

Understanding Autochthony-Related Conflict: Discursive and Social Practices of the *Vrai Centrafricain*

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Abstract

During the latest armed conflict in the Central African Republic (CAR) from 2013 to the present, narratives emerged regarding who was an autochthon and who was not, pitting “true Central Africans” against “foreigners”, Christians against Muslims. This new cycle of violence is embedded in a long history of political violence in the CAR. Still, the claim of one group being more autochthon than another has not been a prominent feature of previous conflicts, neither has fighting in the past formed so clearly along religious identities. Being a Son of the Soil, an autochthon, evokes an image that denies CAR’s history of migration of social groups and reify fixity, and such conflicts have also been present in other parts of Africa, as well as in Europe and Asia.

To date, most literature seeking to understand autochthony-related armed conflict has been dominated by elite-centric analysis that highlight the mobilization of autochthony as a strategy to retain power in cases of political liberalization or democratization (Cameroon, Kenya or Côte d’Ivoire). When not elite-centric, analyses of autochthony-related conflict have emphasized land, access to land issues or crudely predatory logics of vigilante groups on the local level (Côte d’Ivoire or the DRC). In CAR, neither political liberalization, nor land issues alone were prominent, but autochthony was a strategy as witnessed in other African cases of autochthony-related armed conflicts. In that sense, this research asks how and why is autochthony being mobilized in the CAR politics before and after the 2013 coup? The dissertation argues that elites and ordinary citizens discursively mobilize autochthony as an identity capital across various scales. They do it to access non-land related resources, claim hierarchy, and discriminate against the other. The mobilization of autochthony is tied to longer legitimacy-seeking strategies of the elite, and autochthony is a symbolic myth that can be mobilized at various levels. The dissertation’s main theoretical contribution is to challenge the tendency to consider elites and supporters as belonging and subscribing to different discursive realm. This study has considered that autochthony links leaders and their followers in a type of pre-given conception that no longer needs explanation. This contributes to considering elites and their supporters as tied by the same discursive realm, but the concrete meaning of the discourse is different across multiple levels. To make the argument, the dissertation uses a qualitative multi-method approach predominantly centered on discourse analysis, fieldwork, interviews, and newspapers archival research.

My research shows that understanding autochthony violence requires a simultaneous analysis of how autochthony is given meaning at different levels by various actors in everyday practices from the macro to the micro. Instrumentalizing autochthony lies at the interplay of all these levels. In this work, autochthony is vague enough to connect leaders to followers and, at the same time, precise enough for listeners to make sense of the term by connecting it to their daily experience of it. The long-term existence of the autochthony discourse allows it to change and morph at times of heightened crisis. It does not emerge overnight, but it has a longer genealogy that must be understood in context. That is, it is not simply because Bozizé targeted Muslim-foreigners in his speeches that people mobilized against them. Top-down manipulation might have resonated with followers but understanding of autochthony also operated independently of the top-down manipulation. That the conflict manifested around sectarian lines fits within an autochthony framework because autochthony is an empty identity marker whose content can be filled in many ways – most frequently with reference to ethnicity, religion, language, myths of origin, or some combination of such markers.

Key words: Autochthony, Land, Identity, Belonging, Violence, Armed Conflict, Religion, Muslims, Foreigners, Central African Republic.

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Acronyms

ACFPE	Agence Centrafricaine pour la Formation Professionnelle et l'Emploi
APRD	Armée populaire pour la restauration de la République et la démocratie
BECDOR	Bureau d'évaluation et de contrôle de diamant et d'or
CAR	Central African Republic
CADCO	Central Africa Diamond Company
CAMCO	Central Africa Mining Company
CATADIAM	Centrafricaine de taillerie de diamant
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
CFA	Central African Franc
CFSO	Compagnie Forestière Sangha-Oubangui
CMOO	Compagnie Minière de l'Oubangui Oriental
COAC	Coalition pour les Actions Citoyennes
COCORA	Coalition Citoyenne d'Opposition aux Rebellions Armées
COMIGEM	Comptoir des Minéraux et Gemmes
CPJP	Convention des patriotes pour la justice et la paix
DDI	Diamond Distributor Inc.
DRC	The Democratic Republic of Congo
EITI/ITIE	The Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative/ Initiative pour la Transparence dans les Industries Extractives
FACA	Forces Armées Centrafricaines
FARE	Front pour l'annulation et la reprise des élections de 2011
FBIS	Foreign Broadcast Information Service
FDPC	Front Démocratique du Peuple Centrafricain
FNBC	Fédération Nationale des Boubanguérés de Centrafrique
FPRC	Front populaire pour la renaissance de la Centrafrique
GSTC	Groupe de travail de la Société Civile sur la Crise Centrafricaine
HIPC	Heavily Indebted Poor Countries
ICAD	Société Israélo-Centrafricaine du Diamant
ICASEES	Institut Centrafricain des Statistiques et des Études Économiques et Sociales
ICSID	International Center for Settlement of Investment Disputes
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPD	Inclusive Political Dialogue
KNK	Kwa na Kwa (Work and work only)
MDREC	Mouvement Démocratique pour la Renaissance et l'Évolution de Centrafrique
MESAN	Mouvement d'Évolution Sociale d'Afrique Noire
MINUSCA	La Mission multidimensionnelle intégrée des Nations unies pour la stabilisation en Centrafrique/United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic
MLC	Mouvement de Libération du Congo
MLPC	Mouvement de Libération du Peuple Centrafricain
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OCRB	Office central de répression du banditisme
RPRC	Rassemblement Patriotique pour le Renouveau de Centrafrique
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programs

SERD	Section d'Enquêtes, de Recherches et de Documentation
SoS	Sons of the Soil
SSR	Security Sector Reform
UDRP	Union des Démocrates pour le Renouveau Panafricain
UFDR	Union des forces démocratiques pour le rassemblement
UFR	Union des Forces Républicaines
UFVN	Union des Forces Vives de la Nation
UNDP	Union Nationale pour la Démocratie et le Progrès
UNITA	The National Union for the Total Independence of Angola
UPC	Union pour la paix en Centrafrique

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1. Introduction

1.1. Introduction

In December 2012, rebel groups in the north-east of the Central African Republic (CAR) joined forces to topple the then President François Bozizé (2003-2013). A few months later, on March 22, 2013, the President was deposed in a coup d'état. The coup itself was not surprising. The CAR has experienced numerous coups d'état and almost constant political turmoil since its independence in 1960. The fighting that erupted in 2012 was an intensification of already existing rebellions, which according to the best estimates have killed over 6,000 people (Day 2016, fn 2, 14). The dynamics of the conflict that erupted in 2012–2013, however, was new. This time the conflicts were expressed along sectarian lines. The conflict pitted local Christian-animist communities loosely organized as vigilante groups under the name anti-Balaka, against Muslims rebels known as the Séléka, who had seized power on March 24, 2013, under the leadership of Michel Djotodia. Following months of human rights violations by the Séléka, the anti-Balaka clashed with Muslims in the country. The violence that ensued after the 2013 coup took extreme dimensions unlike anything previously seen in the CAR, as fighters of the anti-Balaka claimed that they were autochthon, representing the “*vrai Centrafricain*” (the true Central African) and that Muslims were foreigners. While the country had previously witnessed different episodes of political violence, the people, until the recent conflict, generally lived together relatively peacefully and there was intermarriage between groups. The manner in which the conflict took on an identity dimension and neighbours turned against neighbours is puzzling.

The impetus for this research came from the fact that the anti-Balaka movement advanced an agenda that “Muslims must all leave the country or die” (Geel 2014; Dukhan 2016, 5). Lombard (2016, 185) revealed that anti-Balaka scrawled graffiti declaring “No more mosques in CAR” when the 2013 presidential rivalry was between Bozizé and Djotodia, and not really about religion. The anti-Balaka

fighters used mob violence and attacked “Muslims”. On the surface, the conflict was characterized as religious, but it had political origins. At the same time, it is clear that there was more to this violence than religious hatred and animosity.

This conflict (2012–present) occurred in the general atmosphere of growing rebellions in the northern part of the country. Recent studies on CAR have attributed the current situation to neopatrimonialism (Ngovon 2015) and exclusionary politics (Smith 2015b). In fact, following trends of exclusionary politics, it was under Bozizé that the majority of rebel groups officially announced their formation (Herbert, Dukhan and Debos 2013, 8). Bozizé’s presidency increased the exclusion of other ethnic groups and elites, and this provoked another successful coup in March 2013 by Michel Djotodia. As the leader of the Muslim Séléka rebellion, Michel Djotodia retained power for less than a year, until January 2014. But these explanations do not take into account that, for the first time, the conflict was not only elite-driven, but engaged the larger population.

Moreover, there is a recent emergence of the new narrative around the true Central African compared to previous episodes of violence. The puzzling fact is that, in 2013, after the coup staged by the Séléka rebellion, they encountered resistance from vigilante groups inside and outside the capital. These groups, the so-called anti-Balaka, claimed to be autochthonous and saw themselves as “standing up for the ‘true’ population of CAR, who, they argued, were being overrun – pillaged, raped – by foreigners” (Lombard and Carayannis 2015, 8; Lombard and Batianga-Kinzi 2015, 54; Ceriana Mayneri 2014a). Such widespread resistance by members of the general population had not been a prominent feature of previous episodes of violence following coups in the CAR, nor have previous conflicts displayed such a dichotomous discourse of autochthons versus foreigners. This dissertation investigates the recent change in violence in the CAR, and, more specifically, the role and emergence of discourses of autochthony in the conflict. Explaining this religious and autochthonous turn in the CAR conflict are the two areas of concern of this dissertation. These turns demonstrate how the current war is different

and poses challenges to existing CAR literature and on autochthony more broadly. That is, the dissertation concentrates on the autochthony discourse and its social implications, as well as the mobilization capacity of such discourse.

Before stating the research question, this thesis begins with a closer look at the difficult contemporary history of political violence which started soon after independence from France in 1960 and involves simultaneous, issues of militarization, ethnicisation of political life, rebellions, and problems of governance. The current period of political violence can be traced back to a series of mutinies in 1996–1997. This was followed by a short civil war in 2001, rebellion under Bozizé’s presidency between 2004 and 2008, and the latest conflict from 2012 to 2019.¹ To state the obvious, state-building processes have been violent in CAR. The extent to which governing elites use violence to acquire political power and the way violence defines the daily life of citizens are central to the argument of this thesis.

1.1.1. Case Study Justification: Explanations of the War in the CAR

There is a growing literature addressing the conflict in the CAR. This literature has four main areas of investigation: first, a focus on elites and their exclusionary politics (Kah 2013; 2014; de Vries and Glawion 2015; Day 2016); second, on violent memories and social practices associated with the history of political violence (Ceriana Mayneri 2014a); third, on the long history of political violence in the country (Carayannis and Lombard 2015); and fourth, on the gradual disintegration and the very nature of the state (de Vries and Glawion 2015; Lombard 2016). A corollary of the latter focus is the manner in which armed groups have come to control territory and perform state-like functions. Following this argument, the conflict is described as being about predatory and rapacious rebel actors with economic motives (Agger 2014; Global Witness 2015; Dukhan 2017; 2018; The Sentry 2018). Of course, similar

¹ It is still difficult to delineate clearly whether or not this conflict has ended. Eight peace accords have been signed, the latest in February 2019 but armed groups are still committing direct killings and human rights violations. Armed groups have further fragmented (Dukhan 2017), moved to controlling natural resources and taxing goods and movement (Schouten and Kalesopo 2017; Schouten 2019).

to other civil wars, revenues from natural resources help finance the war. In this way, there is a strong political economy dimension to the conflict. I address each of the explanations below in order to identify the gaps in the literature, as well as existing works' shortcomings. The brief review situates my work in relation to these other works.

In the first strand of explanation, many claim that enduring exclusionary politics in the country, brutal colonization, and regional power dynamics explain the latest conflict (Kah 2013). The fact that various presidents systematically kept excluding those who were not their ethnic kin is often considered the background of the rebellion.² For instance, President Patassé (1993-2003) excluded the elites of the regime that had preceded him (Mehler 2005). Bozizé, after his coup against Patassé, embarked on sidelining elites that were close to Patassé. Elsewhere, Kah (2014, 38) argues that Bozizé played the card of religious hatred in order to keep power until the general elections in 2016. Although he explains that Séléka staged a coup because of the enduring exclusionary politics of Bozizé. Kah (2014) also emphasizes that the violent actions of the rebel group during the time they were in power (March 2013 – January 2014) pushed the population to fight the rebellion. Much of the literature helps explain why Séléka rebelled (Herbert, Dukhan and Debos 2013; Kah 2013; Wohlers 2015). Although these various authors depict the different actors accurately at play – regionally and nationally – as well as the exclusionary political game, they do not pay enough attention to the recent change of the narrative in the conflict. Even though the political instability of the CAR is important, the latest civil war was different, and the true central African claim remains unexplained.

In the second strand of explanation, when the literature pays attention to the change in the narrative, it is usually to explain the extreme violence itself and not social phenomena, such as how elites and the populations made use of the autochthony category. In that sense, some authors advance that the violent

² For some, it is the recycling of political elites that perpetuates instability in the country (Day 2016). Day (2016, 2) characterized this recycling as the “Bangui Carousel” in order “to reflect the many people who rotate through the country’s regimes, time and again”. This is so because the country has had historically a small pool of educated people as a colonial legacy.

colonization of the CAR, the social practice of violence, and the memory of violence in the country need to be considered (Lombard and Batianga-Kinzi 2015; Ceriana Mayneri 2014a). Ceriana Mayneri (2014a), for instance, grounds his explanation in the long history of conflict between Central Africans and people from the Chad-Sudan border region, pointing out how Chad has often interfered in CAR's internal affairs (See also de Vries and Glawion 2015; Marchal 2015a). Ceriana Mayneri (2014a, 180) questions the meaning of the violence in the CAR by paying attention to representation of power. For him, the violent memories of a distant past were still very active in the CAR, and that, combined with the immediate post-coup violence, help explain why violence spread so easily (Ceriana Mayneri 2014a, 189). While many of these authors employ the term autochthony, they do not explore in-depth what it means to be autochthon in the CAR or the ways in which the media and the government construct the boundary of that identity. However, if ethnicity mattered for political life previously, then understanding how these violent memories influence what it means to belong in CAR becomes crucial.

Thirdly, in *Making Sense of the Central African Republic*, Carayannis and Lombard (2015) explicitly address the latest war in the CAR. The authors provided a much-needed understanding of the complex history of the country and considered the changing dynamics. They contend that the CAR's latest civil war can only be understood "in the context of its violent history of colonization, limited political institutionalization and centralization, and position (geographic as well as geopolitical) in the region" (2015, 2). The edited volume focuses on the very complex historical dynamics of the CAR political economy over the past two centuries to highlight that there is no single factor that can explain the war. The book presents the conflict as the "past of a tense present" (Smith 2015a). Lombard's chapter takes us into micro-dynamics that explain the origins of Séléka fighters and their ability to fight. Anti-poaching struggles in the north forms the background from which combatants learned how to fight, but this addresses Séléka rebels, not anti-Balaka vigilante groups. The authors recognize that the scale of violence and its sectarian turn is unprecedented. The edited volume focuses in depth on the nature of the

state, for instance, its inability to broadcast its power outside the capital and the concessionary politics of the government leaders. These leaders have the capacity to draw benefits from the state's incompetence by outsourcing lucrative state revenue. However, none of the chapters in the book explores autochthony discourses, and whether or not they resonated within the population to explain why Muslims were targeted. Despite the book's sustained engagement with the conflict, little attention has been paid to the claims of the anti-Balaka and the geospatial representation of who belongs in what space in their autochthonous claim. In that sense, this study aims to build on the insights from the edited volume.

Finally, much energy has been spent explaining the nature of the state and its relationship to conflict in CAR, both currently and prior to this armed conflict. For instance, the neopatrimonial state and the economic security it offers to the elite has been highlighted as a driver of conflict (Ngovon 2015) showing how elites struggle to acquire governing positions in order to secure resources. Against this logic, it is the decreasing availability of resources from the state as well as their unequal distribution that sparked the conflict (Chauvin 2015). Following this, the CAR is now described as a state with adjectives: a dead state (Gomina-Pampali 2017) or a state that never existed (Dubé-Belzile 2017). Prior to this armed conflict authors analyzed CAR as a phantom state (ICG 2007), a distant state (Bierschenk and Sardan 1997), a state at the margin of the world (Marchal 2009), or a state of anarchy (Human Rights Watch 2007). These authors certainly point at the limited institutionalization of governing processes in the CAR. As Smith (2015b, 115) writes, the state is hurtful when present and painful when absent. A hurtful presence describes elite politicking and state armed forces preying on the population, while a painful absence correlates with non-state actors, armed groups, and criminals present in remote areas. Lombard's (2016) brilliant work has provided us with the anthropology of the CAR state. She seeks to dissect what the state looks like, and one answer is in her book's title: it is a *State of Rebellion*. She traces how various actors in the CAR, national and international, have a varied understanding of the state without ever considering what it means for the people, which is certainly not a Weberian state. However,

it seems that when authors focus on the state, they link the inevitability of violence to the weak presence of the state. For Bøås (2014), the state in the CAR is so weak that the situation should have been expected. But, if history tells us that the state did not broadcast its power and control territory, then the scope of the current violence should have appeared earlier since the weak state is constant and structural.

From this review, clearly the question of what it means to belong, and who was allowed to belong more than other remains under-explored in explanations of the recent violence. The distinction between “foreigners” and the “Central Africans” is at the heart of this conflict and has been amplified by the brutal history of the country, economic stagnation, and international neglect, yet academic analyses and the gray literature have advanced several explanations that have not considered the seriousness of autochthony and the overlap with religion. There is still a missing dimension with regards to the role of discourses of autochthony. Moreover, Muslims are designated as *Arabo/Arabou* in Sango, CAR national language. This has implications for how they belong.

1.1.2. Research Questions and Key Findings

This dissertation investigates the recent change in violence in the CAR, and, more specifically, the role and emergence discourses of autochthony in the conflict. The focus is on one country, but with multiple cases within that country. That is, I follow the same term – autochthony and its synonyms *Vrai Centrafricain* or Centrafricinity – across various categories of actors: governmental elites, rebels, vigilante group actors, and non-elites (traders and civil society). In common with general dynamics of a civil war, there are leaders and followers.³ I argue that, without a closer look at the meaning behind autochthony, we cannot understand how Muslims came to be targeted. Beyond drawing attention to the understudied autochthony dimension of the CAR war, this study also seeks to capture the multiple and diverse meanings of autochthony among different key actors, including both elite and ordinary citizens. The dissertation also combines the study of autochthony with insights from the literature on civil wars,

³ These categories are fluid during a war.

and as such helps push forward Cederman and Vogt's (2017) call to bridge logics of conflicts rather than "focusing primarily on violence during civil war" (Cederman and Vogt 2017, 2006). In other words, they ask scholars to better consider and integrate different phases of an armed conflict. This is to bridge the pre-war context of non-violence to the war itself rather than having war onset as a starting point.

As many authors have argued, autochthony is an identity category that can take many forms, depending on the context (Bøås and Dunn 2013; Geschiere 2009). What can we learn from elite instrumentalization of identity in the CAR? Did it resonate or not? Has autochthonous identity followed a different logic? I first focus on what it means to be autochthonous in various political and economic spaces, while paying close attention to people's understanding of such a claim. Hence, my approach to autochthony is to probe several actors' interpretation of the same concept, including both elites and non-elites. Although elites are important in understanding the CAR's violence, President Bozizé's role and the structure of the state do not fully account for the widespread violence towards the Muslim population. At best, they explain why Séléka rebelled, and how social practices helped spread the violence. At the same time, Bozizé's behaviour is similar to what authors analyzed in other autochthony-related armed conflicts. However, a more comprehensive account of the violent response of the anti-Balaka requires a careful engagement with discourses of autochthony and the relationship between elites and followers.

This latest conflict has seen the emergence of a new core narrative and has escalated to the larger population. This dissertation seeks to answer one overarching question: ***How and why is autochthony being mobilized in the CAR politics before and after the 2013 coup?***

This overarching question is about meaning making. Only when we capture the meaning of autochthony can we understand the role that the Central African identity claim is playing in its current politics. To answer this question, I address two sub-questions: How did the elites escalate the conflict so that Muslims became the main target? And how are various actors in the current episode of violence making sense of the "true" Central African identity? The first question entails an analysis of government

policies, speeches and actions that have sought to mobilize an autochthony-related discourse. This question examines the top-down aspect of the war. The second question is more bottom-up, and investigates how vigilante groups, rebels, civil society actors, and Muslims themselves are making sense of the true Central African claim. Making sense of identity-related terms involve understanding the discourses around that identity, its exclusionary terms, and its closures. Investigating this discourse among various actors can inform us about the leader and follower dynamic of a civil war. That is, if a leader instrumentalized an identity, did that resonate? Did people follow? This question is important because prior to losing power, President Bozizé claimed that rebels were foreigners and this is essential.⁴ Several villagers, farmers, and young men mobilized and claimed to be defending the country by representing the true Central Africans. What understanding do they have regarding that identity? Instrumentalizing autochthony lies at the interplay of the top-down and bottom-up aspects of armed conflicts. In this work, autochthony is vague enough to connect leaders to followers and, at the same time, precise enough for listeners to make sense of the term by connecting it to their daily experience of it.

I contend that elites and ordinary citizens discursively mobilize autochthony as an identity capital across various scales. They do it to access non-land related resources, claim hierarchy, and discriminate against the other. The mobilization of autochthony is tied to longer legitimacy-seeking strategies of the elite, and autochthony is a symbolic myth that can be mobilized at various levels. The autochthon-allochthon dynamic is a form of political and economic competition that is not related to the question of the soil or land alone. That is, there are other forms of autochthony infused competition. This differs from the focus on land (Lentz 2006; Boone 2017), and it is important to note that land issues have not featured in the CAR case. Historically, “none of the Oubangian races present themselves as the initial owner of the soil. Most occupy it only since the last century” (Kalck 1959, 29). As Marchal (2009) puts

⁴ Marshall-Fratani (2006) identified a similar dynamic in Ivory Coast where questions around who is a foreigner and Ivorian were prominent during the war.

it, the CAR represents the sum of its neighbours' territory. Similarly, Lombard (2016, 187) points out that it is particularly difficult "to define who belongs and who is a 'foreigner'." The various ethnic groups found in the CAR have travelled from neighbouring countries, fleeing war, to settle in the CAR. However, Diki-Kidiri (1986) argues that the country was not empty. People inhabited that space and did not wait for Europeans to come to discover them. This already sets the parameters of historical claim making and renders it difficult to determine which group was first. This is further complicated by the wars which affected the settlement pattern of different populations. Hence it is difficult to establish, with certainty, that specific ethnic groups are the original inhabitants of that area. But the true Central African claim is recent. In that sense, the *vrai Centrafricain* has been popularized by the anti-Balaka and I employ it in this work to analyze various actors' understanding of it and not just anti-Balaka. The "other" of the *vrai Centrafricain* is the Muslim as fighters popularized the autochthon discourse during the war. When probing the Muslim term, interviewees employed the categories Muslim-foreigners-Séléka interchangeably. As a result, I have adopted the term Muslim-foreigner to reflect interviewees polyvalent usages. As I show throughout the thesis, various Muslims can be foreigners and nationals and the Muslim-foreigner term captures the contradiction and hyphenation of both categories.

