initial box

1. I confirm I have read and understand the research information sheet provided for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason. (Contact number of the lead researcher: +44 7432554636).

3. I understand that my responses will be anonymised before analysis. I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses.

4. I agree to take part in the above research project.

_____   _____   _____
Name of participant   Date   Signature

_____   _____   _____
Name of person taking consent   Date   Signature
(if different from lead researcher)

To be signed and dated in presence of the participant.

_____
Lead researcher   _____   _____
                                              Date   Signature

APPENDIX 2

Informed Consent for a research project

Project Title: **Religion, Politics and Conflict Resolution in the Democratic Republic of Congo: An Ethnographic Study of the Role of Christian Clergy in the Ethnic Identity Conflicts in Eastern Congo 1990 - 2023**.

Information about my study and request of your voluntary participation.

My name is Alex Ntung, I will be attending your event/ceremony taking place at …………………………I will be there as part of my PhD research study which involves observations. The decision to participate in this study is completely voluntary. You will not be treated any differently if you decide not to participate or if you stop once you have started.

 Confidentiality and Anonymity

Any information about your participation, including your identity, is confidential. The following steps will be taken to ensure this confidentiality. I will take notes on my observation, but your name will not be used or written in my notes. To comply with most of the participants wishes, I will not use digital recording system.

Participant Consent

I have read the information in this consent form. I have had the chance to ask questions about this study, and those questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I am at least 18 years of age, and I agree to participate in this research project. I understand that I will receive a copy of this form after it has been signed by me and the researcher.

_____

Participant Name

_____

Name of person taking consent - signature and Date

_____
 Research signature and Date

APPENDIX 3: Guiding questionnaire

Religion, Politics and Conflict Resolution in the Democratic Republic of Congo: An Ethnographic Study of the Role of Christian Clergy in the Ethnic Identity Conflicts in Eastern Congo 1990 - 2023.

Guiding questions

1. ***What role (if any) do Catholic and Protestant Church Leaders play in ethnic identity conflicts in eastern Congo?***

   i.   *Do the clergy rise above the politics of identity conflict to confront violence along tribal alliances, loyalty, and interests?*
   ii. *Do Christian leaders play a role in deterring violence and edifying a peace that elevates shared Christian religious identity over the dominant nationalistic narratives where the ethnic identity and citizenship rights of the Banyarwanda and Banyamulenge are bones of contention? If not, why not?*

2. ***What have been the attitudes and motivations of Catholic bishops and Protestant church leaders as they engage with issues of indigeneity and ethnic identity politics in eastern Congo, and how are their motivations expressed?***

   i.   *What is the role (if any) of the religious practices (for example, political statements, sermons), language and symbolism used by Christian church leaders in response to violence?*
   ii. *What is the nature of their responses, and how do these contribute to, deter, or sustain inter-ethnic violence?*

- What has been the main concern of religious leaders as they engage with peace and conflict in eastern Congo and how is this concern expressed?
- Under what conditions can religious leaders contribute to peace-making?
- How could religious leaders influence actors in conflict and promote peaceful coexistence between affected groups?