My central argument also differs slightly from Bøås and Dunn's (2013) argument that autochthony is a "political, not environmental or economic" issue (Bøås and Dunn 2013, 5). They locate this argument in the breakdown of neopatrimonial networks influenced by globalization and shrinking revenues to big-men in the context of political liberalization or elections. A breakdown of neopatrimonial networks explains that certain groups rebel because they have been excluded, but this argument is of limited utility in the CAR because it fails to account for how the anti-Balaka formed to fight the rebels, and also the conditions of political liberalization and elections were not present. I discuss these various points in Chapter 2.

To develop my argument, I investigate the conflict in two different spaces that illustrate how the

conflict materializes. These are the political and the economic spaces. The conflict began and was ongoing in these spaces well before the civil war. For instance, in chapters 4 and 7, I show that economic competition was ongoing prior to the war. The war escalated the competition between autochthons and allochthons, but it did not cause it. First, in the political area, the autochthon-allochthon dynamic represents the struggle to own the political space: who is entitled to govern the CAR? This is manifested both at a macro level in Bozizé's government actions (Chapter 3), and a meso level, where civil society actors understand the public space and the government as belonging to the "*vrai Centrafricain*" (Chapter 5). More explicitly, this is linked with how President Bozizé sought to govern and legitimize his power in the long run. He did not only target foreigners early in his rule and he consistently tried to build consensus around his rule.

Second, in the economic area, competition materializes at the macro and the micro level of the economy in CAR. The conflict manifests itself at the macro level through the government's move to bypass intermediaries in the diamond sector. The government deployed various types of arguments to target foreigners and claimed more space in that sector. At the micro level, I observed that various groups of traders and vendors struggled for the most lucrative places in the marketplace (Chapter 7), and through this, they also make the category of "*vrai Centrafricain*" useful to their actions.

Finally, I investigate the relationship between the discourse of autochthony and the world of the invisible, which cuts across all the various levels identified above. One of the building blocks of any competition is the world of the invisible, a powerful resource that non-Muslims deploy to manage their poor performance in the business sector and target Muslims. The world of the invisible is a dimension alongside the others, and this is how one sees the influence of religion prior to and during this armed conflict. It is not simply the theological differences between Christianity and Islam; it goes beyond that. One of the examples in the thesis is how non-Muslim business actors claim that Muslims use witchcraft to maintain a dominant position (Chapter 7), or Bozizé, who, in various speeches, claimed that it was

witchcraft that was destroying the CAR (Chapter 3). Moreover, the anti-Balaka use the invisible as a resource that literally allows them not to be killed by bullets when this competition is transported to the field of armed violence (Chapter 6). Hence the invisible cuts across the various levels I have identified.

My research shows that autochthony has not been instrumentalized in a top-down manner. It is not simply because Bozizé targeted Muslim-foreigners in his speeches that people mobilized against them. My research shows that the way in which the government mobilized identity is different from how non-governmental elites, street vendors, or traders mobilized and understood the same category. Top-down manipulation might have resonated with followers, but understanding of autochthony also operated independently of the top-down manipulation.⁵ That the conflict manifested around sectarian lines fits well within an autochthony framework because autochthony is an empty identity marker whose content can be filled in many ways – most frequently with reference to ethnicity, religion, language, myths of origin, or some combination of such markers. By religion, I do not only mean theological differences between groups, but the relationship of various people with the invisible world. For instance, the conflict emerged out of a coup, so it was political, but manifested around sectarian lines pushing analysts to claim that the conflict was religious while not addressing the *vrai Centrafricain* claim and meaning. During my fieldwork, interviewees spent time and energy claiming to be true central African, and while equally toning down the religious nature of the conflict.

Hence, my research makes both an empirical and a theoretical contribution. It contributes to the limited empirical knowledge on the CAR, providing in particular a detailed account of the discourses of autochthony in the recent conflict. Theoretically, the thesis adds to the literature on autochthony identity mobilization in armed conflicts. In addressing these issues with an ethnographic and discursive approach, I show that autochthony claims are political and economic, and embedded in the invisible realm from the national to the local level, and the various scales of analysis is important here. In the remainder of the

⁵ Jenkins (2012a) makes a similar finding in her study of ethnic violence in Kenya.

chapter, I set the historical scene to provide the parameters for the ensuing analysis. Then, I address the methods employed in the research and present an overview of the chapters.

1.2. Brief Historical Notes

In order to set the scene for the ensuing analysis, it is useful to recall three important points that frame the current CAR trajectory. These points concern the role that violence played at different moments of the country's history. The first point is the violence that structured the pre-colonial era; the second point is that violence was a central feature in the colonial enterprise, and, by some accounts, that violence was frequently extreme. The third point is that post-colonial elites have also relied on violence as part of their governing strategies. In other words, violence featured in various political projects. This armed conflict shows the continuity in the use of violence, but also a change in the scale and pace of its sheer horror. It is at the intersection of these elements that one must situate the CAR's current trajectory: the "true Central African" claim and its multiple layers of meaning, and the relevancy of violence.

1.2.1. Pre-Colonial CAR, Settlement of Populations, and Slave Raiding

Right from the start, I discuss Muslims in CAR because the current conflict manifested around sectarian religious lines. The arrival of Muslims in the CAR is not recent, nor are they foreign to that geographic area. Historically, some Muslims arrived in Ubangui-Shari through activities such as the slave trade and the ivory trade since, at least, the 15th century (Tchakossa 2012, 90). However, historians find it difficult to reconstruct the history of north-eastern CAR due to the lack of information (Cordell 1985, 12; Kalck 1971). There were Muslim sultanates in north Ubangui-Shari that executed raids on the southern populations to sustain their economies. These sultanates were from areas of Sudan and Chad, and were expanding southward towards Ubangui-Shari. The sultanates lived and thrived on many commercial activities, one of which was slave-raiding, otherwise understood as the organization of military campaigns for the objective of capturing people in order to enslave them. Historians have now expanded our knowledge of the slave-raiding activity of Muslim sultanates on the non-Muslim

populations of north Ubangui-Shari (Cordell 1985; Simiti 2013; Moukadas-Nouré 2015). Specifically, the economy of the Muslim sultanates “was based on slave-raiding, slave trading, agriculture, and the exchange of captives for northern trade goods ... These activities brought profound changes to non-Muslim societies throughout the area” (Cordell 1985, 2). The slave raids were undertaken from 1860 to 1910 (Kalck 1971, 8). Slave raiding was a brutal and violent activity that depopulated parts of the CAR territory even though some ethnic groups resisted.⁶

There are various other accounts among CAR scholars of how Islam spread. Tchakossa (2012, 91), for example, establishes that in the 19th century, Muslims were no longer interested in trade, but the Islamization of the population. That said, Islamization failed because local people rejected it (Tchakossa 2012, 91). This historical account emphasizes the population’s resistance and rejection of the religion. However, Simiti (2013) discusses populations who Islamized because of social proximity to Muslims. For instance, wearing a Muslim dress could, at the time, reflect “wealth and class as much as belief” (Cordell 1985, 96). This is to say that being and becoming a Muslim was a fluid category, and it seems that conversion to Islam was far from monolithic and simple in Ubangui-Shari. In the north, “Muslims were indeed dominant, but their ability to impose their religious culture on all peoples [...] was limited and their impact uneven” (Cordell 1985, 80). Further, “Islam provided the ideological underpinnings of the [Sultanate]. It reinforced the common economic interests of the Muslim ruling class and proved attractive to non-Muslims, many of whom converted” (Ibid., 79). Since Ubangui-Shari encompasses various ethnic groups coming from neighbouring countries, it seems realistic to believe that the history of conversion depends on the area.⁷ Cordell (1985, 35) explains that the Runga ethnic moved south from the Aouk in Dar Runga (Chad), and they already professed Islam. According to him, “They

⁶ The soldiers of the sultanate “met defeat at the hands of the Manza in 1892 or 1893; [the sultanate] detachments suffered serious reversals in raids against the Sara Ngama in 1896 although they still managed to return with many prisoners; and in a campaign among the Banda Linda in 1901, the Linda attacked the central camp at night, forcing many of al-Sanusi’s men to throw themselves into the nearby Ouaka River where they drowned” (Cordell 1985, 109).

⁷ Actually, Cordell (1985, 37) thinks that Muslim infiltration in north CAR “took a shape adapted to local conditions.”

were probably the first Muslim population to settle in Dar al-Kuti in large numbers” at least in the north-east (Ibid.).

Slave raiding from Muslim sultanates was a violent activity that affected several populations and the pattern of settlement in the area. One consequence of this history is the difficulty of knowing with definitive certainty which groups settled in which area first. What we know about the CAR points to the fact that there were various groups who fought each other prior to the colonizer’s arrival.⁸ Some of the people fled Muslim traders and Islamization and came to the territory of Central Africa. Hence, prior to the colonizers, people experienced violence from Muslim sultanates in search of slaves. Muslims incursions affected the Banda and the Gbaya, two large ethnic groups with numerous subgroups in the CAR. For instance,

The general pattern of early Banda history resembles the historical experience of the other non-Muslim peoples. Like them, the Banda probably lived further north in the late eighteenth century. Al-Tunisi [an early explorer of that area] placed them nearer the Muslim states of the Sahel, although the exact location of their homelands has been a subject of speculation. The Banda apparently also faced increased Muslim raiding in the early nineteenth century and responded to this threat in the same manner as their non-Muslim neighbors. They headed south, probably following river valleys such as the Kotto and Kouango which flowed towards the Mbomu and Ubangi. The history of the Banda after 1850 is also a tale of raiding and forced migration. (Cordell 1985, 26, 40)

The Banda ethnic group came from Darfur in today’s Sudan (Kalck 1992, 97) and they were fleeing slave raids of Muslim sultanates. The Baya (Gbaya) came from the Adamaoua, Cameroon (Kalck 1992, 97). Similarly to the Banda’s history, their settlement is also controversial.⁹ The Gbaya were living

⁸ For instance, Cordell (1985, 11) explains that “The most numerous group of non-Muslims in the Chad basin are the Sara peoples living in the south. They are divided into many subgroups speaking related languages. They never formed a centralized state and, despite their linguistic ties, had no sense of common identity. Most Sara lived in small settlements and most groups made war among themselves.”

⁹ Rather than locating the Gbaya in Cameroon, Bigo (1988, 12) based on Pierre Vidal’s work advances that “Gbaya might be autochthonous, and perhaps descendants of ancient megalithic civilizations.” Actually, both theses might hold since Gbaya is a large group also present in Cameroon and state borders intervened only later. Some Gbaya groups have migrated from Cameroon when others stem from even earlier migration. Roulon-Doko (1996) who studied a group of Gbaya (Gbaya ‘bodoë’) found that “There is no story of creation of the world in the gbaya tales, but several tales describe an original world where all the spaces were open” (Roulon-Doko 2009, 40). For her, “We know almost nothing of the supposed migrations of Gbaya” (Roulon-Doko 2012, 1). Importantly, she finds that there is no specific name that designates the oldest village location of Gbaya ‘bodoë’ (Roulon-Doko 1996, 102). But that village was located on the land of Ndongué (Ibid.). Similarly, early

closely with Hausa people, but had to flee the conquest of the Hausa territory that Ousman dan Fodio, a Fulani emir, organized in 1810-1817 (Ibid., 98-99; Kalck 1971, 22).¹⁰ Kalck recounts that, when some Gbaya groups migrated to Ubangui-Shari in the 19th century, they found Bantu people already present (Kalck 1992, 99). In other words, Gbaya people did not have an a priori link with the soil as first comers. Instead, they found other established groups. However, in 2013, when anti-Balaka vigilante groups formed, several of them were Gbaya ethnic and now claimed to be “true central Africans”. Kalck (1992, 92) explains that other ethnic groups beyond these two were conquerors but assimilated and maintained the village chiefs of defeated populations. For instance, the Zandé people in the east managed to impose their language and practices to their conquered areas in three generations (Ibid.). They imposed their presence, and it is difficult to know who the defeated groups were.

This history of displacement and violence due to human conquests and suffering is one of the first manifestations of the contact between Muslims and non-Muslims in Ubangui-Shari. French and Belgian colonizers arrived around 1889- or 1890 (Kalck 1992, 124), though various Europeans had already reached the central African region in the 1870s (Kalck 1971, 36-37). In north-eastern Ubangui-Shari, the sultanate of Dar-el-Kouti of Mohamed Senoussi thrived on the slave trade until French colonizers assassinated Senoussi in January 1911 (Simiti 2013), marking the decline of the sultanate and slave-raiding activities. Muslim sultanate violence was replaced with Europeans’ violence.

1.2.2. Colonization and Violence: From the Concessionary Regime to the Kongo-Wara War

The colonial period from 1894 to 1960 was characterized by the concessionary regime and violent exploitation and can be understood as the continuation of violence that defines the CAR. The colonizer’s objective was to develop the territory of Ubangi-Shari at a profit. Concessions (and the concessionary

colonizers in 1908 ‘noting the impossibility of making the gbaya say that they come from elsewhere think they may be autochthonous’ (Roulon-Doko 2009, 2), but the state of archaeological knowledge does not allow us to know which population are old or not (ibid., 3).

¹⁰ He was a “religious teacher and founder of the Sokoto Caliphate, (and) made a definition of and adherence to orthodox Islam an important political issue” (Cordell 1985, 41).

regime) were the legal and social processes “by which land is temporarily demarcated for specific uses” (Hardin 2011, 115). In Ubangui-Shari, France as the colonial power encouraged private French and business owners to invest and exploit demarcated territories and their natural resources in the colonies. France ceded land and its natural resources there to these business owners, but the French state was not willing to spend money in the colony and did not oblige the companies to invest in the colonies (Cantournet 1991, 13). As such, the objective was only exploitation.

In 1899, 40 concessionary companies were set up, and 15 were established on the CAR territory (Cantournet 1991, 13). The decree that ceded the concessions stipulated that the companies had “exclusive rights on all agricultural, or forestry operation for thirty years, as well as the permanent enjoyment of any land that they labored” (Tchakossa 2012, 130). As Kalck (1971, 51) reports, “the concessionary system produced disastrous results. The companies saw their capital dwindle away in a few months.” These disastrous results were due to the difficult geography and illness that concessionary officers met on the ground. Moreover, the concessionary agents that were recruited were among “the misfits of society” (Ibid.). Cantournet reminds us that concessionary regimes were not invented for Central African exploitation purposes, as the same principles and methods had been employed by other colonial states. This, of course, does not excuse the brutality of the concessionary companies.¹¹

The concessionary companies and colonists used violence and coercion for exploitation and profit: portage, the head tax, and agricultural work.¹² Human portage was the only means for transporting goods, including military equipment, manufactured goods as well as rubber and ivory for export (Nzabakomada-Yakoma 1986, 24). It meant that populations were required against their will for such labour. Forced labour from the area was also used for the construction of the Congo-Ocean Railway, a

¹¹ For instance, the English government encouraged the creation of such companies to exploit regions where the state sovereignty was not effective (Cantournet 1991, 12). Germany and Belgium undertook similar actions (Ibid.).

¹² Regarding the head tax, Smith (2015a, 22) recounts that in one instance in 1904, 58 women and 10 children were taken hostages “for their village’s insufficient tax revenue” (see Nzabakomada-Yakoma (1986, 28) for a detailed account). In detention, 47 of the women and two children died. Regarding agricultural work, when workers gathered insufficient amount of rubber, their ears could be cut off (Tuquoi 2017, 103).

railroad of over 500 kilometers build to link today's Brazzaville with the Atlantic Ocean. In 1925, colonial officers organized manhunts to move people to the labour site. Hundreds, if not thousands (according to some estimates) died on the journey prior to arriving to the construction site (Mogba 2015, 31). Colonial officers sought to secure 3,000 people for portorage every month (Smith 2015a, 23). Human portorage was a cause of depopulation at the time (Kalck 1971, 53) because several people died. When colonial officials and security agents located individuals hiding from portorage work in grottos, they threw grenades to dislodge them (Zoctizoum 1983, 72). People resisted the exploitation, and concessionary officers resorted to more violence to ensure compliance. For instance, one employee of a company strapped dynamite to the back of a prisoner who was already condemned to death and set it off (Cantournet 1991, 14; Kalck 1971, 54). Colonial officers took wives and children hostage to force the compliance of male porters (Zoctizoum 1983, 68). But that was not all. Colonial officers also exerted violence simply to enforce or demonstrate their authority. In 1942, one colonial officer shot his cook without facing consequences (N'Dimina-Mougala 1996, 46). This author recounts many other examples of similar use of violence not related to forced labour.

The violence of the concessionary regime prompted fierce resistance from some ethnic groups, and one of the famous acts of resistance was the Kongo-Wara war (1928-1931). A Central African historian, Nzabakomada-Yakoma (1986), recounts in detail how the events unfolded, especially because it was a historic moment that is largely ignored in the history of revolts in Africa. People revolted because of the increased human suffering of portorage, rubber collection, and the head tax increase (O'Toole 1984). This revolt was after the First World War, and the concessionary companies wanted to regain income lost during the war. They then became increasingly predatory after 1920 (O'Toole 1984, 333). The Kongo-Wara war was an anti-colonial fight, though the historical accounts do not present it as a fight for independence. A Gbaya leader, named Barka Ngainoumbey, spearheaded the revolt and motivated people to resist recruitment for portorage and refuse to pay the taxes (O'Toole 1984, 334). He preached

the end of colonization and he “distributed hoe handles which, some people claim, he said would protect the bearers against[t] European bullets and brutalities” (O’Toole 1984, 334; Nzabakomada-Yakoma 1986, 46). People believed that Barka had superpowers and “the failure of the French to act swiftly against him enhanced his prestige and lent credibility to his claims, thus touching off a general insurrection (Coquery-Vidrovitch 1972, 211 quoted in O’Toole 1984, 335). The French managed to crush the revolt which continued well after they had killed Barka (O’Toole 1984).

There are various interpretations of the overall meaning of this revolt. O’Toole (1984, 335) thinks that “the Kongo Wara may well have been a series of virtually unconnected events, many of which were caused more by the actions taken by colonial administrators and colonists to suppress a supposed general uprising than by any overt activity on the part of most Gbaya or other village dwellers.” Other CAR historians see the revolt as a unitary, and, hence, a nationalist moment against colonizers (Nzabakomada-Yakoma 1986). However, both accounts agree that the colonizers’ violence played a role in arousing dissent and revolt. Arguably, the revolt might have been the most important under French rule in Africa (Nzabakomada-Yakoma 1986, 7).

The violence of the Muslim sultanate’s slave raids and of the French colonizers defined the pre-colonial and colonial periods and, by extension, defined the nature of the new independent state in 1960. The early post-colonial leaders of the CAR experienced the colonizers’ violence. For instance, Emperor Bokassa’s father was killed, and his aunt was beaten to death by guards of one concessionary company (Hardin 2011, 117). The father of independence, Barthélémy Boganda’s mother was killed by the guards of the same concessionary company (Kalck 1971, 75).¹³ Boganda was adopted by Catholic missionaries and became a priest in 1938 (Kalck 1971, 75).¹⁴ He played an important role in the early days of the post-colonial CAR and holds a significant place in national imaginary.

¹³ It was the *Compagnie Forestière Sangha-Oubangui* (CFSO).

¹⁴ More precisely, Boganda had apparently been abandoned by his elder half-brother when they both encountered a colonial patrol in 1920. He was ten years old. The men took Boganda to an orphanage and it was there that a missionary, Father Herriau, took Boganda to another mission where Boganda started his training (Walraven 2017, 242–243).

Barthélémy Boganda, born in 1910, is the man who drove the independence struggle. In 1946, he was elected to the parliament in Paris before independence and flew to France for the first time. Then, his fight for independence began. In 1949, he created the party *Mouvement d'Évolution Sociale d'Afrique Noire* (MESAN) to fight for independence. Boganda demanded that Central Africans be granted the same right as Europeans, and that exploitation and mistreatment should cease. With the colonizers as a target, he claimed that every human being deserved dignity. His slogan, much remembered in today's CAR was “*Zo Kwe Zo*,” meaning that all human beings are equal. This was the basis of his independence struggle while he urged Central Africans to “to speak little and to work a lot, to work to produce and to produce to build” (N'Dimina-Mougala 1996, 49). Indeed, everything was still to be done. He had experienced discrimination and racism as a priest, which pushed him to double down on his fight for decolonization (N'Dimina-Mougala 1996, 43; Walraven 2017, 245). His public speeches moved from a moderate tone to a violent one (N'Dimina-Mougala 1996, 33), which may have been due to these discriminatory experiences.¹⁵ At the same time, N'Dimina-Mougala (1996, 34) reports that Boganda was considered as “authoritarian, autocratic and despotic.” He managed to impose the MESAN as the sole party for Ubangui-Shari prior to independence and silenced his opponents (Ibid.).¹⁶

On December 1, 1958, the territory of Ubangui-Chari became the Central African Republic. Boganda died a few months later in a plane crash on March 29, 1959, prior to independence.¹⁷ His cousin, David Dacko, finished the independence struggle, and on August 13, 1960, the CAR became

¹⁵ Walraven (2017, 249) reports some of these experiences. For example, Boganda “was thrown out of a hotel in 1947 and, again, of a restaurant, one year later.”

¹⁶ During priesthood, Boganda was known as tough, severe and at times bordering violence as he would at times beat people (Walraven 2017, 245). Boganda “was concentrating too much power in his hands. Between 10 November 1946 and 29 March 1959, he was a priest, Member of Parliament, coffee planter, territorial councillor, mayor of Bangui, president of the Great Council of the AEF and president of the Central African Governing Council. This accumulation of mandates has never allowed any of his deputies to play a role other than that of a stooge” (N'Dimina-Mougala 1996, 34).

¹⁷ There are diverging accounts of his death. By some accounts it was an assassination as the circumstances of the accident are unclear (Kalck 1971, 106; Titley 1997). But Serre (2007, 150–151) argues that there is an official investigation report that disproves the assassination thesis. Serre argues that the report “*Direction générale de l'Aviation Civile, Bureau des Enquêtes et Accidents sur l'accident survenu le 29 mars 1959 à Boukpayanga – district de Boda République centrafricaine à l'avion Nord 2502 FBGZB de la Compagnie UAT*” (Serre 2007, 150) presents the conditions of the plane crash and suggests that the plane was deficient and did not resist a stormy weather.

independent.¹⁸ At the dawn of independence, the few educated Central Africans faced the reality that the concessionary regime had not provided any investment into the CAR. There were no roads, education, nor any sanitary infrastructure. Although there was no war of independence, the pre-colonial and colonial violence affected how the CAR post-colonial elites sought to use their power.

1.2.3. The Post-Independence Period: A Brief History of Violent Conflict

CAR's violent history has continued in the post-colonial period. The elites violently competed for power, and importantly, this violent competition remained until recently primarily at the elite level (Glawion and de Vries 2018; Kah 2013).¹⁹ It involved the instrumentalization of ethnic identity for political purpose (Bigo 1988; Danzi 2011), the militarization of politics (Mehler 2011), and a neopatrimonial governance style (Ngovon 2015). The competition between various elites was also a competition among various neopatrimonial networks and left a legacy of insecurity to each incumbent who was never sure of when the next coup would remove them (Vlavourou 2016). The history of this post-colonial violence shows that it is different from the previous use of violence, but also that the 2013 coup is located in this broad competition for political power between elites.

On the eve of the CAR independence, the CAR did not have the human resources necessary for steering the country out of poverty, and the small circle of elites mostly reproduced the colonizer's behaviour. That is, they did not care about the conditions of their fellow countrymen, lived lavish lives, and exploited the population for their own benefits. The post-independence period was characterized by violence, dictatorship, and a lack of interest in controlling a territory geographically larger than France.

David Dacko was the first president, and he inherited a structurally underperforming administration due to the concessionary companies and France's lack of investments. With the responsibilities that were

¹⁸ CAR has two dates at which independence is celebrated: December 1, 1958, is the date on which the colony of Ubangi-Chari became CAR and there is August 13, 1960, the date of accession to independence, accession to international sovereignty and internal autonomy.

¹⁹ Of course, the population also participates into this system. Focusing on elites alone might overlook that fact. Actually, "Elites are patrons and thereby depend on their clients' support, meaning that both sides shape the forms and scope of a patrimonial system" (de Vries and Mehler 2019, 319).

now upon him, he needed educated and competent people for the country, but could hardly find any. The available educated people did not have the required level for the jobs that were awaiting them. Kalck (1992, 325) reports that the National School of Administration had to lower their recruitment level to the second year of secondary school. The highest degree of educated people in 1957 was secondary school (Kalck 1992, 312). Despite this, President Dacko decided that as of January 1, 1961, the entire administration would Africanize, and all positions of responsibility were handed over to clerks who became sub-prefects (Kalck 1992, 312). At the time, many newly independent countries and their elites needed jobs to make citizens feel that independence was real. It was also often a form of nation building and patronage. Indeed, there was patronage, in the sense that the “distribution of state resources is based on the ruling elite’s personal ties, rather than on principles such as the public good, national citizenship or equal opportunities” (Brown and Kaiser 2007, 1142). For instance, President Dacko had to grant high salaries to uneducated people to maintain power,²⁰ and Titley (1997, 22) reports that “friends and relations of the president and his entourage were doing well for themselves in the patronage system.”

As these new governing people were unprepared, “many considered their functions merely as a means of getting rich quickly” (Kalck 1971, 128). Many were promoted above their level of education, skills, and competencies. They opened bars and businesses (Ibid., 129), and the post-independence political life “centered entirely around this privileged caste, who seemed to be entirely indifferent to the low standard of living of the thousands in the villages” (Kalck 1971, 117). Importantly, the educated people, and by extension the governing elites of the country, were very few, approximately 0.01% of the population in 1970 (Koyzoa 1980 quoted in Bigo 1988, 88). In other words, the country’s destiny was left to a handful of people. This had a detrimental effect on the economy. For instance, “The first result of the disorganized administrative and technical services arising from the sudden Africanization was a slowing down in the production of cotton” (Kalck 1971, 126).

²⁰ President Dacko had to grant ministers’ salaries to “55 more or less uneducated deputies, men who had persecuted the villagers [...] in order to stay in power” (Kalck 1971, 116).

Initially when Boganda died, it was another leader, Abel Goumba, who was supposed to lead the nation, but the French did not like his nationalist stance and favoured Dacko (Titley 1997, 16).²¹ The rivalry between Dacko and Goumba pushed Dacko to rely on an autocratic style of governance and surround himself with friends and ethnic kin. Titley (1997, 17) advanced that Dacko relied on his ethnic kin when his power was insecure. As President, Dacko eliminated the opposition that Goumba represented, dissolved Goumba's party, and arrested his associates (Ibid., 20). Dacko had seen Boganda wield power, and this suggests that he had an idea of what kind of powers the new independent state would allow him to use.

A few years after Dacko came to power, Jean Bédél Bokassa staged the first military coup on December 31, 1965 and established the autocratic rule until 1979.²² Bokassa was brought up by missionaries and later joined the French army (Ibid., 154). After his service, he returned to the CAR and was the Chief of Staff at the Ministry of Defence in Dacko's government. Bokassa and Dacko were both related to Boganda, the father of the independence. According to Kalck (1971, 152), the coup might have been motivated by the fact that political elites were living a bourgeois life when Dacko was planning cuts to the security apparatus. This threatened the living standards of people who were in the army. Others report that Bokassa was a drunkard and womanizer and that Dacko wanted to replace him, which prompted the coup (Titley 1997, 24; Serre 2007, 86). Either way, the coup appeared to be about job security, living standards, and a rivalry between the leaders.²³

Bokassa's coup was an indication both of the political turbulence to come and of France's intention to remain closely involved in the internal affairs of its former colony. The coup maker, Bokassa, had been a key figure in the country's newly created army, and went on to become its self-proclaimed

²¹ Dacko's biography recounts a different story in which the French played a lesser role (Serre 2007, 75–77).

²² See Bigo (1988, 88 and following pages) for a good account of that period.

²³ Kalck (1971, 152–154) advances that Bokassa's coup stems out of protest to a differentiated treatment between the military and the police. There have been budget cuts to the military and increased the budget to the police. There was also personality dispute between the gendarmerie head and military (Serre 2007, 85–87). Since the state apparatus was the only secure provider of economic income, it could be argued that the budget cuts threatened Bokassa's security and he chose to seize power.

Emperor. Under Bokassa's infamous leadership, ethnicity mattered for political ends; he also adopted a neopatrimonial style of governance. Bigo (1988, 83) recounts how Bokassa inserted his ethnic kin, family, and village people into the army and created a militia, *Les Abeilles* (the bees), for repression activities. Bokassa removed his cousin from power and built support among his own Ngbaka ethnic. For instance, Ngbaka were overly recruited in the police (Decalo 1989 quoted in Ngozon 2015, 510).²⁴

In September 1979, after more than a decade of misrule, Emperor Bokassa the 1st was removed from power by *Opération Barracuda*, which was supported by France (ICG 2007). France reinstated the former president Dacko in 1979, and, in 1981, General André Kolingba seized power from him.²⁵ When Kolingba from the Yakoma ethnic group came to power in 1981, he promoted his ethnic kin as well.²⁶ Similarly, the following presidents, Patassé and Bozizé, from the Gbaya group, built on previous behaviour of ethnic kin promotion for support. Using ethnicity seemed to be a political strategy for maintaining power, and this is in line with a neopatrimonial style of governance and legitimacy seeking. These various presidents made use of a “winner takes all politics” by excluding their rivals from governance circles (Mehler 2005, 149).

Thus, for example, the mutinies within the army in 1996–1997 were a public display of a deep disagreement within the military elite arising from decades of ethnic promotion by presidents. In 1996–1997, high-ranking officers, who lost their privileged positions under President Patassé, led mutinies within the army.²⁷ The rebelling officers were the supporters of the presidents with whom they identified,

²⁴ For an in-depth analysis of the hyper patrimonial style of governance of Bokassa, see (Bigo 1988; Titley 1997). For a critique of the notion of personal power that Bigo develops, see Mbéko (1993). The main ethnic groups in the CAR are the Banda, Yakoma, Gbaya—Mandjia, Sara, Ngbaka, Zande, Nzaraka, Muslims, Camerounians, Banziri and Mboum (Kalck 1971; 2005).

²⁵ André Kolingba, in fact, participated in Bokassa's coup in 1965; he was a lieutenant at the time (Serre 2007, 87).

²⁶ The Yakoma is an ethnic group part of the larger Ngbandi ethnic group. According to the 2003 census of CAR population, the Ngbandi ethnic group represented 5.5% of the country's population. The Ngbandi ethnic group is also present in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

²⁷ Specifically, there were four army mutinies during these years. The first mutiny 18 April 1996 involved 250 soldiers and was indirectly linked to the exclusion of military elites tied to Kolingba (from the Yakoma group) regime. It lasted four days and left seven dead and 40 wounded (ICG 2007, 10). One month later, May 18, 1996, the second mutiny involved 500 soldiers claiming that the settlement of the first mutiny was not executed (this mutiny lasted eleven days: 43 dead and 238 wounded). The third mutiny started on 15 November, 800 rebels were now involved and now had political aims (Mehler 2005, 136-7). The fourth mutiny, May-June 1997 left 100 dead and 60,000 displaced (ICG 2007, 11).

and were trying to regain the privileged positions they previously enjoyed in the military. However, this conflict did not escalate out of the military sphere. Although these mutinies were the culmination of several years of ethnicization of military promotion, they were not episodes of ethnic conflict. As a matter of fact, the mutinies were largely explained as a conflict between “the old and the new regime; between armed supporters of two important politicians [Kolingba and Patassé]; and, finally [indirectly] between two still vaguely defined ethno-regional groups” about access to state resources (Mehler 2005, 137).

A few years after the mutinies, the second conflict (2001–2003) occurred in the general atmosphere of competition over the control of government. There were tensions among some members of political elites who were dissatisfied with the deteriorating civil and political conditions, such as unpaid salaries (Mehler 2005, 144).²⁸ This was mainly an inter-elite conflict over access to resources at the top. With that background, there was a failed coup and a short war (10 days) in 2001, and the security situation remained unstable until the successful coup by Bozizé in 2003.

The failed coup of May 28, 2001, caused retaliation from the Patassé government towards the Yakoma, ethnic group of the former President Kolingba. The estimated number of deaths varies between 300 and 500, while 50,000 to 80,000 people were internally displaced (Mehler 2005; Carayannis and Lombard 2015; Leaba 2001). The 10 days of fighting are better depicted as one-sided violence because the military, following President Patassé’s orders, retaliated against one specific group: the Yakoma. Patassé believed that the former President Kolingba was behind the failed coup, and, amidst confusion over the organizer of that coup, the Yakoma ethnic group suffered the retaliation from the army.²⁹

As this brief overview demonstrates, in early post-colonial period, the government and the public

²⁸ Mehler (2005, 144) noticed that there were harassment of the private press, extrajudicial killings, and social unrest. Trade unions called for strikes in September 2000 and manifested against twenty-nine months of salary arrears. Moreover, a demonstration by the opposition in December 2000 was violently repressed. In fact, Patassé excluded members of other ethnic groups from his governing circle. He appointed several officials from his ethnic group to “the state-owned oil company PETROCA and the radio and television services” (Mehler 2005, 133). Moreover, “two hundred members of the presidential guard (mainly Yakoma: identified with previous president (Kolingba ethnic group) were dismissed or shifted to the army” (Ibid.).

²⁹ That Kolingba instigated the coup at the time was not clear. Patassé’s Defence Minister Jean-Jacques Demafouth was also accused of being behind the coup (Mehler 2008, 15).

administration were primarily a place for personal economic security. The early days of the post-colonial country featured rivalry between Dacko and Goumba, and the intra-elite struggle continued later on. Hence, elites representing various groups have vied for political power by each adopting varied strategies within that structure, but their struggle for access to power has rarely involved the population at large. Some authors argue that it is the breakdown of the neopatrimonial style of governance that degenerated into armed conflict (Reno 2007), and that the “competition between and within such patronage networks can be fierce and degenerate into open violence” (de Vries and Mehler 2019, 319). This brief history’s purpose was to locate the current conflict’s origins in these elites power struggles, and to show how violence has been used in each rule, albeit in different ways. The broader point is that the CAR’s history is one of several kinds of violence that numerous actors have perpetuated during the pre-colonial period, the colonial period, and the post-independence period.³⁰ However, I do not want to give the impression that violence is continuous and unchanging. On the contrary, history shows different kinds of violent enterprises and the more recent violence is unique.³¹

1.3. Methods and Approach to Data Construction

This thesis is based on a qualitative multi-method approach to allow for an in-depth study of autochthony discourses in the CAR. By adopting a multi-method approach – discourse analysis, fieldwork, interviews, and newspaper archives – the implicit logic is that multiple sources of evidence

³⁰ For clarity and precision, I have left out, for instance, the regional dimension of the conflict (Marchal 2009; 2015c), or the fact that impunity and poverty influence the types of life choices that people make.

³¹ Indeed, the violence displayed during this war must be understood in the context of CAR society’s own violent mode of expression beyond the sole focus on elite. For instance, Ngovon (2015, 524–525) advances that “regular forces have helped provide armed groups with examples of atrocities and violence to imitate,” such as burning villages and extrajudicial killings. Hence, for him armed group atrocities are far from unprecedented in CAR (Ibid., 525). But Ngovon strictly focuses on armed groups (state and non-state) and neglect how violent mode of expression are also embedded into CAR society. Lombard and Batianga-Kinzi (2015, 53) advance that social practices such as popular punishment and vengeance are threat management tools in CAR and also form the background to explaining extreme violence. Also, part of the methods I used for this work was newspaper archives. From newspapers, it appears that violent social practices were often reported and vividly descriptive. Several newspapers report how people were beaten to death by their neighbours or fellow villagers for various issues such as theft (Essango 2007b; Mokopipo 2008; Essango 2008), work dispute (Essango 2007c), love affairs dispute (Essango 2004) or even witchcraft. The use of machetes in such killings were also reported. For instance, Schengen (2005) recounts how a man was slayed with a machete in a village. I advance these titles among many others to illustrate how Central Africans, both men and women, deal with revenge, justice, and threats.

allow for a triangulation that strengthens the validity of the argument because multiple sources allow for converging lines of inquiry (Greene 2007, 42). Interviews are chosen to complement discourse analysis because the interview is not generally considered a complete research method by itself (Jones 1996, 139), and, discourse analysis is open to mixing with other methods. It often makes sense to use discourse analysis in conjunction with other forms of analysis (Fairclough 2003, 3; Wodak and Meyer 2009). Many scholars suggest digitally recording all interviews (Aberbach & Rockman 2001; Jones 1996), but these suggestions are for stable and safe research environments, which was not the case for my fieldwork. Moreover, conditions of ethical research are precluded in several conflict zones (Cronin-Furman and Lake 2018; Wood 2006). During my fieldwork, I recorded interviews when possible; otherwise I made extensive use of memory notes. In other words, I wrote down extensive notes from memory as soon as possible after the interview.

I constructed data using two techniques. The first technique is a discourse analysis, focused on how the government constructed the boundary of the autochthony category through its mining policies and through Bozizé's speeches. My rationale for a discourse analysis is anchored in a post-structural understanding of social realities. In general, poststructuralists, postmodernists, some feminists, and critical social constructivists share certain theoretical commitments about how discourses work. These generally lead to a common research interest in discourse studies (Milliken 1999, 225) to "illustrate how [...] textual and social processes are intrinsically connected and to describe, in specific contexts, the implications of this connection for the way we think and act in the contemporary world" (George 1994, 141 quoted in Milliken 1999, 225). My approach to discourse closely follows that of Michel Foucault (1971), who believes that discourse holds the potential of shaping both political behaviour and individual subjectivity. Studying discourses in relation to war intends to uncover the power behind words in legitimizing violent action.

There are various conceptions of discourse analysis, one positivist, Critical Discourse Analyst

(CDA), and another one post-structuralist (Dunn and Neumann 2016; Jacobs 2018). The debate is located in the nature of the ontological reality at hand, which is not a debate that this thesis will aim to settle. In brief, post-structuralist discourse analysis is based on the fact “that ‘reality’ is produced and made understandable only through discourse” (Dunn and Neumann 2016, 40). In other words, “It is only through discursive meaning-making that [real world] objects become known and knowable to us” (Ibid.). On the other hand, for CDA proponents, by comparison, “There is a ‘reality’ that does not depend upon what is known about it” (Suderland 2004:1 quoted in Dunn and Neumann 2016, 35; see also Banta (2012) and Fairclough (2003)). The CDA approach sees a “dialectical relationship between discourse and society but contends that discourses do not encompass all aspects of social life” (Dunn and Neumann 2016, 36). For the purpose of this thesis, it is important to clearly state that I based my approach on poststructuralist understandings, using the tools and approaches outlined by Dunn and Neumann (2016), as well as Gee (2014). Post-structuralist discourse analysis does not advance direct causality claims, or that discourses directly cause specific events, and this has been a point of contention in the literature. Contrary to post-structural discourse analysis, CDA proponents claim causality in their work. As both approaches differ in their understanding of reality, the causal claim they purport should be different. Post-structuralist discourse cannot be judged on positivist terms. So, I do not claim that autochthony discourses “caused” violence, but they certainly influenced people’s understanding of violence, and they acted on this preconceived understanding. Similarly, I cannot claim that people are killing solely on the basis of the identity discourse.

Discourse analysis, with its various schools, rests on three analytical principles (Milliken 1999, Pouliot 2007),

First, discourses are systems of significations, which construct social realities. This tenet emphasizes the dialectic between meaning and reality. Second, discourses are productive of the social realities they define. They construct legitimate speakers, authorized practices, as well as common sense. [...] Third and finally, discourses are articulated through the play of practice. Discursive intersubjective structures falter unless constantly instantiated and reinstated through agents’ practices (Pouliot 2007, 371).

My approach is to systematically analyze the speeches of several actors within their context. Discourses also move humans. We speak, we hear, we internalize, and then reproduce them in other types of actions. Having a discursive approach can help bridge the macro explanations of civil war to the daily experiences of people, and also bridge the material and the ideational divide. Moreover, by focusing on several actors' discourses, I can point to elements of closure and contention. Discourses, by nature, are selective. Autochthony, as an identity, fits a discursive approach. It follows that, if identity is produced through discourse, then closure in discourse is also linked to closure in our identities. Therefore, the stories various actors tell about autochthony are important. In line with discourse analyses, framing perspective in social movement theory also exposes that leaders framing of a problem seek to motivate, diagnose a problem, propose a solution, and input blame (Snow and Benford 1992, Benford and Snow 2000). In attending these various tasks, frames must "resonate" with masses. This depends upon the "frame consistency, (its) empirical credibility, and (the) credibility of the frame articulators or claims makers" (Benford and Snow 2000, 619). Authors acknowledge that frames are not static, continually in meaning construction, and framing possibilities are constrained by broader political context (Snow 2004; Snow and Benford 1992; Benford and Snow 2000).

In adopting a discursive approach, the assumption is that language is part of social life and is seen as constitutive of "what is brought into being" (Hansen 2006, 15). That is, language can have a performative function in shaping reality. It is in this case that a focus on elites should not be underestimated because not everyone can mobilize discourses effectively, and actors must occupy positions that allow them to access relevant audiences. I undertook a discourse analysis of President Bozizé's public speeches to trace the presence of themes related to autochthony/ foreignness/citizenship in independent newspaper archives during fieldwork.³² There were two reliable newspapers that were

³² At the beginning of this research, my objective was to research discourse in databases, especially the previously known *Foreign Broadcast Information Service* (FBIS). FBIS hosts information from 1974 to 1996 and started from late 1995, reports are available on *World News Connection* database. The database consists of "annexes that were created by the US intelligence

old enough and had a good reputation, *Le Confident* and *Le Citoyen*. I selected these two also because they are the main newspapers (Bernard-Dende 2014, 21) even if, at times, I relied on secondary newspapers as well (such as *Media +*). I proceeded to gather scanned and photographed versions of the newspapers from the archives, but both newspapers have been looted several times due to political instability. Their archives were therefore incomplete. I found the most complete archives in the *Alliance Française* of Bangui, which has been protected during violent events. Both newspapers are daily newspapers, and I gathered thousands of the newspaper articles. For each year, there were between 250 and 300 publications. I covered the years from 2003 to 2013, and I gathered more than 5,000 scanned newspapers articles. One weakness is that the newspapers' publication is occasionally incomplete. They can either stop their publications to protest various decisions, or they are forced to stop their publications due to sanctions by the institution that regulates the press in the CAR (*Le Citoyen* 2009a; 2009b).³³ Newspapers have also stopped publication when their editors were arrested and in protest of such arbitrary arrests.

With the newspapers, I had two objectives: understanding the public speeches of Bozizé and understanding the newspapers' representations of Muslims and foreigners. I surveyed Bozizé's public speeches that the newspapers transcribed. Some of the discourses were delivered in Sango, and the journalists transcribed them into French. This is a caveat that needs mentioning as it does not allow me to capture the full nuance of some Sango words the president may have used. Moreover, I did not have access to the audio files of those Sango discourses for crosschecking. That said, at times, with two versions of the same speech, it was clear that the president had emphasized different themes in Sango and in French. I have complemented the newspapers' material with the audio files of other speeches obtained from *Radio Centrafrique*, the state-owned broadcasting corporation. Some of these audio files

community to benefit analysts and policy-makers" (Readex 2020, par.7). Unfortunately, remote collection of discourse regarding President Bozizé's period was not available. I could collect those discourses only when I was undertaking fieldwork.
³³ The newspaper has been sanctioned. They were forced to not publish for a month. In *Le Citoyen* (2009b), the newspaper halted publishing in protest to a decision.

were in Sango and, in that case, I worked with Central African colleagues to translate and grasp the nuance of the speeches. As the material draws from both state-owned media and independent media, they can be considered the official narrative of the Bozizé regime. I have surveyed 53 official speeches by President Bozizé, delivered over a period of 10 years (2003-2013), and covering close to 200 pages. I analyzed these speeches qualitatively and manually in order to understand whether or not Bozizé instrumentalized identity and, if so, how?³⁴ In a similar vein, I surveyed the newspapers' representations of Muslims during the period, seeking to capture how they were portrayed and represented during "normal" times. For instance, rarely, if ever are Muslims represented positively, and this is significant if one wants to understand why they were targeted during the war. That this observation comes from independent media reinforces the fact that the views were not spread by the state and are held publicly.

The second general technique I used was fieldwork. I undertook one six-month research from May to October 2017, where I had the opportunity to conduct semi-structured interviews, focus groups, participant observations, and immersion by living with a middle-class CAR family. Generally speaking, my process of using qualitative methods can be considered as a bottom-up approach, as it is "inductive, emerging and shaped by the researcher's experience in collecting and analyzing the data" (Creswell 2007, 19). Qualitative multi-methods fit this study's ambition to understand the influence of autochthony by paying attention to broad social and historical factors, with an emphasis on President Bozizé's regime. Epistemologically, my fieldwork research adopts an interpretive stance. A qualitative, interpretative (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012) approach is fruitful for this research because it pays close attention to meaning making. The interpretive stance holds "the belief that these understandings [understandings of the social world] can only be accessed, or co-generated, through interactions between

³⁴ I originally wanted to use the software Nvivo but later abandoned the idea. Simply because of epistemological issues. I did not want a machine to mediate my knowledge of the world. The software can suggest links between themes once the researcher upload their data. Of course, this is a query but as the function is available, once you use it you cannot forget what you have seen, and it starts influencing the link you might not make otherwise. In other words, I did not want a machine-driven analysis. Of course, I am using a computer to type my dissertation, this is not about coding discourses. Moreover, the corpus of speeches was manageable. It seems convenient to use a data analysis software when one has more than 100 speeches.

researchers and researched as they seek to interpret those events and make those interpretations legible to each other” (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012, 4). Interpretive methodologies “signal an orientation towards concepts as they are encountered and used in the lived experience of those who are ‘native’ to the context that the researcher is studying (by contrast with concepts defined a priori by the researcher, privileging theoretical literature over lived experience)” (Ibid., 38). Moreover, even while focusing on autochthony, a place-specific knowledge is required to understand how people make sense of the term.³⁵

From this methodological perspective, “The researcher is not outside that which is under study” (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012, 80). Hence my positionality is relevant to the project. Qualitative empirical research has its own challenges, and fieldwork has a mixture of disappointment and strong emotions in terms of the relationships the researcher builds with the respondents (Bizeul 2007). Indeed, producing this kind of knowledge depends on how the various attributes of the researcher are perceived (Lussier and Lavoie 2012) and the way researchers present themselves during field research. Several studies by researchers of African origin have precisely analyzed how gender and other categories of identity had influenced the data they collected (Wamai 2014; Bouka 2015; Yacob-Haliso 2019).³⁶ I identify my experiences with these authors as my interactions with interviewees were dependent on how I was perceived: as a young male, Black, Beninese/African graduate student enrolled in a Canadian university. These various attributes have complicated my access to interviewees in a number of ways. In fact, the overall pool of interviewees is very male dominated. CAR is a male-dominated society, and as a male researcher it may have been easier for me to access male interviewees. However, there are other

³⁵ Place-specific knowledge is required because case studies have shown that while considering elite theories of conflict, the reasons why people commit violence on the ground are various and do not always correspond to what (Kalyvas 2003) calls “master narrative.” Perhaps people on the ground are not even following leaders in general but take advantage of the chaos to loot or grab goods (Brass 1997). Indeed, “civilians cannot be treated as passive, manipulated, or invisible actors; they often manipulate central actors to settle their own conflicts” (Kalyvas 2003 481). Consequently, the vital question of why masses follow is important and ultimately is an empirical question. Kalyvas (2003) notices that political violence often mixes with personal violence in intricate ways. He advocates for a better focus on local dynamics and the interaction between local dynamics and master narratives through alliances of multiple actors at multiple levels.

³⁶ This literature produced by African diasporic researchers is fast growing, see Beoku-Betts (1994), Munthali (2001), Akello (2012), Compaoré (2017), Keikelame (2018).

identity attributes, such as age or nationality that have complicated access to the interviewees. For instance, interviewing government elites and some high-profile civil society activists was complicated because they would deny me access and grant access to White researchers. I have noticed this several times during fieldwork because I had contact with various White researchers who disclosed that they had met with the same potential interviewees. As they had denied me access for no explicit reasons, this remains a puzzle to explain. As I was young, other elites did not take my work seriously. Some yelled on the phone when denying me interviews and others lectured me when they thought that I was misbehaving. It is unclear to what extent this influenced the research findings. This might seem anecdotal, but if taken seriously, it means that a certain type of information was not available just because of how I was perceived in the field. On the other hand, as I was living with a Central African family, it became difficult to be “on duty” and “off duty” from fieldwork. This poses ethical dilemmas as to what the researchers can consider as fieldwork when they are discussing with members of the family they are living with or when they are eavesdropping conversations. Moreover, when I presented myself as residing in Canada, some interviewees expected financial remuneration for their participation. Finally, my religious identity might have influenced access to interviewees. At times, non-Muslims even asked me before the interview would begin if I were a Muslim, probably to gauge what they would feel free to tell me or not. Similarly, Muslims never asked the question in our interviews. Probably because it was taken for granted that I was not a Muslim.

During fieldwork, I mapped the actors of the conflict. I used the snowball technique and relied on the people that my interlocutors recommended to me. Specifically, I conducted 92 in-depth interviews, and met with 76 people.³⁷ The interviews targeted several key actors, considering a variety of social categories: former and current members of government, members of armed groups in confrontation, the anti-Balaka and Séléka (*Front Populaire pour la Renaissance de la Centrafrique* (FPRC), *Union pour*

³⁷ The full list of interviewees is in Appendix 1. However, only the interviews that I mobilize in this work appears in the list.

la Paix en Centrafrique (UPC), *Séléka Renovée*, and *Rassemblement Patriotique pour le Renouveau de Centrafrique* (RPRC)), representatives of national and international non-governmental organizations, as well as civil society figures: academics, journalists and other knowledgeable people. I conducted interviews mainly in Bangui, the capital, in Yaloké,³⁸ and the mining village of Gaga.³⁹ In the political elite category, I targeted current and former government members.⁴⁰ With these interviewees and the multi-scale level of co-generated data, it is less likely that I looked for confirmatory evidence of autochthony. At least two points serve to support this. First, the interviewees did not reveal a prominent preoccupation regarding a link to the soil and relevancy of land questions. Secondly, while I expected the president to have mobilized and instrumentalized ethnic identity, the careful analysis of speeches revealed that this was not the case.

Chapter Overview

Having briefly outlined the history of conflict in the CAR, as well as the various explanations for this prolonged violence, the thesis proceeds as follows in order to answer its research questions. The next chapter provides a literature review and begins with a theoretical exploration of the autochthony debate and its relationship with conflicts. This chapter investigates the relationship between the concept of autochthony and the soil, as well as a brief examination of ethnic wars, because both types of conflicts are somewhat similar. The chapter concludes by examining the theoretical framework for the thesis, which builds on a discursive understanding of identity (Hall 2007), partly because language can be performative, and partly because language constructs reality and sociological approaches (Hilgers 2011).

³⁸ A rural area located 225 km from Bangui. Yaloké has been chosen because of the relative security during fieldwork. This rural area is in the department of Ombella M'Poko. This department was one of the most accessible during fieldwork. It is a rural area where several peasants participated in the anti-Balaka movement and Muslims were chased out of the area. However, Yaloké was also the refuge for internally displaced Fulani. All these dynamics influenced the choice of Yaloké as a second site for fieldwork.

³⁹ A village approximately 35 km from Yaloké.

⁴⁰ Being a member of government changes very fast in CAR. I have interviewed people who by the end of my fieldwork were no longer Ministers and at the same time some interviewees have been nominated Ministers after our meeting. It is thus difficult to draw a clear boundary.

Chapter 3 investigates Bozizé's instrumentalization of identity before his last speeches where it was obvious that he was targeting Muslim-foreigners. The chapter builds on a corpus of official speeches that Bozizé delivered in several instances in order to better understand how he actively constructed foreigners and set them against his regime. The chapter's analysis is a necessary step in order to better understand elites' instrumentalization of identity and thus break away from a mechanistic portrayal where people automatically follow their elites. Instead, in line with the discursive understanding of autochthony, every time an elite is constructing the boundary of an identity, they are bringing social life into being (Hansen 2006). Even though Bozizé delivered accommodating speeches, he constructed Muslim-foreigners as people against his regime and the improvement of the country, suggesting that true Central Africans are those who support his regime.

Chapter 4 examines government policies and complements the focus on speeches, demonstrating that institutional power, policies, and competition also matter in making autochthony meaningful. The chapter focuses on how an economic competition has been ongoing in the mining sector and supported by the government prior to the war. Other studies have focused on the President's manipulation of citizenship laws such as in Côte d'Ivoire or the DRC (Jackson 2006; Marshall-Fratani 2006), but here, I see such manipulation through mining laws. This gives a sense of how the government mobilized identity by covering it as technical reforms supported by the World Bank and international partners. Chapters 3 and 4 thus together serve to emphasize that it takes both speeches and government policies to achieve instrumentalization of autochthony. But this alone does not suffice. As discourses reify certain realities and give them meanings, it is necessary to probe the realities around the mobilization of autochthony and move away from the top-down level.

This is the task of Chapter 5, which builds on the fieldwork material, interviews, and archived newspaper material. This follows Ricoeur's (2000) insight that closure in the discourse is linked with closure in identities. Hence, I probe various understandings that non-governmental elites (non-Muslims)

hold regarding autochthony. Since the discourse is geared towards Muslims, I contrast their views to that of Muslims. Muslims cannot be seen as a simple receiver of such discourse with no agency. They have been living in the CAR for generations, and also claim to belong, through different symbols. This chapter offers an interesting contribution because, most often, the literature focuses on questioning the dominant discourse. For instance, *Ivoirité* or *Congolité* have been analyzed, but rarely do we get to hear from the receiver of such discourses. How do they belong, accept, or challenge the mainstream discourse? This exercise reveals the competing understanding of the discourses, and points to interesting areas of contention and closure in identities. This meso-level investigation highlights the political competition between non-Muslims and Muslims, as a way to understand the realities that government rhetoric reifies.

Chapter 6 focuses on the anti-Balaka as the main vigilante group that has popularized the *vrai Centrafricain* discourse. Focusing on this vigilante group is necessary to understand the extreme path of action that they have chosen. The chapter seeks to better explain the role of the invisible world in the anti-Balaka fight and the articulations of *vrai Centrafricain* that fighters held. The group's discourse reveals the sense of entitlement of non-Muslims, which they perceived to be threatened by the Séléka rebels. Their understanding of *vrai Centrafricain* relates to non-Muslim civil society actors, and one can better see why the movement received popular support and justification of their human rights violation.

Chapter 7 further examines how non-Muslims and Muslims interacted in a very localized instance, namely the market. The chapter argues that one of the ways in which the *vrai Centrafricain* narrative was understood locally was through economic competition over access to good market spots. This is the type of social reality that Bozizé's speeches give flesh. Indeed, the main markets in Bangui, KM5, and the Central Market (*Marché Central*) have seen a reorganization of the dominant groups of traders. The competition was ongoing, and then accelerated with the war, and the chapter shows the type of motives and competition around autochthony.

Chapter 8 concludes the thesis by highlighting the implication of a discursive understanding of

autochthony and the dynamics of civil war. In fact, autochthony, many argue, is a political strategy that elites deploy when their regime is threatened (Bøås and Dunn 2013). This argument gives much power to “rational” elites who knows what to manipulate and “emotional” followers from below. This dichotomy is unhelpful. This is why the discursive understanding concludes that autochthony links leaders and their followers in a type of pre-given conception that no longer needs explanation. From the top to the bottom, various actors are in the same discursive realm. Finally, the conclusion proposes further areas of investigation.

2. Theories of Autochthony: Towards a New Understanding

2.1. Introduction

Autochthony presents itself as an identity category, and a claim that leaders can call upon and that has been prominent in several African armed conflicts. Existing literature on the role of autochthony in African conflicts tends to overlook studies of ethnic conflict, and also tends to tie autochthony to political liberalization, globalization, land issues, or so-called Sons of the Soil (SoS) dynamics that are prominent in Asian conflicts (Côté and Mitchell 2017). Authors in ethnic conflict studies, on the other hand, have treated autochthony as a marginal issue (Cederman and Vogt 2017). However, autochthony draws from a similar dynamic to ethnic conflicts, and is not tied to the soil alone. This chapter seeks to connect these two bodies of literature, showing how analyses of autochthony and ethnic civil intersect and are relevant for my investigation.

In this chapter, I propose an understanding of autochthony as untied from land and more grounded in identity formation through discourse and social actions. With this move, I would like to focus on the symbolic and non-land material aspects of autochthony. I argue that the content of autochthony and its boundaries are malleable (more so than ethnicity) but specifically constructed and contingent on a contentious context. In other words, autochthony discourses are assembled, meaning that they are temporally and spatially specific and open to change. My study shows that autochthony as identity consistently calls upon access to non-land related resources, hierarchy, and discrimination. I have organized the rest of the chapter around two main themes. First, I examine current understanding of autochthony and the limits of this understanding. I later co-examine autochthony and ethnic war literature to develop a symbolic approach to autochthony.

2.2 Existing Understanding of Autochthony

Autochthony issues are present in several African armed conflicts such as those in the DRC and the Ivory Coast, as well as elsewhere in Europe and Asia (Bøås and Dunn 2013; Babo 2013;

Jackson 2006; Verweijen 2015; Geschiere 2009; Yanow and Haar 2013; Côté and Mitchell 2017). It is a global phenomenon (Côté and Mitchell 2017; Bøås and Dunn 2013; Geschiere 2009). The popularity of the discourses reveals something about it: its malleability. Autochthony is extremely malleable. That sets it apart from ethnic identity. Some authors have claimed that autochthony is an empty signifier (Bøås and Dunn 2013; Yuval-Davis 2013; Geschiere 2009), but that emptiness itself is misleading. If autochthony is considered an identity, there should be a content. The content might vary across time and space and be unstable, but there is content.⁴¹ Autochthony supports claims and demands that could be racist (Yanow and Haar 2013) or exclusionary (Dunn 2009). Hence, some of the malleable fillers of the autochthon identity are access to resources and entitlement or even expectation of behaviour.

My task in probing autochthony is necessarily limited because the term encapsulates a relationship with the other that is as old as “the beginnings of western metaphysics” (Kearney 2003, 13). As a word inherited from the Greek language meaning “from the soil,” an “ontotheology” (Der Derian 1995) is encapsulated. That is, a metaphysical and deep belief in what the concept means, hence its use and spread across continents (Africa, Europe, and Asia). In that sense, there is an *a priori* conception of what it means to be an autochthon. This section examines some of the ways in which autochthony has been understood in the literature.

Discourses of autochthony are about people claiming to have been the first inhabitant of a place and, in doing so, denying “newcomers” the right to live on the same territory.⁴² When focusing on the

⁴¹ As autochthony is vague, it calls for probing into the category through discourses and practices that defines its constant (re)negotiation.

⁴² There is a diversity of approach to Sons of the Soil conflicts focused on different regions. The quantitative literature has noticed that conflicts involving lands, “sons of the soil” (Fearon 2004; 2011) were more intractable than conflicts not involving such dynamics. Generally, in the quantitative literature, the argument is limited to the identification of relevant variables that make some wars long-lived. Fearon used the term “sons of the soil” explaining that wars involving “land conflict between a peripheral ethnic minority and state-supported migrants of a dominant ethnic group are on average quite long-lived” (2004, 275). Conflict around ethnic lines seem similarly intractable and could sometime demand partitions of a country although partition has rarely happened on the African continent (South Soudan and Eritrea). For other scholars, this “sons of the soil” dynamics has been defined as a war involving territorial issues that lasted for at least ten years, these years could be consecutive or not (Fuhrmann and Tir 2009; Derouen and Bercovitch 2008). In quantitative conflict analysis, the shorthand Enduring Internal Rivalries (EIR) has also been used (see Derouen and Bercovitch 2008). In brief, the quantitative literature on ethnic conflict has dealt with autochthony from a different perspective that is less relevant to my analysis.

African continent, authors such as Dunn (2009), Bøås and Dunn (2013), and Nyamnjoh and Geschiere (2000) have attempted to unearth the dynamics of autochthony, and this thesis follows their paths. In identifying broad trends and patterns, the recent upsurge in autochthony discourses in Africa and elsewhere has been attributed to issues of globalization (Bøås and Dunn 2013; Geschiere 2009), political liberalization, and democratization (Geschiere and Jackson 2006). Autochthony has also been treated in relationship to land rights (Lentz 2006), although can end up supporting claims unrelated to land (Jenkins 2012b).

Autochthony is an identity marker. In Bøås and Dunn's terms, it is an empty identity and a trope because the claim to belong to a place before someone else is often impossible to prove in most contexts. Belonging to something per se can be manifested in "land, religion, a flag, an institution or anything else that makes us feel more secure and comfortable" (Bøås and Dunn 2013, 1). They show that "autochthony claims are intimately connected to disputes over land and access to land" (Bøås and Dunn 2013, 5), but these claims are simultaneously political, and accordingly, autochthony reveals itself as a trope because it "is a strategy, not a fact" (Bøås and Dunn 2013, 12).⁴³ Similarly, Ceuppens and Geschiere (2005, 387) argue that autochthony is empty, "an identity with no particular name and no specified history." For them, if it is impossible to prove who was first, then autochthony has no ontological reality. Moreover, autochthony should be read as part of the fact that "historically, African social formations have generally been characterized by mobility and inclusiveness with permeable and shifting boundaries" (Bøås and Dunn 2013, 2). In brief, the content of autochthony could be "anything," it is an empty signifier with no essential, predefined meaning. This in turn leads to the question of why autochthony discourses have risen to prominence in recent years.

One of the contexts that gives rise to autochthony discourses are processes of democratization and liberalization of the political space (Geschiere 2009; Bøås and Dunn 2013). Elsewhere, issues of political

⁴³ However, from my understanding of the existing literature, there seems to be a difference between indigeneity and autochthony. But Bøås and Dunn do not differentiate.

liberalization have been tied to land rights and citizenship (Marshall-Fratani 2006) and have even allowed presidents to remain in power (Socpa 2006). Simultaneous political and economic liberalization of the 1990s endangered stability in many African countries. The general context was that SAPs (Structural Adjustment Programs) were imposed on African countries during that period. SAPs made the democratic transitions difficult and heightened the insecurity of office holders. They were faced with the choice of implementing SAPs and face electoral punishment or ignore donors and be cut off from aid. The result was a gradual curtailment of democratic liberties and a concentration of patronage to ever narrower circles that reinforced exclusion (Abrahamsen 2000). Simultaneously, ruling elites had to open the political space and allow multi-party competition, amidst the reduction of resources. In this context of heightened competition for dwindling resources, questions of who belongs where emerged as a way to check who has the right to access government resources.

Globalization is also associated with uncertainties that can facilitate the emergence of autochthony discourses (Dunn 2009; Bøås and Dunn 2013), but uncertainty creates insecurity, and populations want security.⁴⁴ In Dunn's terms, elites employ autochthony discourses as "an attractive response, one of several possible, to the ontological uncertainty of the postmodern/post-colonial condition" (2009, 114). The autochthonous claim provides security in the face of ontological uncertainty created by the state and globalization. When it comes to violence, Bøås and Dunn argue that it "is a seductive provider of ontological certainty."⁴⁵ Violence is also linked to the performative dimension of identity, where young

⁴⁴ Dunn (2009, 120) thinks that autochthony should be read according to state-building processes. A Tillian argument with a twist where war making is part of the process of the construction of the state. Thus, the state creates the ontological crisis and presents itself as the only entity capable of dealing with the crises (Dunn 2009, 120). In his words, state making involves a "double-move": 'producing anxiety about order and welfare, uncertainty about territory and space,' uncertainty about political identities, and autochthony discourses emerge as a way to reduce these uncertainties (Ibid.). Claiming that one belongs creates certainty amidst uncertainties and anxieties. However, the type of certainty provided by autochthony is illusionary within these processes of state making.

⁴⁵ These authors built on Appadurai's notion of dead certainty to explain the violent display of autochthony, locating autochthony in a globalization framework. Appadurai (1998) studied the link between globalization and ethnic violence focusing on various forms of uncertainties that globalization creates. He argues that globalization creates uncertainty for people, and people resort to violence as a strategy to create certainty. Because people have an inherent desire to belong, they might resort to violence to ascertain their claim.

people employ violence as an act of empowerment (Bøås and Dunn 2013, 29). In other words, it is by being violent that many, especially young people, can ground their certainty about belonging in front of the allochthon. In another version of the globalization argument, Geschiere (2009) sees autochthony as the expression of local belonging. Since globalization creates uncertainties and dislocated forms of belonging, in retreating to the soil, the local is on the rise.

In current examinations of autochthony, violent modes of expressions are frequently linked to the structure of globalization.⁴⁶ As far as violence and armed conflict are concerned, it is necessary to understand if, and to what extent, people follow their leaders. In other words, the resonance of the autochthony trope is assumed in various ways. Bøås and Dunn (2013) tell us why these identities rise and that they are violent because they resonate with people. Hence, they assume that autochthony automatically resonates with the people, rather than analyze why these discourses are appealing to people – except that autochthony is also a response to the uncertain globalized world. That said, this is not an adequate or sufficiently precise explanation, as other discourses and forms of resistance against globalization, uncertainty, and exclusion are possible. Actually, “Manipulation can be successful only because it appeals to deep emotional feelings from below as a result of long-standing autochthony-allochthony divisions in society” (Konings 2008, 204). Globalization remains a broad category where people’s agency, discourses, and practices can easily disappear.

There are at least three shortcomings in the accounts above. First, their accounts are focused on structural factors that explore the rise of the discourse but downplay how people make sense of the term. For instance, the focus on political liberalization and globalization does not inform us of the localized experience of those who are excluded.⁴⁷ Second, authors already identified that autochthony has no

⁴⁶ The presence of autochthony discourse is not automatically linked with deadly violence. Even in places where autochthony supports racist claims (Yanow and Haar 2013), autochthony is not always violently displayed. Other researchers argued that autochthony is only indirectly linked with violent practices (Verweijen 2015).

⁴⁷ When discussing violence, there is a tendency in the literature to overly focus on the claims of the group committing violence (Verweijen 2015). This is, of course, very important. But to understand how competing visions of belonging conflict,

specific history. The question is that if we cannot know who belonged first, why are people even making that claim? Third, the exploration of violence and autochthony does not bring in relationships between elites and the masses as one encounters in ethnic war studies. In other words, it is important to focus on how autochthony makes sense in the everyday experiences of people especially in a setting where ethnicity matters.

In order to comprehend autochthony rather than other possible discourses of identity that shape the conflict in the CAR, I mobilize the literature on ethnic wars that has not paid close attention to autochthony. Autochthony can overlap with various other identity categories such as ethnicity and/or religion.⁴⁸

2.3 Stories of Ethnic Wars⁴⁹

This literature on ethnic conflict is cross-disciplinary, and large, so my review here will necessarily be limited to that which is the most relevant. Traditionally, three schools of thought have characterized the way ethnicity matters and understood in armed violence: “primordialism/essentialism,” “circumstantialism/instrumentalism,” and “constructionism/constructivism.” Scholars who adhere to the first school of thought, primordialism, argue that the fundamental power of ethnicity is found in “deep social, historical and genetic foundations” (Harff and Gurr 2004, 96). For these scholars, primordialism

one must also probe notions of belonging advanced by those who are excluded groups, hence the varied localized experiences. For instance, in the eastern DRC, Furaha (2017) is among the very few to specifically inquire about the Congolese Rwandophone who are the receiver of the autochthony discourse. Lombard (2012b) noticed that “the term *gagango* (literally, ‘person who has come [from elsewhere]’) has taken heightened salience and is applied to all who live in a village other than that of their birth. Concerns over autochthony attach not to the level of the nation, but of the village” (Chapter 2, fn 21, 76).

⁴⁸ This warrants that investigating autochthony category should pay attention not to subsume other social categories to it, but to consider how they overlap. A similar point has been raised by authors studying ethnic identity construction. For instance, Ruane and Todd (2004; 2010) advance that different social categories can have a potential mobilizing power. What is considered to be ethnic, the “immediacy and physicality of distinction is common to all important social categories, including class and religion, not specific to ethnicity” (Ruane and Todd 2004, 218). As a consequence, the dynamics involved in ethnic wars could also be found in other wars not termed “ethnic.”

⁴⁹ Ethnicity is a type of identity. In Hale’s perspective, which builds on studies in psychology, ethnicity is a “social categorization that is robustly important in a wide variety of social situations and that has been transformed into a useful rule of thumb for evaluating and reacting to one’s relationship to others in the social world. [...It is a] social radar” (Hale 2004, 473). This approach is helpful in grounding ethnicity in its profoundly social aspect even if some of these aspects have hardened over time. Ethnicity once formed is deeply embedded in “in daily practices, habits, routines, institutions, social structures, interactions, and modes of thought, and is significantly influenced by socio-spatial dynamics” (Jenkins 2012a, 80).

helps explain the intensity of political action.⁵⁰ However, the argument that identities are “fixed, fundamental, and rooted in the unchangeable circumstances of birth”⁵¹ is clearly problematic (Cornell and Hartmann 1998, 48). Case studies of “ethnic wars” disprove that ethnic identities are fixed.⁵² For example, Lemarchand (1994) has shown that Hutus and Tutsis in Burundi were aware that these ethnic categories changed over time.⁵³ Indeed, if ethnic identity can change with time, how could it be given at birth? Moreover, colonial encounters shaped ethnicity on the African continent (Mamdani 1996) and, as such, ethnicity is rooted in the modernity of the African state as inherited from colonization (Berman 1998).

As primordialist approaches give less space for change, scholars writing in the school of circumstantialism / instrumentalism argues that individuals can be holders of several identities (even multi-ethnic, considering that one can be born from parents of two different ethnic origins) that are activated according to different circumstances. According to these scholars, instrumental elites are responsible for organizing violence along ethnic lines to build support and maintain power (de Figueiredo and Weingast 1999; Brass 1997).⁵⁴ In this view, elites work to construct ethnic identities for material, political, or economic gains. Instrumentalism is subsumed into circumstantialism because scholars argue that elites are being instrumental according to circumstances, and that people will find different identities relevant depending on their circumstances (Cornell and Hartmann 1998). Hence, identities are

⁵⁰ Primordialism was a response to modernization theorists and assimilationism (Cornell and Hartmann 1998; Horowitz 1985). These theories argued that modernization will lead to dismantling ethnic identities to the benefit of bigger communities such as states.

⁵¹ See Gil-White (1999), Kaplan (1994) and Huntington (1993) for various articulation of this.

⁵² In African politics, several scholars showed how ethnic identity was more flexible in pre-colonial times (Hintjens 1999) and an amalgamation of “mobility, overlapping networks, multiple group membership and the flexible, context-dependent drawing of boundaries” (Lentz 1995, 319). Colonization introduced new dynamics in African ethnic identity formation but by no means halted their transformation.

⁵³ Similar findings in Rwanda (Fujii 2008). However, Jenkins (2012a, 11) shows that primordialism is often misrepresented because they agree that ethnic identities change in time and its power comes from affective ties.

⁵⁴ Identity has deep emotional implications advanced by primordialism and retained in constructivist theories. Also, focusing on elites in these theories only answer one side one of the puzzles because there is still the need to explain to what extent people follow elites who construct antagonistic ethnic identities as a strategy for retaining power. The approach in elite theories is “too narrow and top-down” (Demmers 2012, 29). The vital question of the mass who follows is also important. One answer has been that they do not follow. Basically, people take advantage of chaos to loot and conduct criminal activities (Kalyvas 2003).

profoundly situational and can change over time. Since one identity can be relevant in one situation and not another for material (economic rivalry) and political gain, elites capitalize on this to build support. It has been demonstrated that different group identities formed either to claim political rights or material gains, and this was not always the process of elites or political entrepreneurs (MacArthur 2013). Indeed, as Cornell and Hartmann (1998, 62) argue, “More recent analyses have emphasized the ways in which competition and conflict reinforce pre-existing ethnic or racial boundaries or even, in some cases, generate them anew.”⁵⁵ Although this school of thought points to contextual factors of identity and the role of elites in building support for various types of gain, instrumentalist scholars pay less attention to the durability of identities once it is formed, which is one of the primordialist school’s insights. The deep emotional charge of identity and the significance it has for people has been a critical insight of primordialism and cannot be dismissed (Cornell and Hartmann 1998, 56). To address this, Cornell and Hartmann (1998) bridged primordialism and circumstantialism/instrumentalism under the label of “constructionism,” an approach that has also come to be known as constructivism.

Constructivism/constructionism seeks to tie the two other schools together.⁵⁶ Constructivism advances that group identities emerge and change over time. One’s identity is both “contingent on circumstances and therefore fluid and is often experienced as primordial and therefore as fixed”⁵⁷ (Cornell and Hartmann 1998, 71). Indeed, Fearon and Laitin (2000) termed this as “everyday primordialism.” This approach focuses on how groups’ identities are built, rebuilt, and dismantled (or not) over time. It focuses on interactions between the circumstances (context) and own group activism (Cornell and Hartmann 1998, 72). This approach locates agency with both elites and groups.

⁵⁵ See for instance Lynch (2012) who demonstrates how the Endorois people in Kenya have been recognized as an ethnic group and indigenous to a specific territory. Endorois have been produced by various painful encounters with Kenyan state and have also been validated by the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR) in conjunction with “Minority Rights Group International (MRG), a London-based NGO that works ‘to secure the rights of minorities and indigenous peoples’” (Lynch 2012, 35). This shows the complex (and global) ways by which ethnic identity is still being “invented” (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983).

⁵⁶ Barth (1969) was one of the early anthropologists who worked from a social construction of identity perspective.

⁵⁷ It is also experienced as “real” for the people involved.

From the constructivist perspective, “ethnic - indeed all - identities are not ‘things’ but relations; that their content is wrought in the particularities of their ongoing historical construction. Which is why [...] the substance of ethnicity or nationalism can never be defined or decided in the abstract” (Comaroff 1993, quoted in Lentz 1995). Berman states that the construction of ethnicity means that it is “built on real cultural experience” (Berman 1998, 312). In that sense, what people do, what they feel, and their various practices are part of what helps define their ethnic identities. Brubaker (2004) and his colleagues Loveman and Stamatov advanced a cognitive understanding of ethnicity building on research in psychology as well. Ethnicity is then “not a thing *in* the world, but a perspective *on* the world” (Brubaker 2004, 65). Such perspective follows the view of identity as a “social radar”⁵⁸ (Hale 2004, 473), meaning that it is produced through discourse, and which “proceed in interaction” (Burke and Stets 2009, 16). All of these dimensions are relevant in order to understanding autochthony.

2.3.1 Identities, Ethnicity, and Armed Violence

While the literature reviewed above advances our understanding of identity formation, it does not do a good job at explaining violent manifestations of autochthony. As Fearon and Laitin (2000) comment, when it comes to applying the social construction of identity to violence, “general statements about how this process works are hard to find” (Fearon and Laitin 2000, 849). However, one key insight of ethnic conflict is to say that elite power struggles are at the heart of so-called ethnic wars, and to warn against reification and fixation of ethnic identities (Williams 2011; Abrahamsen 2013). In that sense, studying the ethnic dimension of a war does not equate to saying that ethnicity, let alone identity, has caused the

⁵⁸ Identity refers to a social category (Fearon and Laitin 2000, 848; Fearon 1999). As such, identity is “the set of meanings that define who one is when one is an occupant of a particular role in society, a member of a particular group, or claims particular characteristic that identify him or her as unique person” (Burke and Stets 2009, 3). The social and the individual are inevitably linked when we think identity (Burke and Stets 2009, 3). Therefore, identity must be thought in its *ing* form, never finished, always in construction, produced by discourse and contingent (Hall 2007, 269). Identity is contingent on history, institutions, specific places, and practices as well as discourse (Hall 2007, 271). It is through discourse and differentiation that one trace symbolic boundaries (Hall 2007). Focusing on the discursive element, identity is then “strategic and positional” (Hall 2007, 270; see also Hale 2004). In that sense, identity “proceed in interaction” (Burke and Stets 2009, 16) between the individual and its social environment as the Structural Symbolic interactionist perspective shows. This interaction centres on the “shared use of symbols” (Burke and Stets 2009, 19).

war.

Based on how different group identities are formed, some scholars argue that it is the deprivation or exclusion of groups⁵⁹ based on their identities that ignite wars. Gurr and Harff champion the deprivation thesis (Gurr 2000; Harff and Gurr 2004). Since they argue that, in “response to privation and repression [from a dominant group towards a subordinate group], some ethnic groups mobilize for political action, which is then used by threatened elites to justify their destruction” (Harff and Gurr 2004, 98). This insight speaks to the relevance of context (circumstances) for different groups in competition. As they summarize, “people who [...] live in an autocratic political system with low international economic status, one that has used discrimination and intermittent violence to repress its ethnic peoples, are the most likely to challenge their oppressors” (Harff and Gurr 2004, 113). However, not all countries presenting these risk factors have witnessed these wars. Moreover, what does it mean to deprive an “autochthon” group? Other studies show the importance of factors such as natural resources in stabilizing regimes and buying peace (Ross 2001; Basedau and Lay 2009).

The deprivation thesis is complemented by an opportunity model that advances that even if a group is deprived, the opportunity to wage war must be present; otherwise the group will not fight back the oppressors.⁶⁰ For Fearon and Laitin’s (2003) rational choice approach, it is the fact that there is a possibility to launch a rebellion that is important. Specifically, the authors emphasize the conditions that favour insurgency (Fearon and Laitin 2003, 75). Collier, Hoeffler and Rohner (2009) have a different version of this called the “feasibility thesis.” Opportunity that renders mobilization for war feasible economically, militarily, and politically are the most important variables of such studies that are quantitative in their methodological orientation. For instance, the inability of a government to fully

⁵⁹ Simultaneously, scholars were also trying to answer why is it that a specific group follow their leader? One answer revolved around collective fear. Scholars have focused for instance on how a group can interpret the behaviour of a contending group to power by rereading past histories of confrontation (Posen 1993). These were the early attempts of International Relations scholars to make sense of civil wars by building on rational models of social action couched in a security dilemma approach.

⁶⁰ Some of this literature overlap considerably with the contentious politics and social movement literature (Goodin and Tilly 2006).

control its territory creates an opportunity and is a structural source of armed conflict (Quinn et al. 2007; Mason et al. 2011; Cunningham et al. 2009). That inability creates a situation of dual/multiple sovereignties, i.e., a situation where rebels control territory in peripheral areas within the state.⁶¹ By focusing on opportunity, these theories cannot account for the emotions, passions, and other nonmaterial factors, nor do they explain sudden brutality, violence, and targeted killing between communities. Moreover, these models usually fall short in showing the extent to which people follow their leaders.

Furthermore, case study research has shown that, while considering these materialist, rationalist explanations, there are multiple reasons why people commit violence on the ground and these do not always correspond to what Kalyvas (2003) calls a “master narrative.”⁶² For example, Straus (2006) found that, in Rwanda, although ethnic categories mattered, coercion and peer pressure were the main reasons people said why they killed (see also Fujii 2008). At times, people on the ground are not even following leaders in general but take advantage of the chaos to loot or grab goods (Brass 1997). Indeed, “civilians cannot be treated as passive, manipulated, or invisible actors; they often manipulate central actors to settle their own conflicts” (Kalyvas 2003, 481).⁶³ Consequently, the vital question of why masses follow or take part in conflict is important and, ultimately, an empirical question. As Kaufman (2001, 6) argues, “Stories of ethnic war need the flexibility to consider that different conflicts are dissimilar in this regard: a one-size-fits-all theory of manipulative leaders simply is not adequate.” This suggests, at least, that instrumentalization is not simple and mechanistic. On the African continent, deprivation, opportunity,

⁶¹ Initially Quinn et al. (2007) and Mason et al. (2011) borrowed Tilly’s (1985) expression. A condition of “dual sovereignty exists when an opposition group has the organizational capacity and popular support to initiate and sustain an armed challenge to the incumbent regime’s claim to sovereign authority in the nation” (Quinn et al. 2007, 173). Mason et al. (2011) speak of “multiple sovereignty.” Multiple sovereignty exists when one or more organized armed challengers emerge and command a significant degree of popular support (Mason et al. 2011, 172).

⁶² This is where at times scholars tend to over emphasize the greedy nature of some individual to the extent that grievances, felt and experienced discrimination might not matter (Collier and Hoeffler 2004). In the literature, at times “any attention paid to the micro-level, has largely been to assert its criminality” (Jenkins 2012a, 41).

⁶³ Indeed Kalyvas (2003) notices that political violence often mixes with personal violence in intricate ways. He advocates for a better focus on local dynamics and the interaction between local dynamics and master narratives through alliances of multiple actors at multiple levels. In a similar way, Hay (2009) used the term “Herestetics” to highlight that a structure (social or natural) should not be seen as always constraining various types of actors but instead one should delve into how different actors use the structure they found in place to their advantage.

and elite models all intersect with local issues (Abrahamsen 2013, 4).

Although the question of why people follow is important, disentangling the individual behaviour from the group is empirically and methodologically challenging. Some studies of African civil wars were able to isolate the individual from their groups. Some authors could do that in their research on Rwanda because the government was able to imprison those identified as the *génocidaires* (Straus 2006; Fujii 2008). These researchers could then go into prisons and interview specific individuals. That method sheds light on individuals' motivation and allows scholars to link perpetrators' participation to master narratives of the conflict. However, this perpetrator-centered approach is not always possible in other war zone configurations. Other researchers had to spend time with rebels to uncover their individual motivation. In this research, I probe into a specific identity category that has remained marginal in ethnic war studies by surveying several actors' understanding of it; I shed light on the interaction between the individual and their groups.

This thesis seeks to pay close attention to the discourses and symbols both Muslims and non-Muslims draw upon to manifest their belonging as a way to understand what is autochthon about the violence and how there is closure in competing narratives of belonging. It is not clear who the autochthons are in the CAR, but that does not mean that the notion has no latent meaning. Here, it seems that it is not only religion that is involved, but also various ethnic groups with different religious beliefs, and that there still needs to be better understanding for both autochthony and ethnic conflict studies. However, my work does not claim that the discursive approach is the cause of the killings. Rather, it is a matter of demonstrating how pre-war discourses, in daily lives, are constitutive of violence that erupts in war time.

2.4 Unpacking and Theorizing Autochthony

Building on the insights above, I now provide an explanation of how autochthony is symbolic and

material, but not tied to land alone.⁶⁴ In doing so, I maintain the possibility that autochthony's relationship with violence might involve land, but not necessarily. Instead, autochthony discourses may be related to different forms of local competitions and conflicts.

My understanding of autochthony builds on a discursive understanding of identity (Hall 2007) and the sociological approach of Hilgers (2011). To claim to be autochthonous to a community or a nation is a claim that represents the work people have done to contribute to the realization of that same community (located on a geographic area or state). The realization could have been working the land, but not specifically. That is, if the CAR is what it is today, it is due to the participation of each and every group on its territory, and not only the prerogative of a particular group. In that context, the autochthony claim can be applied to the state on a broader level or to a local instance on the village or neighbourhood level. As such, we can probe into the symbols (in this case both Muslims and non-Muslims) invoked to express belonging and participation to the realization of the CAR.

To be able to build my work around this understanding, I first untie autochthony from the soil. Second, I probe into the social understanding of autochthony as a form of capital. Then, I borrow from the insights of elites and followers in ethnic conflicts literature and make explicit that autochthony, formed by discourses, is about political and economic claims to legitimacy and resources, which I demonstrate in the case of the CAR throughout the thesis.

2.4.1 Autochthony and the Uneasy Relationship to the Soil

While autochthony suggests a relationship to land, its malleability, and flexibility, lends itself to other types of connections and relationships. For instance, in Kenya, Jenkins (2012b, 138) noticed that immigrant minorities in certain areas were violently targeted because of their perceived political support for the opposition. As she states, it is the “involvement (of migrants) in opposition to the host community

⁶⁴ Even in Asian contexts where the SoS conflicts are prominent, Wade's (2017) closer exploration of Myanmar's politics is telling. He finds one argument that Buddhist monks put forward is that they “came down from the sky” (164). The conflict has an autochthony dimension in the sense that some communities claim to have been the first inhabitants.

that is a source of tension” (Jenkins 2012b, 138). Similarly, Socpa (2006, 62) noticed that “it is the divergent political and ideological choices of autochthon and immigrant people that led the former to undertake a process of exclusion.” In Zambia, political elites drew on the notion to exclude political opponents (Whitaker 2005), as was the case in Côte d’Ivoire prior to the war. Hence, the nature of the political moment matters. By the same token, political liberalization alone does not suffice to give salience to autochthony discourse. I must specify that, the definition of autochthony suggests that land is important. A State and access to State power depend on control of a given territory. In that sense, land is always lurking in the background of my research. This points to the fact that we live in a world of states, but my central argument is regarding the symbolic and discursive elements of autochthony. Part of the literature has tended to focus on land rights putting land issues front and center and assuming that if one gets land rights correctly, then autochthony issues might be resolved. What I dispute is the account according to which autochthony is simply a claim to possession of the land by virtue of having been its first inhabitants. To develop an understanding that allows for the simultaneous recognition of instrumental elites and diverse local realities beyond the question of land alone, I combine several literatures. But first, to decouple autochthony from soil, I draw from anthropologists’ and philosophers’ work. For this task, I build on how autochthony has different meanings at different moments in both Africa and ancient Greece.

The debates surrounding autochthony on the African continent relate to its relationship with history, settlements, and the aporias of the term itself. The fact that the term has varied origins and designates different realities through time shows that its meaning cannot be taken at face value. Autochthony must be investigated as it relates to history and the politics of meaning. The meaning that sticks at a particular moment is not predetermined. Historically, in the English language, the term is deemed to have come from “geology and botany (as in autochthonous rock formations or plants)” (Ceuppens and Geschiere 2005, 388; see also Yanow and Haar 2013). Ceuppens and Geschiere (2005) advance that, in

the French language, the origins are different because “*autochtones* are people, not plants or rocks” (388). As Ceuppens and Geschiere (2005) show, the word was introduced in various parts of Africa during colonial times and when the word “autochthon” had a more condescending connotation (388-9).⁶⁵ More precisely, autochthony was “First introduced by the French at the time of the colonial conquest of Sudan in the late nineteenth century, the concept itself was envisaged as playing a vital role in categorizing these new subjects to aid in administering these vast, newly conquered areas” (Ceuppens and Geschiere 2005, 388). Being designated as autochthon at the time was an excuse to be ruled over because the populations who were present were considered pre-social (Ibid., 389). The authors explore the genealogy of autochthony in Africa and show that colonizers searched “for autochthons as an anchor for the administration while at the same time treating them as some sort of lesser group” (Ibid., 388). In the colonizer’s vocabulary, autochthons referred to the local people they found at their arrival, people to whom little consideration was given. For the authors, that is the main usage of autochthony during the colonial period. Considering both groups (colonized and colonizers), autochthony served to delegitimize the latter at the expense of the former. It served the politics of colonization and being from the soil was irrelevant. That political liberalization became the main vessel for autochthony in the 1990s demonstrates that old words can be given new meanings.⁶⁶

Anthropologists have demonstrated that, in several cases, settlement is not related to being from the soil and groups claiming to be autochthon might, in fact, have “autochthonize” (Izard 1985, 318). In other words, groups became autochthon. Izard (1985) skillfully demonstrates such cases in Yatenga in Burkina Faso. Mossi people in Burkina Faso were conquerors around XVI century, late comers, rulers, and owners of political power. They found autochthons (first comers), but established legitimacy for their power (156). With time, however, Mossi rulers who belonged to the power circles managed to become

⁶⁵ Hilgers (2011, 146) disagree, however.

⁶⁶ In the sense that in pre-colonial Africa “often rulers came from allochthon clans who emphasized their origin from elsewhere yet had privileged access to political positions. Since the late 1980s, in contrast, autochthony has become a powerful slogan to exclude the Other, the *allogène*, the stranger” (Nyamnjoh and Geschiere 2000, 423).

people of the soil, allowing them to autochthonize (Izard 1985, 318). In fact, there was the possibility that powerful conquerors sought a symbiotic relationship with those they found, instead of chasing them away.⁶⁷ These conquerors were able to establish a relationship with the soil even though they did not have one on arrival. Mossi conquerors autochthonized by moving from a ruling status to the owner of land, by becoming sedentary people, and not referring to a common ancestor, but a common place (Ibid., 318). Surprisingly, the conquered people were also able to access the status of ruling class, and the Mossi conquerors moved with their own people from the soil (Ibid., 326). In that sense, it was possible to be from the soil and move with Mossi conquerors. The Mossi are currently considered as one of the most autochthon groups in Burkina Faso. Gruenais (1985, 20) studied, the same region and, similarly found that “the masteries of the soil can be created by the conquerors.” Therefore, those claiming to be from the soil could have diverse origins (Ibid.). Precisely,

some historical traditions refer to a founding leader of a political unit who entrusted control of the land to a member of his suite or to one of his parents [...] Other traditions show founders of chieftaincy moving with their own autochthons [...] Finally, descendants of conquerors, sometimes become themselves masters of the land (Gruenais 1985, 20).

With the multiple origins of autochthon, irrespective of colonization, Gruenais advances that “there is no link between land control and autochthony” (1985, 20). Elsewhere, in east Cameroun, Boutrais (1999) shows how Foulbé conquerors peacefully established their domination over the groups they found on arrival, by making political use of herds and meat. Boutrais demonstrates that the Foulbé’s “generous meat distributions were used to build connections and gain local allegiance” (Boutrais 1999, 349).

Beyond colonization and settlement, autochthony also represented a social organizational device. This is clear from the example above, but also from the frontier thesis of Kopytoff (1987). Prior to the western colonizers’ arrival, Kopytoff, argues

the reconstruction of the ancestral distribution of African language families [...] suggests that from the beginning of the North African Neolithic, sometime about 5000 B.C., and until 200 B.C. or so,

⁶⁷ Groups also fought each other and the defeated have been incorporated into larger units. In CAR, Kalck (1971) has demonstrated this regarding Zandé conquerors. Cordell (1985) shows a similar process when considering the slave trade and how slaves were incorporated into Sénoussi’s sultanate. Hence, the various people became autochthon.

most of the populations ancestral to the present population of Sub-Saharan Africa were concentrated in the northern half of the continent [...] From this ancestral “hearth” of African culture, after the onset of desiccation of the Saharan-Sahel belt sometime around 2500 B.C., a population tide crept slowly southward, out of the expanding Saharan desert and into the savannas (Kopytoff 1987, 9).

This context establishes the basis on which he developed the frontiersman thesis as articulation of belonging to a soil. In brief, Kopytoff shows how, in precolonial times, people broke from larger groups to establish themselves at the margins, or the frontier. In this way, African peoples, during the precolonial times, always had the “exit” option from their polities, and leaders had to find ways to exercise power over people instead of territory (Herbst 2000). First-comers would show the place to latecomers, who, in turn, would become first comers to other latecomers and the movement continued to organize a polity. From this thesis, it follows that, at the frontier, chronologically determining who is the first is a conundrum because “no one [...] could ever claim to be really first” (Kopytoff 1987, 54).

Moreover, to establish oneself at the margins also arises out of “subjective definitions of reality” (Kopytoff 1987, 11), because those who broke from the original polity might have found spaces already occupied on arrival. As an example of a subjective definition of reality, consider how Fulani herders migrated to the CAR. In the early 1900s, western CAR was described as unoccupied, and Fulani herders attempted to move and settle there as they fled Cameroon. But “this space, which seems empty to the early explorers of the end of the last century, is none the less controlled by the Gbaya. Some attempts [of Fulani] to settle before 1914 would have resulted in killings of animals and herders” (Romier 1999, 465). The Gbaya controlled the territory but were not physically present. A polity might have defined an area as under its occupation without being geographically present. Similarly, would-be occupants of a space could ignore that an area was under another polity’s control. As a result, “Societies often define neighboring areas as lacking any legitimate political institutions as being open to legitimate intrusion and settlement [...] even if the areas are in fact occupied by organized polities” (Kopytoff 1987, 11). At the very least, confusion existed at the frontiers; these preceded metropolises that also preceded frontiers

(Kopytoff 1987, 16). Similar processes of exit and reconstruction might have been occurring simultaneously in neighbouring areas (Izard 1985, 26).

The principle of autochthony allowed various social groups to cohabit, smaller groups to integrate within larger ones, and conquerors to autochthonize (Izard 1985; Gruenais 1985; Kopytoff 1987). Hence, there was a social function attributed to being autochthon, and nothing absolute about being from the soil or possessing land. From these anthropological works, chronology into precolonial Africa is helpful for decoupling autochthony and the soil. Societies mixed in complex ways to the extent that determining who really was first from the soil is not possible. Identity is about belief and experience, not a universal truth. Thus, being an autochthon can be described as “not only and, in some cases, [...] not at all being first migration wise” (Hilgers 2011, 146). Autochthony serves as a receptacle for several types of discourse, and it also has a sociological dimension (Hilgers 2011). Autochthony can be better considered as the “contribution of a group to the prosperity” (Ibid., 147) of the state, a nation, a community. For instance, “The first group founded the collective, the second allowed its reproduction and the third its development” (Ibid., 148). So, depending on how and when a group settles in an area, different sociological functions are attributed to their contribution. This is relevant to the contemporary study of autochthony. It follows that several groups with different periods of migration can claim legitimate belonging in relation to what they contributed, and how they contributed.

From these findings, I advance that conflicts arise when a group’s contribution is unacknowledged, denied, or allowed in various spaces (political or economic). People seek this legitimacy discursively, performatively, and, ultimately, through violence. Without this sociological dimension, one cannot understand why several groups still claim to belong to the state. Christians and animists use the autochthony discourse to deny belonging to Muslims, but Muslims also hold on to symbols and discourses of belonging to the same country. These are competing versions of the “imagined community” (Anderson 1983). Adopting such considerations, multiple and simultaneous claims of autochthony are

possible.

There is one last step in delinking autochthony from the soil. It is about investigating the Greek root of the concept. After unsettling the notion in the African context, this investigation reaches a similar conclusion in the European setting too. Autochthony, or “being from the soil” as a self-evident claim, presupposes settlement and immobility when historically, the composition of communities globally has been driven by mobility. Hence, the aporia of the concept. Indeed, autochthony, in Western metaphysics, going back at least to ancient Greece, denied movement in the search of authenticity from the soil. Loraux’s book *Born of the Earth: Myth and Politics in Athens* focuses on the poetics of being born from mother earth in ancient Athens. When she delves into Greek history, she finds no shortage of poems that speak of Greek origins. Surprisingly, these poems locate the origins of the “first man” as born from the soil, like a plant, and denying any origins from the womb of a woman, and these various myths are gendered as well.⁶⁸ In Loraux’s accounts, myth of Aristophanes “The male is born from the sun (masculine) and the female from the earth (feminine)” (Loraux 2000, 8). In

the Platonic myth of the *gêgeneis* (born [root *gen-] of the earth), or the autochthonous Athenian or Theban myths (from *autokhthôn*, born from the earth [*khthon*] itself [*autos*] of one’s homeland), man—mankind, a man, or men—rises up from the earth as a plant emerges from the ground (Loraux 2000, 1).

In the myth of Hesiodic “The human creature [...] made of earth and modeled by a god in the role of craftsman, is the product of fabrication” (Ibid., 21). Seeking true authentic birth in the myths was not benign. In fact, with the term autochthony, Athens would “assume the nobility that affords a good birth” (Ibid., 21), and allows it to annex “the values of the aristocracy” (Ibid.). In brief, Athenians recounted a story of their origins that allowed them to erase the plurality of its constituents. Loraux finds that “only Thucydides proposed a heterodox history of the constitution of the Athenian *genos*” (Ibid., 21). Thucydides recounts how wealthy people came from other regions to form Athens. At the time, “Cities

⁶⁸ Note that there are similarities with Biblical accounts of creation as Adam, the first man, is fabricated from the soil. But, even in Biblical accounts, Adam did not remain in the same place, but going back to creationist theories or evolutionary theory is not this thesis focus.

or regions [...] took pride in having been founded or civilized by a prestigious foreigner” (Loraux 2000, 13-14). So, the city was far from being composed of men who never moved and who truly came from the soil. For Loraux, “being from the soil” in ancient Greece was a device geared towards an internal function. Autochthony represented concern with purity and aristocracy when denying how foreigners (who could be wealthy families) were integrated in the same period (Loraux 2000, 17-26). Moreover, other functions were attached to the term autochthony, such as “virility,” “democracy,” and “courage.” In the end, more than a contradiction, autochthony is a “myth” (Loraux2000, 26).

Decoupling autochthony from the soil was useful, specifically because in the context of a country that is geographically as large as France and Belgium (with an estimated 4.5 million people), the question of land is not a primary issue. The *vrai Centrafricain* is not the prerogative of only the vigilante group that promoted it, chiefly the anti-Balaka. Questions of political rights and participation, dignity, access to resources, and equal treatment are - in this context - more important than land rights. Of course, the interpretations several actors advance of *vrai Centrafricain* operate within a state-centered discourse. The content of *vrai Centrafricain* is then moulded to several localized instances.

2.4.2 Symbolic Politics and Autochthony

The previous section allowed me to reconceptualize autochthony away from the soil. The next step is to go deeper into issues of instrumentalization, mobilization and practices. Prior to understanding what is “autochthonous” about violence (Verweijen 2015; Fearon and Laitin 2000), we should understand the claims, its multiple meaning across multiple scales. This is important because few authors have explored the linkages of elites to non-elites through autochthony. I turn to the literature on symbolic politics in ethnic wars as a corrective to the argument that autochthony is a powerful strategy for politicians (Bøås and Dunn 2013; Dorman, Hammett, and Nugent 2007).

In the psycho-cultural work on ethnicity and violence, Kaufman (2001) shows how ethnicity is

mobilized in war.⁶⁹ This informs my understanding of the mobilizing power of autochthony as this notion shares similarities with ethnicity. Kaufman concluded that myths and symbols help explain particular calls to action in ethnic wars (Kaufman 2011, 2001). The core assumption at the heart of symbolic politics is that “people make political choices based on emotion and in response to symbols” (Kaufman 2001, 29). In his theory, elites are able to provoke intense feelings because they tap into symbolic myths. Elites can manipulate symbols that have emotional value to citizens, and this is likely to resonate with masses because emotion also drives action.⁷⁰ In that sense, Kaufman’s “myth-symbol complex,” allows leaders to appeal to “emotive ethnic symbols (and) to those myths that enable leaders to mobilize supporters for policies that lead to violence” (Kaufman 2011, 937). Building on psychology, Kaufman’s perspective is fruitful, but as he grounds his study of human action into emotion, he is not clear about whether or not elites are also emotional beings. He seems to suggest that elites are rational, but the followers are emotional. What I retain from his work is the “myth symbol complex,” which fit with a discursive approach that seeks not to perpetuate the elite-mass dichotomy. Moreover, the emotions here are not fear only. These are emotions linked with people’s daily experience in their settings and relate to anger, disappointment or frustration which are all linked with grievances.

A myth is “a belief held in common by a large group of people that gives events and actions a particular meaning” (Kaufman 2001, 16). Of course, symbols derive their meaning from “social consensus” (Burke and Stets 2009, 11), and vary from “one culture to another” (Burke and Stets 2009, 11).⁷¹ Succinctly, the mechanism that Kaufman identifies includes that there should be myths justifying ethnic hostility, ethnic fears, and opportunity to mobilize and fight (Kaufman 2001, 30–35).⁷² In other

⁶⁹ Even in ethnic conflict studies, “Depictions of ethnocentric mobilisation remain overly vague” (Desrosiers 2015, 124), and there is “Little consensus on what type of rhetoric affects perceptions, beyond its ethnocentric nature” (Ibid.).

⁷⁰ Horowitz (1985) already pointed to emotional variables when he equated ethnic bonds to family bonds to understand the deep attachment and feeling people have to their ethnic identity.

⁷¹ They further specify that “Different symbols may have the same meaning [...], or the same symbol may have different meanings in different contexts [...]” (Burke and Stets 2009, 11). This is why, for instance, autochthony could represent racist claims (Yanow and Haar 2013) or land rights (Kuba and Lentz 2006).

⁷² “Prejudice plays a role as well. In many cases, a group’s myth-symbol complex includes prejudice against the other group—

words, if one group's identity content is about myths that frame hostility towards another group, the mobilizing capacity of such myths by elites is dangerous. So, it is key to highlight that Kaufman does not discuss a simple or mechanistic instrumentalization. The instrumentalization depends on the myth, and in this case, it is not an ethnic myth but autochthony as a myth. As Kaufman focuses on myths, he recognizes that proving or disproving the myth per se is laudable, but this does not stop people from believing it. It is precisely the emotional potency of such myths that need attention. These myths are "facts" in which people believe. People believe the myths as real; hence it is real to them and they are ready to act on them. Autochthony as a "myth" (Loraux 2000) then encapsulates several metaphors, and the link with globalization is not straightforward.

Through autochthony, I do not leave the elites in the rational world and followers in an emotional one. Both are emotional beings and the rational/emotional dichotomy is unhelpful.⁷³ Kapferer (2012) suggests a critical consideration of such myths in terms of ontologies with their own logic. He argues that the myths have no fixed meaning and can have different meanings in different situations (Kapferer 2012, xxvi). This fits with the contingent and constructed character of autochthony. Indeed, "Myths constitute a reality in their own right" (Kapferer 2012, ix). Myths are not an overly empowering force but "achieve meaning and have force through the social and political contingencies of the historical world that simultaneously produce and engage them" (Kapferer 2012, xxiii). These myths have their own logic and realities that tie elites to their followers. Elites are bounded by the myths.⁷⁴ And, as demonstrated, autochthony is a myth, specifically in CAR where it is difficult to know historically which groups settled first.

that is, stereotypes about the rival group, enhanced by negative feelings about that group. Again, the emotional dimension of prejudice is important: research suggests that negative feelings about the other group are more important than stereotypes in explaining attitudes towards outgroups" (Kaufman 2001, 26).

⁷³ This binary understanding is now critiqued. It is usually an attempt "to divide the actions of individuals into 'rational' versus 'emotional' or 'irrational' types [as it] is to deny the complexity of human behaviour" (Turner and Killian 1987, 14 Quoted in Gamson 1992, 54; See also Goodwin, Jasper and Poletta 2004; Cramer 2002).

⁷⁴ Kaufman also elaborates on the fact that the myths encapsulate reasons of why a group fears another one. Those fears lead to a security dilemma in specific contexts.

The meanings of myths and symbols are not predetermined; they are constructed. Discourses are the main medium doing the meaning work and reveal closure in our identities. Although Kaufman takes norms, myths, symbols, and other non-material factors into account, he does not always focus on systematic discourse analysis and his account is also too elite focused. A symbolic politics of autochthony that takes a discursive approach could shed light on the instrumentalizing role of elites, on meaning making, and on “how collective narratives on [...] the enemy, victims and perpetrators are formed and sustained” (Demmers 2012, 125). It is within discursive constructions that one can point to the self and other divide, but also to how violence is legitimized against that other. Therefore, I take a longer approach to elite instrumentalization, seeking to unveil how elites construct or mobilize myths because people cannot follow mechanistically a call to arms when a regime is faltering. Public speeches of the President and official narrative reveal how the audience is accustomed to specific themes prior the war and facilitate mobilization of autochthony as its boundaries are being constructed. In that sense, the pre-crisis narrative determines the elites’ reaction when their power is at risk (Strauss 2015). Leaders do not pick and choose to instrumentalize autochthony, this is linked with longer pre-crisis official narrative and how a regime seeks to rule. But few studies have put instrumentalization in a longer term (Desrosiers and Thomson 2011; Verwinp 2000; Desrosiers 2014), often making a direct link between the discourse and its effects (the mobilization).

Combining a focus on the role of myths and symbolic politics with an analysis of the discourse of autochthony leads to a richer and more complex understanding of political phenomena, and, more specifically, of the dynamics of the conflict in the CAR. My approach allows attention to discourses, how discourses tap into myths, and symbols that elites use to construct and mobilize emotionally driven action. Autochthony must be understood in such terms. As our practices vary in time and place, it follows that people assign different meanings to autochthony spatially and temporally. My understanding can offer an answer to the resonance of the term rather than assume it. That is, autochthony is vague enough

to connect leaders to followers and, at the same time, precise enough for listeners to make sense of the term by connecting it to their daily experience of it. For this reason, my thesis examines how autochthony is mobilized by linking it to the extent to which it resonates with people with an understanding of their very localized experience.

2.4.3 The Social Implications of Autochthony: Discursive Practices and Everyday People's Experience

Bringing in identity literature shows that the content of any identity is part of its own particular historical process (Comaroff quoted in Lentz 1995). Currently, autochthony in African countries is a strategy that politicians use. It follows that finding a link with violence has remained elite-focused. Rather than focusing solely on elites, this study brings together elites and non-elites, as well as rebels' perceptions of autochthony, in this case, the *vrai Centrafricain*. In this way, my study adopts a more sociological approach of social interaction and competition by considering autochthony as an identity capital.

In this work, the *vrai Centrafricain*, autochthony, represents a lens through which I analyze the political and economic competition between "Muslim-foreigners" and non-Muslims. Hence, I formulate that one is autochthon by the virtue of x or y claim and by what one does, practices, or experiences. In other words, autochthony gets its meaning through people's discourses and other practices beyond its self-evident nature. This meaning is trans-scalar, from the local to the global (Jackson 2006). It follows that how various groups share competing representations of their contribution to the realization of the state becomes a site of investigation. Simultaneously, political elites reify people's experiences in autochthony's claims.

Hilgers (2011) acknowledges the sociological function of autochthony and considers it as a form of capital. This is in line with other recent work that considers identity as a form of capital (Dorrnsoro and Grojean 2018; Backzo and Dorrnsoro 2017). For Dorrnsoro and Grojean, "Identities (be they regional, ethnic, or local) are not merely principles of social and territorial affiliation – not just categories

of ethnographic description and popular perception. They are also allegiances signalling a rank in the access to various resources in the context of rivalry or unequal cooperation between groups” (Dorrnsoro and Grojean 2018, 9).

It follows that “the structure [of that] capital corresponds to the principles that determine its value: belonging to a community, the role in the history of its development, the position [that a certain group holds] in the history of its settlement” (Hilgers 2011, 150). Depending on the issue of contention, various members of a group will mobilize the place they hold in the history of the development of the country or village, their belonging to an ethnic group, or the history of the settlement. Various members of the group will make links to these principles to claim their autochthonous status and, ultimately, resources. As we will see later in chapters 5 and 7, autochthony is a form of capital, since claiming it allows traders to have access to good vending spots in marketplaces. This is linked to what people do every day to invest in autochthony as a form of capital. Selling in the market is a daily activity. I focused on that specific space to illustrate how autochthony could be considered as a form of capital (Hilgers 2011; Dorrnsoro and Grojean 2018). Moreover, as a form of capital of autochthony could be about access to the benefits of the economic sector (Gold, Diamond, etc.) while denying access to other groups on the basis of identity.

Building on Hilgers (2011), autochthony is trans-scalar and incorporates an insidious gradation from less autochthon to the most autochthon. The concept function as a trope (Bøås and Dunn 2013) but:

rests on the hierarchy which it establishes in a space of relations. To exist, this hierarchy supposes the existence of a community whose development has been made possible by the contribution of different groups (Hilgers 2011, 148; see also Packard 1987).

A community that is torn at a particular moment is one that exists only by the virtue of the participation of various groups in its formation. When a group’s participation status is unrecognized, its autochthony claim might have a different meaning. For instance, my interlocutors recognized that the Aka ethnic group were the first comers, the most autochthon of the country, but, at the same time, they experience the most discrimination. They were not even the primary concern of the anti-Balaka groups claiming to

represent the *vrai Centrafricain*.

As a main empirical property, autochthony relates to the first comers who made the land “humanly viable” (Hilgers 2011, 146; see also Lentz 2006). The case of the Aka reinforces the sociological dimension of autochthony status. That illustrates two things: first, the social status accorded to groups that are deemed to have contributed the most to making the land humanly viable, and second, the relationship of that group to the state. This relationship is important in determining which group has access to which resources (Dorronsoro and Grojean 2018). This, in turn, has the potential of influencing the course of identity formation (both content or/and boundary). The state plays a significant role through its policies, investments, and public sector jobs (Dorronsoro and Grojean 2018, 9). In that sense, Aka people do not seem to have been of interest to policymakers in the CAR.

The Aka group developed a relationship with the forest, their primary habitat. It serves to differentiate them from their fellow Central Africans when we consider relationships with the state. The Aka is not competing for access to resources in the same way, nor for political power or access to state positions and influence – hence autochthony’s interpretation as sociological and political. The Aka group is considered to be at the margin of society, supposedly living in symbiosis with nature. But even if they are considered first comers, they are often regarded as not having contributed to making the space humanly viable or any other type of contribution to the community or state. With that in mind, it becomes crucial to differentiate between autochthony and indigeneity. In some countries, there seems to be a difference between autochthony and indigenoussness (Leonhardt 2006), and this is the case in the CAR. Since autochthony is symbolic and material, first-comers can escape the status of indigeneity if they are considered to have contributed to making the wild environment viable, Aka people do not. Had they failed to do so, the differentiation between indigeneity and autochthony becomes crucial. Indeed, pygmies in the CAR (as in the Central African region, broadly speaking) live in the dense equatorial forest, but have regular contact with villagers. Hence, they are indigenous, but not autochthon. The *vrai*

Centrafricain debate in the conflict leaves this group out.

Autochthony speaks to citizens who are not political elites. Both elites and non-elites can be using the same word for different purposes and speak to different realities. Hence, autochthony binds both leader and follower through varied experiences, this is a specificity of autochthony that differs from ethnicity and provides an understanding of this type of instrumentalization. Making sense of people's understanding of autochthony is relevant in determining how elites' and people's understanding connect. One possible way to make sense of this connection is by paying attention, first, to actors' representations through discourses, myth making and how they reveal closure in identities, and second, through other daily activities and practices. As far as identity formation is concerned, practices – even if they are discursive – are useful to connect the true Central African claim to what people also do. This is why the focus on people's experience matters. I bring to the fore the micro, the everyday utilization, and the importance of autochthony in people's lives.⁷⁵ The competition that takes place between groups is both material and discursive. In other words, "Discourses and representations have materiality" (Mbembe 2001, 5).⁷⁶ If autochthony capital signals allegiances and access to resources, this is far from mechanistic. As I conceive identity as produced by discourse and autochthony as an identity, autochthony is then produced and practiced through discourse in its localized expression and experience.

To move from the governmental elite speeches, I mobilize the host-guest metaphor and the center-stage discursive concepts, which allow demonstrating how dominant groups perpetuate discrimination in their discursive practices. With these concepts, I show that elite manipulation must be thought alongside the other levels (meso and micro) of mobilization. In everyday discourses and practices, non-

⁷⁵ As a concept, the everyday is about investigating what various "events [mean] to people" (Kalekin-Fishman 2013, 714). In other words, it is about how "time, space, and power interact to provide the infrastructure for lived experience in the everyday, together with methods that will enable researchers to encompass the (dis)order that makes up experiences recognizable as distinct events" (Ibid., 724).

⁷⁶ Beyond this recognition, "A central challenge for social analysis, then, must be how to preserve the insights that have been produced by the linguistic turn while also adding the insights promised by practice theory, to combine the study of meaning and the study of the material" (Dunn and Neumann 2016, 62). This thesis could be seen as a step in this direction as I combine discursive analysis of Bozizé's speeches to what people "do" in a very localized space.

governmental elites and local level actors conceptualize the community, with which they are in competition, as immigrants and guests “who is expected to abide by certain rules of hospitality, namely conforming to the political [and economic] wishes of the host community” (Jenkins 2012b, 577). In a nutshell, non-Muslims perceive the presence of Muslims in the economic spaces as a threat to the country, and on that basis, non-Muslims do not want Muslims in the political space. In the competition to have access to resources, these discursive practices signal to other groups that as guests, they are not entitled to the resources. Hence, the discourse plays an important role. With this metaphor, I show that non-governmental elites also participate in constructing and maintaining oppositional identities through autochthony. Importantly, this everyday discourse feels natural to the dominant group, making it difficult to perceive and acknowledge discrimination. This is because the dominant group always centres the stage around its own issues. Critical race theorists, Grillo and Wildman (1991), argue that dominant groups always make their perception the most important and have difficulty listening and understanding other groups. Hence, this discourse is about power. Discourse renders certain types of actions possible while delegitimizing others. With that insight, I make explicit how non-Muslims mobilize various issues they are concerned with and centre the discussion around those issues. Even if they listen and acknowledge Muslims grievances, they use analogies that recentre the discussion around their issues. If Muslims are conceptualized as guests and immigrants, they do not get to shed lights, centre their issues for it to be addressed. The host-guest metaphor and the center-stage problem are two discursive devices that reveal how autochthony operates at the meso and micro levels. This draws attention to one of the ways through which the discourse of autochthony is constructed, negotiated, and practiced. In the everyday, these practices are deeply ingrained bodily ways of acting, even unconsciously.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ We can also understand this with Bourdieu as habitus. In my analysis, however, I refer to this as practices, bracketing Bourdieu’s notion of habitus while recognizing the manner in which ways of acting become habitual and deeply ingrained. For a brief but effective review of the habitus, see Wacquant (2006).

Concluding Remarks

This thesis does not seek to explain the “cause” of violence, but to understand the autochthony category and how elites’ role in mobilizing that category intersects with localized experiences of various other actors. What I add to the various explanations advanced above is the understanding of the mobilization of a particular identity in the name of autochthony that has not been central in ethnic wars. I thus combine their insights into a symbolic politics of autochthony. Identities can be based on myths, which can never really be proven, but the fact that they are felt and experienced by people is what matters (Kaufman 2001; Lemarchand 1994; Horowitz 1985; Cornell and Hartmann 1998). This theoretical framework will now be employed throughout this thesis. In the CAR, land issues were not present during my research, and from the interviewees’ perspective. With these various tools, I point out that Bozizé’s instrumentalization of identity, in the long term, centers around regime legitimation strategies. This differs from how non-governmental elites and local level actors understood autochthony. Daily discursive practices reveal that it is both the involvement of “Muslim-foreigners” in violent politics (which itself is the way politics is done in the country) and the support they received from their co-ethnic/co-religious that sparked reprisal and resentment from the anti-Balaka who popularized the *vrai Centrafricain* narrative. Hence, various narratives operate independently from elite instrumentalization. But the fact that non-governmental elite practices are ingrained in everyday practices and habits facilitate the reception of elite instrumentalization.

The approach I laid out here sought to understand various violent displays of autochthony, I drew from the insights of elite theories of conflict and constructivist works on elite manipulation. Then I combined it to a discursive understanding of identity and to a social approach of autochthony in which autochthony is considered as an identity capital. By focusing on discourses, I argue that it is possible to explain both the new articulation of violence in the CAR and understand the mobilizational capacity of autochthony. Also, the link with emotion is another crucial factor to understanding the myth symbol

complex and autochthony. As my approach combines autochthony and symbolic politics, I can keep the link with emotions, the discursive and the symbolic (mythical stereotypes in identifying the other Muslim).

3. Making Sense of Bozizé's Leadership: Work, Development, Unity, and Foreigners

3.1. Introduction

This chapter assesses Bozizé's rhetoric and authority prior to the March 2013 coup, with the objective of understanding how the state, through Bozizé, acted to make Muslim-foreigners objects of violence. The chapter analyzes the elite's instrumentalization of identity by pointing out the strategies that Bozizé adopted. I analyze Bozizé's speeches, treating them as the official narrative of the regime.⁷⁸ This chapter argues that the way political elites weave together various themes in the long term during their time in office can have an impact on the war, even if people in remote areas have a different understanding of the theme. The chapter suggests that a regime's legitimation of itself through discourses and other practices is relevant to understanding the contentious points and representations that occur when the regime faces a terminal crisis. One should not separate times of instability of a regime from times when the regime was stable.

Authoritarian rulers do not always rely on pure coercion, but make use of discourses and various symbolic strategies to engage their audience (Schatz 2009).⁷⁹ Most simply, authoritarians do a lot with discourses.⁸⁰ That said, my analysis overall shows that Bozizé promoted a more moderate rhetoric that sought to legitimize his rule by speaking to all constituencies and presenting himself as the president of national unity. He sought to persuade and make his 2003 coup and rule acceptable. This shows how Bozizé sought to manipulate symbols that have emotional value to citizens and construct the boundaries

⁷⁸ I acknowledge that with these official speeches I have not exhausted the possibility of understanding how Bozizé sought to convey information. Jourde (2007) demonstrated that campaign tours are also a way for elites to convey information. There are multiple activities that elites engage in to build support and solidarity; official speeches are only one part.

⁷⁹ For Schatz (2009, 203), "The cement of soft authoritarian rule is an elite's ability to frame political debate, thereby defining the political agenda and channeling political outcomes. Soft authoritarianism relies more centrally on the means of persuasion than on the means of coercion, although coercion remains a part of the ruling elite's arsenal."

⁸⁰ Jourde (2005, 422) has highlighted that authoritarian elites rely on "symbolic and cultural strategies" for a successful ruling. It points out again that discourses, norms, and non-material factors are important beyond pure coercion. The elites might also frame their discourses according to the international community agenda in order to lower pressure on their authoritarian regime or seek support from donors (Jourde 2007).

of the *vrai Centrafricain* as opposed to the “other” Muslim-foreigners.

In the chapter, there are four main phases of Bozizé’s regime around which themes of belonging and foreignness have been mobilized. The first phase runs from his coup on March 15, 2003, to the emergence of rebel groups in the north-west and north-east of the CAR in 2005. During that phase, Bozizé sought to present himself as the president of unity. The second phase where his speeches changed in nature started at the emergence of the rebellion in 2005 and ran to 2008 when there was the Inclusive Political Dialogue (IPD). In this period, Bozizé adopted a more aggressive attitude in his speeches and scapegoated foreigners for the state of affairs in the CAR. The third phase ran from the inclusive dialogue in 2008 to Bozizé’s re-election in 2011. During that period, Bozizé deescalated his aggressive tone, and focused on his development achievements. The last phase was short, from the emergence of Séléka, to the coup that toppled Bozizé in March 2013. During that short period, Bozizé remobilized themes of the second phase. The speeches show that the challenges and events he faced influenced the position he adopted.

3.2 “I am the President of all Central Africans”

Bozizé was an unsuccessful presidential candidate in the first democratic elections of the country in 1993, obtaining only a meagre 1.5% of the vote (Mehler 2011, 126). Bozizé had been the chief of staff in the army during Patassé’s presidency (1993-2003), but he was fired in late 2001 when Patassé realized that he had misappropriated army funds and property such as weapons and ammunition (Ziguélé 2015, 98-99). Patassé had feared that he was no longer loyal to his regime and would foment a coup, and thus, wanted to arrest him. However, Bozizé managed to escape the arrest. In 2001, Patassé experienced multiple coup attempts. His regime survived with the help of foreign troops such as the Libyan army and rebels from the *Mouvement de Libération du Congo* (MLC) in the DRC (Leaba 2001). As Bozizé fell into disgrace with Patassé, he fled to Chad in November 2001 and started organizing his rebellion to topple Patassé. Bozizé attempted a coup in October 2002 but failed as MLC rebels defended Patassé

again. Bozizé finally succeeded with another coup attempt in March 2003. He ruled for a decade and until removed in another coup in March 2013.

Bozizé installed a transition period until the elections of 2005. I consider this period as the first phase of Bozizé's regime, based on both internal and external conditions that affected the regime.⁸¹ Under the first period, Bozizé constructed his regime and government by mobilizing positive themes and accommodating notions of unity, dialogue, development, work, good governance and rejection of the past. Results of the elections were announced on May 24, 2005, and Bozizé was sworn in on June 13, 2005. How Bozizé set the tone for understanding Muslims and foreignness is important as a proxy to analyze the overt manipulation of "the true central African." Desrosiers (2014, 203) noted in her study on Rwanda that "without the right conditions, [...] extreme rhetoric may appeal to some, but it rarely resonates and even risks triggering strong negative reactions." That is, an extreme ethnic and divisive rhetoric might not be a winning strategy for a leader.

Bozizé's regime was accommodating, and some themes were broad and ambiguous enough to allow all segments of the population to identify with it. After the coup in March 2003, one of his early speeches in April portrayed his coup and the men who supported him as patriots. In several instances, he justified the coup and portrayed himself and his supporters as people who assumed their responsibility and saved the country from corrupt politicians. He labelled his rebellion as "patriotic forces" (Bozizé 2003a), claimed that he did not stage a coup to satiate his own personal interests, but to represent the nation. Bozizé and his men are portrayed as patriots (Bozizé 2003b). They came to *liberate* the country from the Patassé regime which had replaced the national army with "foreign occupying forces and mercenaries" (Bozizé 2003b). For Bozizé, the previous dictatorial regime spread "death," "misery," and "desolation," with the support of foreign forces (Bozizé 2003b). Hence, Bozizé portrayed the previous regime as the enemy to be defeated since the regime was corrupt and backed by foreign armies that helped it resist

⁸¹ There are other possible understandings of the regime evolution.

coup attempts in 2001 and 2002. He tried to get his audience to recognize that he had goodwill.

Bozizé sought to justify his illegal seizure of power as he mobilized the key theme of foreignness. In doing so, he connected foreignness and destruction with the previous regime. As shown, Patassé had relied on the intervention of Libyan forces and Bemba's rebels to remain in power. This context is important to make sense of Bozizé saying, in June 2003, that the country was "devastated, looted and submitted to foreign occupation forces and hordes of faithless and lawless looters" (Bozizé 2003b). So, in the articulation of foreignness at the beginning of his regime, Bozizé linked foreignness with devastation, looting, pillaging, robbers, killers, rapists, and lawlessness. He posited this in opposition to the previous regime to legitimize the coup, thus seeking justification for this illegal seizure of power. In brief, Bozizé claimed that he was saving the country from a form of destruction that was also linked to violence perpetrated by foreign troops.

Bozizé represented his regime as a break from Patassé's regime. During the national dialogue at the end of 2003, he took advantage of the stage and, again, justified his coup. The country was undergoing "grave circumstances" (Bozizé 2003d) and his actions were set against an "exceptional situation" (Bozizé 2003e). He employed discursive strategies to legitimize his regime and the coup but erase corollaries of abuses and destruction that his coup brought. Bozizé claimed that his men and him were the harbingers of change (Bozizé 2003e) and that his regime brought a "new page for construction and reconstruction" of the country (Bozizé 2003a), a return of "constitutional order" (Bozizé 2004) and reconnection with the international community. He linked his actions to the interests of the country to try to convince and appease those who might not approve of the coup. In other words, he created a similarity of interests. He did not refer to the coup as a coup, which is a common strategy of coup makers. Coup makers always say that their intervention is against corrupt politicians (Abrahamsen 2018, 23). Bozizé delivered a speech to diplomats in Bangui a few weeks after the coup. In that speech, he advanced that "the resumption of the democratic process of 15 March 2003 will be reinforced" (Bozizé 2003a). To make

sense of the statement, one must keep in mind that the CAR was supposedly undergoing a democratic transition from the 1990s when Patassé was elected. This means that Patassé's presidency was a failure in history, a bracket. To state that the democratic process will resume means that it had stopped at some point and that Bozizé would resume it. In that speech, Bozizé proposed that he would re-establish security and peace, good governance, and the fight against poverty. These themes are broad enough to elicit support, from both international and national partners. They were positive enough to cut across the divides, as it is possible that ambiguous themes help promote commonalities (Desrosiers 2014, 209). His regime was presented as the regime of "popular change" of March 15, 2003, even if staged with only a handful of men (Bozizé 2003b). However, some interest groups, such as businesspeople, manifested their support for Bozizé's regime in the few days after the coup (Yanganda 2003a). There was even a march of support for the government after the coup in 2003 (*Le Confident* 2003a) and reporters wrote that the government could claim wide support from the population (Bakwa 2003a). In that sense, Bozizé could invoke popular support for his regime.

After the coup, Bozizé established a transitional government in which he included representatives of minority communities to say that he is an inclusive president (Bozizé 2003b). He further stressed: my "policy is not to say that I only work with the Gbaya. I work with the Banda, the Yakoma, the Sara, the Mbatia and more. My policy is not like at the time when the president of the National Assembly, the Prime Minister were all relatives of the President of the Republic" (Bozizé 2005a). His speech at the swearing-in ceremony in June 2005, clearly advanced that he was a president of unity: "I am the President of all Central Africans" (Bozizé 2005b). He recognized that he would work with his ethnic kin, but they would not be alone. So, he did not distance himself from co-ethnics. He further demonstrated that he would be accommodating by introducing an amnesty law at the time and welcoming back refugees and exiled people (Bozizé 2003b).

On September 9, 2003, Bozizé organized a national dialogue to which 350 delegates and

representatives of the CAR society participated, including political parties, civil society representatives, etc. There had been army mutinies in the 1990s, and Patassé attacked the Yakoma in retaliation of the failed coup. Therefore, the objective of the national dialogue was a reconciliation for the various social groups, as well as finding ways for the country to return to elections and democracy (*Actes du dialogue national* 2003, 7). During that national dialogue, Bozizé advanced that it was by “associating as widely as possible [with] all the component of the population to a consensual management of public affairs that [he] will succeed the noble mission” that he has set to himself (Bozizé 2003d). In search of legitimacy, Bozizé invented a new celebration to commemorate his coup called the *anniversaire du sursaut patriotique* (the anniversary of the patriotic uprising) to be celebrated annually. At the first celebration of this anniversary in 2004, Bozizé doubled down on his willingness to remain an open and uniting president. As he claimed during the speech, “To rebuild our dear and beautiful country, no one must miss the call, no one is too much” (Bozizé 2004).

This openness, however, faded away as the election period began in 2005, when Bozizé instrumentalized foreignness to insist on the need to maintain the break with the past and embrace the change he represented. He delivered a speech in Sango in Ngassima in which he linked Patassé’s party, the *Mouvement de Libération du Peuple Centrafricain* (MLPC), to foreignness.⁸² In another speech during the electoral campaign, he mobilized foreignness to argue that it would be a mistake to vote for the previous president. For him, the “policy of the MLPC [is one] of Hitler and everyone must know. The MLPC’s policy is that of the ‘Banyamulenges’ who killed, raped our sisters and looted all our properties” (Bozizé 2005a). The Banyamunlenges are the nickname of Jean-Pierre Bemba’s rebel group and also signify foreigners since Bemba’s troops are from the DRC. In fact, Banyamunlenges is the nickname that Central Africans used to refer to MLC rebels (Wairagala 2011), but Banyamunlenges are a complex group of Congolese Tutsi whose involvement in MLC remains uncertain. With the context of

⁸² This speech was also in the context of the launch of the activities of Eurafrique, a subsidiary of the Canadian company Acmines.

the 2005 elections, Bozizé's instrumentalization of foreignness and Bayamunlenges meant that voting MLPC was a step backward, a step towards voting for a foreign-backed regime that made Central African suffer. Bozizé's message was clear. What is important is that foreignness had a strong negative connotation.

Finally, Bozizé's early speeches presented *work* as the pathway to development. As he advanced, "It is only through work that we can develop the Central African Republic" (Bozizé 2003d).⁸³ During this phase of his presidency, Bozizé maintained that his leadership would be about "work and work only": *Kwa na Kwa* (KnK) in Sango. It is a "true philosophy of development" (Bozizé 2004) that he links to the founding father of the country: Barthélemy Boganda. He deployed it as a device to identify enemies of the country:

My motto is and remains "KWA NA KWA!" We must be vigilant so that our work is not in vain. Vigilant, to track down and neutralize the lazy, the corrupt, the proponents of laxity, absenteeism, the nostalgic of the old regime that sabotage our action. It is because of the harmful action of people like them that today, no state or mixed economy company is viable. (Bozizé 2003b)

Work eventually became one of his most common themes, a trope that he used to frame his actions positively, to exclude and to delegitimize opposition, and to frame political dialogue later in his reign.

In these early speeches, Bozizé adopted an accommodating tone as he was seeking legitimacy. Bozizé's discourse was accommodating when looking forward, yet portraying a past where foreigners colluded with the past regime and identified as part of the enemy. He did not target Muslims, but foreignness was present in his discourse as a means of discrediting the opposition and his predecessors. Foreignness was used as a strategy.

3.3 Emergence of Rebellion and the Escalation of Foreignness in Speeches

In the space of two years, tensions increased, multiple rebellions emerged, and the election further

⁸³ In Sango and translated by the newspaper.

increased political tensions. The period of the new elections and the emergence of rebellion marks the start of the second phase of Bozizé's regime. This is the phase when Bozizé insisted on what foreignness meant to him, and where he developed a few key themes of his regime. Analyzing Bozizé's discourses does not necessarily show a clearly delineated or unidirectional progression from an accommodating tone towards a more exclusionary and radical tone. Rather, the speeches reveal that he adapted to the shifting regional dynamic and internal challenges to his power, challenges such as the elections, the emergence of rebel groups and the political dialogue with rebels. By having clear phases, one can better understand the reasons of the shift in Bozizé's narratives. At the same time, Bozizé deescalated and re-escalated aggressive narratives towards foreigners, making it difficult to trace a linear progression or radicalization during his presidency.

Rebellions began in mid-2005 amidst the presidential elections period. The *Armée populaire pour la Restauration de la République et la Démocratie* (APRD) was the first rebellion in mid-2005. It was active in the north-west, and it was believed to be linked with the deposed president, Patassé, but there was no hard proof of such a link (Berg 2008, 23). APRD also formed to provide protection against insecurity of highway bandits. But there were also other insecurity actors, the ex-liberators. These were armed men who helped Bozizé seize power, but he abandoned them later. These men then joined the group of bandits in north-west and north-east CAR and caused insecurity. Late October 2006, the *Union des Forces Démocratiques pour le Rassemblement* (UFDR) appeared in the north-east and posed challenges to Bozizé's regime. As some rebels were previous backers of Bozizé's coup, one of their demands was that Bozizé keep his word and remunerate them for their warring effort. The beginning of these rebellions was instrumentalized by other politicians who took advantage of the situation to increase their nuisance capacity. This is what Mehler (2005, 149) called "powerful losers," politicians who could not enter the governing circle and that Bozizé also excluded on purpose. For instance, the opposition leader Charles Massi claimed to be the representative of the APRD and acted as their spokesperson even

if the rebels did not know him (Lombard 2012a). Besides insecurity issues, UFDR claimed that the north-east CAR had been historically excluded from politics and economic development initiatives. Smaller rebel groups, such as *Union des Forces Républicaines* (UFR), formed against Bozizé's rule claiming that the 2005-post elections were rigged and that politicians were corrupt (Bangui 2006). Hence, there were multiple factors influencing these rebellions. However, dissent against Bozizé's rule and armed opposition started already in 2004 with the *Front Démocratique du Peuple Centrafricain* (FDPC) of Abdoulaye Miskine (*Le Confident* 2004; 2006b).

The 2005 election was supposed to bring an end to the transitional government through democratic, multi-party competition, but instead Bozizé managed to exclude his political opponents. Politicians complained that they were not included in the 2005 elections, and there were several opposing voices (Boukanga 2003). Political parties also complained that Bozizé was proceeding to a clan-based and solitary management of power and that political parties were demonized (ADP et al. 2004). At the time, a judge of the constitutional court close to Bozizé invalidated the applications of several contenders (Momet 2005). The most obvious reason was that they were all Bozizé's political opponent. For instance, political contenders like Patassé, in exile after losing power, could not participate in the elections. Similarly, Martin Ziguélé, Prime Minister under Patassé, and Jean-Jacques Demafouth, Patassé's Minister of Defence, could not participate in the elections. Public opinion disapproved this move of the Constitutional Court. Since Bozizé was still preoccupied with his legitimacy and claiming to be the President of unity, he declared that he would "save" and allow some candidates to run in the elections. For instance, Bozizé allowed Martin Ziguélé to participate in the elections. Bozizé was saving these candidates because the decision of the court had no appeal, it was definitive. So, Bozizé's move had no legal base as it was up to the Constitutional Court to re-examine the applications that were blocked. Bozizé supplanted the judiciary body to prove that he was the President of unity.

The President of Gabon, Omar Bongo, mediated the crisis between Bozizé and his opponents. This

allowed more political opponents to run and the elections were held in March 2005, which Bozizé won. Ultimately, Bozizé considered the 2005 elections as a consolidation of his legitimacy. This allowed him to flesh out his discourse on work politics and provide less space for inclusion and dialogue with emerging rebellions. In his 2005 inauguration speech, he advanced that “our country is coming to the end of the process of restoring true constitutional democracy, once undermined [by Patassé]” (Bozizé 2005b). Later that year, in August 2005, during the Independence Day speech, he advanced that “*the consensual transition, an offshoot of the patriotic surge of March 15, 2003, came to an end*” (Bozizé 2005c). To understand the “end” Bozizé mentioned, a bit of context is necessary. When he came to power, his first prime minister was Abel Goumba, an important opposition figure since the colonial period. His choice symbolized political openness and the end of ethnic governance because Goumba did not belong to Bozizé’s ethnic group. Goumba was from the Ouaka Province in the centre-east CAR. The 2003 government was comprised of several opposition political parties and ethnic groups. This move allowed Bozizé to put forward a radical break from Patassé and to portray his regime as one of consensual transition. However, in December 2003, Prime Minister Goumba was soon dismissed and replaced by another Prime Minister, Célestin Leroy Gaombalet. This context and the increased tensions with politicians reveal that Bozizé was looking forward to cooperating less with the political elites. Also, as highlighted in the previous section, Bozizé’s openness faded away during the election period. To illustrate the end of consensual transition, the government that Bozizé formed in 2005 was made of people who supported him during the elections, his ethnic kin, and people from his nascent party, the KNK.

The theme of “work” frames Bozizé’s understanding of the country’s problems as well as applicable solutions. Bozizé linked and opposed other themes to work. In his diagnosis, one of the main problems is that Central Africans do not work enough for the development of the country. Thus, there was a concern with productivity and development. In a Sango speech delivered in Bangassou for the 47th

anniversary of the CAR's name (December 1, 2005), he said that it is “the laziness and the big mouth [*Le fainéantisme et la grande bouche*] that represents us and that has damaged our country” (Bozizé 2005d). Bozizé insisted that the prefects and mayors were lazy and did not work (Ibid.). This expression – “To have a big mouth” (*avoir la grande bouche*) – is used in several African francophone countries. It signifies that the person is extremely talkative, and not discreet. In the context of December 2005, the mobilization of this metaphor was not trivial: Some rebel groups were already formed, and political leaders were unsatisfied with the recent elections results and the failure to implement the recommendations of the 2003 national dialogue. When Bozizé implied that Central Africans talk too much rather than work, this might refer to the dialogues that the country had undertaken from independence. For instance, between independence and 2005, there was the:

- National reflection seminar in 1980;
- Great national debate in 1992;
- Common minimum program of government in 1996;
- Consultation and dialogue committee and the Bangui agreements in 1997;
- National reconciliation conference and the national reconciliation pact in 1998 (*Actes du dialogue national 2003*);
- National dialogue in 2003.

By 2006, there had been several national gatherings, but no significant changes in the way the CAR national politics were conducted. The rebel groups, APRD and UFDR were active. As a result, Bozizé sent the army into the rebel areas, and retaliated disproportionately against the population (HRW 2007). With active rebellions against Bozizé and his regime, the political opposition and international community started calling for a dialogue with the rebels. Some of these rebel leaders were former liberators (Bozizé's coup backers), hence, they needed a space to sort out their differences with Bozizé. Bozizé did not want to open dialogue with rebels but agreed to do so in December 2006 (ICG 2008, 2), and finally held talks with them in 2008. Given this context, Bozizé drew a distinction between work and dialogue in many speeches. He advanced that there are countries that do not do repetitive dialogue, but progress (Bozizé 2006e; 2006i), citing the example of Cameroon. He also linked his disapproval of the

national reunion or dialogue to Boganda's word, the founding father of the CAR, who said, "let's talk less and work a lot" (Bozizé 2006e; 2006j). As the talks with rebels took such a long time to materialize, it is evident that Bozizé was reluctant to engage in an open dialogue with the rebels despite his claim to being the president of unity. The question then is, how can he portray himself as representing unity and, at the same time, be unwilling to talk with his opponents? For him, the answer is *in doing work and talking less*. When you work, you do not have time to talk or rebel, and, for him, central Africans excel in talking (Bozizé 2006b).

In a 2006 speech, Bozizé complained that "our only work comes down to dialogue" (Bozizé 2006e). This sentence was in the French part of his speech. In the Sango part of the speech, he went further: "the problem is simple, dialogue, dialogue, dialogue. It is as if apart from dialogue, there is nothing else we can do" (Bozizé 2006e). Bozizé emphasized different themes in French and in Sango even if both discourses were delivered at the same event. He was certainly addressing a specific audience with this kind of information: his core supporters who might not be very fluent in French. This is a strategy used by leaders in other countries (in Kenya, for instance, during the 2007 elections). Hence, leaders keep the ability to pursue different strategies internally and externally. Some nuances that are lost in French can be used in Sango, and ethnic metaphors can be more effective that way. It does not matter if international audiences can understand or not. What matters is the relationship the President is building with his supporters or a particular broader audience.

Bozizé contrasts work and dialogue in a way that revealed his frustration with this kind of political exercise. Dialogue was a problem to him and as the only work he saw people doing in the CAR is dialogue. At the same time, the speeches reveal Bozizé's conception of political action. From this framing, Bozizé made it clear that it was the lack of productive work that brought the country to where it was, rather than the complex elite politicking in Bangui. He was a president who was there to work. Bozizé was saying that the previous dialogues have not helped the country, but instead damaged it and

he is therefore unwilling to participate in dialogues since it is a problem and it is ineffective. These events help make sense of the big mouth metaphor. Ultimately, Kwa Na Kwa (work and work only), not dialogue, is for the development of the country (Bozizé 2006a).

Work conveys the solution Bozizé saw for the rebellion because poverty was the culprit and one of the causes of rebellion (Bozizé 2006e).⁸⁴ As he posed his diagnosis, dialogue with rebels was not the solution. For him, the dialogue that the country held in 2003 after his coup was enough. So, “voices that rise to demand a dialogue can be questioned about the objective while the acts of the national dialogue serve as a compass to us” (Bozizé 2006c). Bozizé used the National Dialogue of 2003 to dismiss any contact with rebels, not considering that the context had changed. During the previous dialogue, there was no rebellion except his and other militias related to Patassé. Moreover, Bozizé thought that opening dialogue with the rebels would equate to stupidity (Bozizé 2006j).⁸⁵ Moreover, several newspaper articles demonstrated and claimed throughout the years that Bozizé simply disregarded the conclusions of the 2003 National Dialogue and displayed bad faith in their implementation (Madimba-Nimba 2003e; ADP et al. 2004; Deïgoto 2005; Afrique Éducation 2006; *Le Confident* 2006).

Although Bozizé laid down his unwillingness to dialogue with rebels and politicians, he managed to make unity a consistent theme as he linked work and unity. For instance, in 2006, Bozizé advanced that the country would not develop “unless we all *join together*, in the rediscovered solidarity and fraternity to *rebuild* our country” (Bozizé 2006c). Bozizé even claimed that “reconciliation and national unity [are] the cornerstone of [my] political action” (Bozizé 2006a; 2006b).

During this second phase, as Bozizé sought to convey his understanding of work, he shifted the

⁸⁴ Bozizé advanced in an interview with the BBC that CAR rebellions are poor people that are searching for food only. He used the French expression “Chercher à manger” (Fleury-K 2008). These discursive strategies seek to accuse and delegitimize rebels. Actually, the expression “Chercher à manger” is pejorative. Central Africans use it to mock political elites (Ngovon 2015, 504). In this specific speech, the audience is international, and this might show that rebels are illegitimate and that he is in control of the situation. Bozizé has not taken the rebellion seriously.

⁸⁵ In the speech, Bozizé attacked political parties claiming that they are demanding dialogue because they are caught between the rock and a hard place. It means that his politics is effective, and he does not need to open dialogue. For him, “those who ask for this dialogue are those who support the rebellion. Do you think that Bozizé is dumb?” (Bozizé 2006j)

understanding of foreignness. He started suggesting that foreigners were taking advantage of the country, and that public servants were complicit with them. Bozizé explained that “the prefects, the mayors, the secretaries-general really work in disorder and they give advantages to foreigners. They also give papers to foreigners” (Bozizé 2005d). He further explained, “the foreigners come to coax the customs officers, to coax the authorities until we sell everything. We give them everything for free, we lower our prices” (Ibid.). From his understanding, foreigners were given unfair advantages and benefits because local authorities were not working properly. Should public servants work correctly, they would not give undue advantages to foreigners.

In 2006, the rebellion became more established in a way that Bozizé could not ignore. At the same time, regional implications of men in arms increased as Sudan and Chad were involved in proxy wars (HRW 2007; Giroux, Lanz and Sguaitamatti 2009). In July 2006, Bozizé addressed the rebels and the deteriorating security situation stating that he considered that the “security is seriously threatened in the northern part of our country, which is practically “under occupation,” thereby challenging this basic principle of international law which does not admit that the territorial integrity of a State be undermined” (Bozizé 2006d). For him, foreign rebels threatened territorial integrity, meaning that rebellion was foreign to the north. Other forces were sharing the space with villagers and villages were “occupied.” He subtly wove in the foreignness of rebels since the start of rebellions. In that sense, Central Africans themselves were not rebelling against his power, but foreigners were. Also, he conflated dynamics in the north-west and north-east. Both have different roots but saying that the north was under occupation created confusion and conflation of issues. Such understanding of the rebellions reveals the treatment that Bozizé deemed applicable.

Foreignness was a prominent theme in many of Bozizé’s speeches in 2006. Indeed, rebellion posed a threat to his regime and to the legitimacy he thought he acquired through elections. Rather than addressing the rebels’ concerns, he identified them as a problem that the nation faced. In a speech in front

of the National Assembly in July 2006, Bozizé stated that

foreigners [...] are currently in our country and [...] are behind many crimes. Regarding the security problems in our country, when we get to arrest the culprits, know that most of these people are foreigners. They are the ones who make trouble in our country [*Ce sont eux qui font la merde dans notre pays*]. There are also Central Africans who are involved in this, but most of them are foreigners. (Bozizé 2006e)

Bozizé clearly and directly linked foreigners with the country's security problems. The rebellion is caused by foreigners who make trouble (*font la merde*) in the country. Days afterward, Bozizé addressed the *Union des Forces Vives de la Nation* (UFVN), a regrouping of CAR opposition political parties. Again, he directly linked all types of insecurity in the country to foreigners, as well as traders, businessmen, thieves, and military personnel (Bozizé 2006f). He explained that insecurity was mainly “imported from abroad and 80% of [insecurity activities] are practiced by foreigners, according to the statistics of the defence and security forces.”

Further reflecting on the economy of the country, Bozizé linked foreigners to economic problems, and this discourse was still present during my fieldwork in 2017. For Bozizé, “80% of the economy is in the hand of foreigners [...] Why sustain insecurity in the country? We do not know. [...] [They should] respect this country” (Bozizé 2006f; Bakwa 2003d). It is unclear how he arrived at that figure. Given the context of rebellion, this link was powerful. Bozizé was shaping and manipulating his audience's understanding of the conflict. Bozizé already advanced that foreign hands and people were causing trouble in the country. On top of that, he was stating that they held the economic sector. By adding the economic dimension, he showed that the CAR was losing on many fronts. Ultimately, foreigners were disrespecting the country, but they were also motivated and were envious of the natural resources of the country (Bozizé 2006f). There was a slow and clear construction of foreignness as nefarious along many dimensions and this was explicitly linked to the business class and the north-east, where many Muslims are present, hence he was considering Muslims as foreigners and by extension giving content to the *vrai Centrafricain*.

In August 2006, Bozizé delivered a speech in Vakaga, in the north-east, where most of the Muslim population lived and where the UFDR rebellion originated from. During the speech, Bozizé did not particularly address grievances of the region; he focused on foreigners: “It is not the people of Vakaga who caused this trouble, it was the people who came from abroad. [...] All this comes from abroad to push us to kill each other. I tell you to be calm and not give in to strangers who come to manipulate you. They manipulate you by destroying the CAR” (Bozizé 2006g). In this representation, people in Vakaga were treated as having no agency, and foreigners were the manipulators and destructors. In November 2006, Bozizé returned to the Vakaga and addressed the population. In that speech, foreigners, as well as their Central African collaborators and politicians, wanted to destabilize the country. He differentiated between the rebels in Paoua (north-west) and those in the north-east. As he claimed,

“in Paoua, the troublemakers are Central Africans. These are Central African politicians who want to destroy the country. In Birao, it is foreigners, or even foreign countries that cause trouble and want to destroy our country. Their motivation is the bad heart, the jealousy, the greed of the wealth of our country. They want to make trouble in the country to continue stealing our wealth as they have been used to since our independence” (Bozizé 2006i).

This is exactly the manifestation of the binary division between central African and Muslim foreigners. Whether intended or not, Bozizé perpetuated the geographical divide. He was explicit: in the west (Paoua), there were nationals, and, in the east, there were foreigners.

The number of speeches that Bozizé delivered in 2006 increased accusatory rhetoric. This rhetoric was thus prominent starting in 2006, and it targeted foreigners. From the regional proxy wars at the time, Chad and Sudan were the foreign countries that Bozizé attacked, but he also addressed domestic foreigners when he advanced that economic activities were in the hand of foreigners, probably Chadian and Sudanese who settled in the country. Bozizé spoke to the domestic audience when he emphasized the division between the north-west and the north-east. For instance, Bozizé targeted Muslims and the region where they were based, the north-east, by delivering several speeches in the region but denying their agency and their grievances and claiming that they were manipulated by foreigners.

In 2006, Bozizé adopted a confrontational and militaristic approach to the rebels. The army had also committed serious human rights violations (HRW 2007). Starting with finger-pointing at foreigners, Bozizé metaphorically justified his actions in a speech delivered in Birao: “You have a house you have built; you live with your wife and your children. Can someone come and provoke you with your family at home? Is the person right in doing this?” (Bozizé 2006g). Here, the house represents the country in which the population lives. The “someone” that is provoking remains indeterminate but is foreign in the sense of not belonging to the “family.” The “house” and the “family” are presented as peaceful victims of a “provoking” other. In other words, the CAR was peacefully living life at home, but foreigners were provoking its inhabitants. If one is provoked, one is entitled to react, which is the same logic that anti-Balaka fighters used in 2013-2014. However, insidiously, Bozizé implied that the foreigners were enemies already within the country and that actions needed to be taken. He sought to mobilize people against foreigners by playing on a sense of a present danger. He attempted to make clear that if one failed to act, one did not know what would happen tomorrow. Bozizé told his audience in one speech delivered in Birao in November 2006,

Stay calm, and I ask everyone to take your work seriously. Know that we have arrested bad people, people who do not even know how to speak Sango. People who do not even know how to speak French, do they come from Rwanda? Do they come from Burundi? We do not know yet, but the investigation is ongoing. So be careful of foreigners coming into your neighborhoods. Do not be ashamed in front of them, because these people tomorrow they can be those people who will shoot you with the Kalashnikov. Tomorrow it can be those people who will destroy your homes (Bozizé 2006i).

In the speech, Bozizé used “work” to mean defence and so he indicated that; the population should be ready to defend the country against the foreigners. He was shaping the understanding of the rebellion, but it was already present that “belonging” was linked with the ability to speak Sango or French, a discourse that came back in 2013 when Séléka rebels took power.⁸⁶ Moreover, he insinuated if people did not react immediately, foreigners might kill them tomorrow and destroy their homes. This context

⁸⁶ I expand on this in chapter 5.

gives another meaning to “work,” where it is a strong call to react similar to statements in the Rwandan genocide (Hintjens 1999). Bozizé also advanced that “Men, women, children, community groups, you must stand up and fight for your country, for the defence of your country. Let no one stay behind when a foreigner tries to steal your country” (Bozizé 2006i). Elsewhere, Bozizé asserted that the country “belong[s] to central Africans and not foreigners” (Bozizé 2006h). He constantly sought to construct solidarity around the problem he identified, to create a sense of strong nationalism and belonging. Playing with foreignness back then, as well as today, is at the heart of the conflict even if religious identity became the vessel of the manifestation of that conflict. Who is a “foreigner” and who is “Central African” today? What is clear is that foreignness has been linked to nefariousness, rebellion, and insecurity. That is important irrespective of the actors’ citizenship.

3.3.1 Foreigners and Opponents Against Work, Unity, and Development

In December 2006, Bozizé agreed to hold a dialogue with rebels. In fact, the political opposition suggested a dialogue, that Bozizé opposed, but the international community pressured Bozizé to accept (APANews 2008; *Le Confident* 2007; ICG 2007). It seemed that Bozizé felt his regime was less threatened and no longer mobilized foreignness as he did in 2006.⁸⁷ As the international community backed the dialogue, he knew that rebel would not overthrow him. There was a de-escalation of a confrontational stance in Bozizé’s speeches leading to the 2008 dialogue, but before that dialogue, Bozizé made sure in the speeches that rebels were understood not as against his regime but against the country’s development and the unity of its people.

Bozizé used other strategies of soft authoritarianism that allowed his message to be consistently received. He sought to delegitimize rebels by pitting them against the development of the country. At the very least, at the level of the government rhetoric and governmental elite circles, this set the stage for a

⁸⁷ He further changed his unwillingness to dialogue into a more positive approach in a number of his 2007 speeches. See Bozizé (2007b; 2007c; 2007e).

thorough understanding of what it means to be a true Central African later. Being a foreigner or non-Central African meant that the person is against the development of the country. According to the speeches, rebels were the source of the country's underdevelopment, and rebels are foreigners. For him, poverty, politico-military events, or even army mutinies caused insecurity to people (Bozizé 2006f). Bozizé chose to emphasize poverty and linked it to political instability and rebellions. Poverty might not be necessarily linked to political instability, but Bozizé chose to do so and created a clear link between the country's situation and rebellions. As such, he spoke the international discourse of the security-development nexus; that is, no development without security and no security without development (Stern and Öjendal 2010). This type of speech shows how the securitization of underdevelopment can be driven by African actors, and the security-development discourse allowed the President to militarize his answer to the rebellion by sending the military in rebel areas and violating human rights. The nexus expresses an ambiguous response in the sense that one can securitize poverty. In order to address the poverty vs. insecurity he discussed, Bozizé chose the military option. This shows the contradictions within the security-development nexus but also the kind of answers this discourse renders actionable and comprehensible.

Bozizé demonstrated the capacity to address the international audience by deflecting domestic problems. He reiterated the security-development nexus in other instances. In 2007, he delivered a speech in the north-west town of Bocaranga during the World Food Day. At the time, Bocaranga was an area sympathetic to the APRD. During his speech, delivered in Sango, Bozizé claimed that,

Our country has suffered a lot. The lies have destroyed our country; bad practices have destroyed this country; stalling tactics [*ce qu'on appelle en français manœuvres dilatoires*] have ruined the Central African Republic. The insecurity has destroyed the Central African Republic and prevents the exploitation of the cement plant that the Mayor mentioned. It is insecurity that prevents us from building the Ndim factory. The rebels and zaraguinas have occupied it, you know it well. Bozizé is a man of work (Bozizé 2007d).

If insecurity was preventing development, the following action was then an escalation of the military response to eradicate the security problem as Bozizé did. Unfortunately, the regions are not

currently more developed than there were in 2007. Such nexus can play into the authoritarian strategy to choose which option he prefers the most. As Abrahamsen (2018) shows, the contemporary expression of militarism is embedded in the security-development discourse and it is a militarism pushed by both non-military and military actors. In fact, “Development issues have not only become security issues, and vice versa, but security actors have also come to occupy a more prominent place and voice within development” (Abrahamsen 2018, 25). In this specific context, the military that had been mobilized did not bring any development initiatives, but rather a human rights violation. At least in the above quote, Bozizé made sure that rebels bore the responsibility for the failure of the cement plant (the factory in the quote) to materialize as a project of development. To my knowledge, a cement plant was planned to be built in Bocaranga, but I am not sure if it has been constructed.

According to the President’s discourse, the rebels were against development. Bozizé brought forward a material manifestation of progress and development: a cement factory. This factor was something that could bring jobs and revenues for the country. Earlier in the quote, he established that insecurity (not defined) had destroyed the country. Thus, it was impossible to realize, attain, or pose concrete steps for development because rebels were stopping development. For development to materialize, the rebels must be eradicated. In this way, the security-development discourse renders certain types of actions possible. However, Bozizé made sure that, in the same paragraph, he is presented as someone doing the work. Bozizé was working and willing to bring development through concrete steps, but rebels were preventing him for doing so. To further illustrate the point he claimed, “the people of the APRD [rebels] cannot plunge the inhabitants of the Ouham-Pendé in misery all the time. God does not want that” (Bozizé 2007d). Rebels were causing poverty and misery. Although he specified one rebel group, this was in the context of several groups that were against his regime.

Bozizé claimed that the country has known

different types of insecurity such as robberies, roadblocks, poachers. That is what we have known for several years. But the new phenomenon of security concerns political affairs. This is the case in Paoua, Markounda, Tiringoulou and Gordil. The reasons are political. [...] we know because people

want to come to fight in our country to take possession of it. People take up arms to come to destabilize our country. These people we know them, they are from the MLPC party. It is these groups that come to coax the children so that they can take up arms and start making a fuss [*faire du tapage*] in the country. The same is true of Tiringoulou, where security is a political security, but this time it is the great foreign powers [Sudan, Chad], it is the foreign states that are behind the crises. But because of diplomacy we cannot name these countries (Bozizé 2006e; see also Bozizé 2006f).

His opponents were both political parties and rebels. All the cities he named in the quote are in the northern part of the CAR. Bozizé also linked the MLPC party to insecurity and troublemaking. He did this because it was useful for him to build consensus. The MLPC was the party of former President Patassé that Bozizé removed from power. Bozizé also established previously that it was Patassé who brought foreigners into the country and caused damage. He mobilized the past regime's wrongdoings to justify his coup and regime in several speeches. In this way, the discourse being used at this time fomented a sense of an unwanted past of which he had previously spoken. He further brought in Tiringoulou, an area in the north-east, and linked it to other rebels to create a sense that the CAR was a victim of foreign powers. At the same time, Bozizé acted as if he was protecting the country by not disclosing names. He wanted his audience to suspect Sudan and Chad as perpetrators, both of which had been involved in proxy wars at the time and whose rebels used the CAR as a rear base for their attacks.

The President deescalated his confrontational discourse and organized a Political Dialogue in December 2008, which showed a shift in the conditions of his governance. Throughout the years, Bozizé succeeded in constantly staging political dramas that allowed him to present himself as doing good for the country, as the saviour and the working man, who worked for the development of the country. In his representations, the rebels were foreigners who did not want good in the country. In other words, Bozizé sought to represent foreigners as problematic and consistently mobilized this rhetoric. He invited his audience to assume that they were troublesome, and this was a consistent message prior to 2013.

To make sure that the rebels and political opposition were considered the enemies, Bozizé always presented his achievements to his audience. His strategy here was to present himself as walking the talk.

Work was his mantra, and that resurfaced in his speeches. For instance, he would present his achievements in terms of building institutions, such as the National Assembly, the Constitutional Court, the Social and Economic Council (Bozizé 2006j). In another instance in 2007, in a discourse in Sango in Sido, north CAR, as he was celebrating the anniversary of his patriotic movement (March 15, 2007), Bozizé claimed that he was relentlessly fighting for the CAR to be known internationally and that he was working for the country (Bozizé 2007b). The government launched several projects (Bozizé 2007c) that were internationally backed, but he made clear that the projects could not come to realization if there was no security in the country (Bozizé 2007e). In that sense, work, development, and peace and security were linked: “work can only be done in peace, the love of one’s neighbor and security. A country cannot develop in anarchy” (Bozizé 2007d). Bozizé also advanced that the international community was committed to helping the country; the donors pledged, and made money available, but people were not working. He argued that rebels and other politicians started war instead (Bozizé 2008a). In the same vein, Bozizé presented his achievements in a Sango discourse during the 2008 Independence Day.

We have established a constitution, organized the elections, set up the various institutions of the country, such as the Constitutional Court, the High Council of Communication [...] We organized big meetings with international partners. We have carried out major works. The results have created shame and frustration among some (Bozizé 2008b).

Basically, people were rebelling despite his achievements, understood under the broader theme of “work.” He argued that he was succeeding in developing the country and that these achievements were creating frustrations. However, that is not all. As Bozizé was working and setting up institutions, he further isolated opponents and cast doubts on their actions. In his opinion, if he was working for the country, why would people rebel? This kind of suspicion and questioning cast doubt on the motive of rebels. In the French version of the 2008 Independence Day speech, he asked,

Where does the desire to again resort to weapons come from when the Central Africans now have the opportunity to express themselves through the legislative bodies set up by the Constitution which recognizes the ability of all parties, both the majority and the opposition, to express themselves freely through the media, but also through the ballot box? (Bozizé 2008b)

In other words, if, through his achievements, institutions were running, why would the opposition resort to weapons? Of course, he neglected to mention that these were the institutions that he had control of and where the opposition had voiced concern over ethnic and exclusionary governance since at least 2004 (ADP et al. 2004).

In Bozizé's speeches, not only were the foreign rebels against development, they were also against the unity of Central Africans. In his 2006 New Year's Eve speech, Bozizé urged people to embrace genuine reconciliation (Bozizé 2007a). With regard to the peace accords, "Our ambition today more than yesterday, is to continue this policy of openness and extend a hand to all the daughters and all the sons of the Central African nation" (Bozizé 2007c).⁸⁸ In the same speech, he promoted and discussed peace. He signed various peace deals with rebels prior to the national dialogue of 2008.⁸⁹ He presented himself as the one who took initiatives and signed peace accords with rebels because the country was ruined. Since "nothing sustainable can be built without a very broad popular support, I decided to reach out to all the compatriots." He used the peace deals as an opportunity to further the idea that he was a rallying president. As Bozizé already signed several peace deals and was awaiting the political dialogue, unity, peace, and work became prominent themes for him. His vision was well illustrated when he claimed,

This year [2008], the commemoration of August 13 is placed under the sign of peace, unity and commitment to the construction of our country with the motto "Kwa na Kwa," meaning work, nothing but work. This is the spirit in which the Central African nation united in its diversity will find the way of development and prosperity (Bozizé 2008b).

Once again, he was the president of unity: a rallying president. In such circumstances, why would rebels take weapons? To him, they were against his rallying efforts. Bozizé reminded people of stability and the conditions under which the country would develop and become prosperous. On December 8, 2008, the Political Dialogue kicked off and this represented another shift in Bozizé's rule.

⁸⁸ He further advanced that "what unites us is deeper than what separates us." See also (Bozizé 2007e).

⁸⁹ Peace accord with the FDPC of Abdoulaye Miskine in Syrte on February 2, 2007. He signed another peace deal with the UFDR on April 13, 2007. On May 9, 2008, Bozizé signed a peace deal with the APRD.

3.3 After the Inclusive Political Dialogue, De-escalation, and Elections

In June 2008, the government signed a comprehensive peace agreement in Libreville (Gabon). The peace deal agreed to “a complete ceasefire, a general amnesty, the release of prisoners, the integration of rebels into the national army, and commitment to a new DDR program supported by the international community” (Herbert, Dukhan and Debos 2013, 12). However, the deal broke down, and in December 2008, the government held the Inclusive Political Dialogue (IPD).⁹⁰ The IPD involved the government, the rebels, and the political opposition. The IPD lasted two weeks (8-20 December 2008) with 200 participants. Herbert, Dukhan and Debos (2013, 12) assert that the IPD sought to “design a plan of action to implement the 2008 peace agreement” when in fact, it was a “façade” that “mask(ed) each player’s second thoughts” (ICG 2008, 2). The IPD did not accomplish its objectives due to divergent actions from all stakeholders. The ICG (2008, 1) advanced that “the donors emptied the political dialogue of the security element that is at the heart of the crisis.” Indeed, several of Bozizé supporters in 2003, the ex-liberators, from the rebellion against Patassé, were angry because Bozizé did not sufficiently reward them for their war efforts. On the government’s side, Bozizé distorted “the general amnesty he agreed upon with the rebel movements during the peace talks into a weapon of exclusion” (ICG 2008, 1). The political opposition, on their side, wanted to “transform the concept of political dialogue that was agreed in December 2006 into a mechanism to produce quick regime change” (Ibid.). The important question of reconciliation was not a preoccupation for these stakeholders. In any case, the IPD was an important event during which former president Patassé, who was present, spoke of the “new birth” of the CAR (Patassé 2008). The third phase of Bozizé’s rule spans from the IPD in 2008 to his re-election in 2011.

When studying elite instrumentalization of identity in wars, the longer perspective of authoritarianism is helpful to examining how they ground their power through the information they want

⁹⁰ The Libreville peace agreement did not hold because “the rebels broke the ceasefire due to the government’s draft of the new amnesty law—the rebels argued that various clauses disadvantaged the rebels, compared to people in the security forces, and would make it impossible for many of the rebels to benefit from the amnesty” (Herbert, Dukhan and Debos 2013, 12).

their audience to consume. The pre-war situation can help explain why certain themes that elites manipulate in periods of war resonate with followers. The themes are not made up completely in the last moments of the regime. In the CAR, from 2008 until it was clear that rebels posed a threat again in 2012, Bozizé continued undermining opponents to gain popular support and furthered his previously laid agenda around work as a pathway to development (Bozizé 2003a). As Schatz reminds us, “Elites enjoy a range of strategies to frame how the public apprehends material conditions” (Schatz 2009, 207). In that sense, continuously repeating his mantra of work and development and linking them to several other themes would present Bozizé’s challengers as against the improvement of the country. For instance, in 2009, he officially created his party, KnK (*Kwa na Kwa*), that would represent his mantra.

By 2008, Bozizé had been in power for five years. He refocused on unity in his speeches. The IPD and the various peace deals might have lowered the threat to his government. The unity theme clearly reappeared through patriotism and is linked to his enduring theme of work.⁹¹ The (re)promotion of the regime’s accommodating stance was present after the IPD. During his 2009 independence speech in December, Bozizé states, “we have worked a lot since the change of March 15, 2003. I did not work alone. I [included] everyone. All Central Africans have worked” (Bozizé 2009d). He was actively bridging “all Central Africans” with “work” and that he associated “everyone,” whereas, inclusive governance formed part of the existing grievances against him. Bozizé emphasized that unity was the base for national reconstruction, which was another variation on the work theme. In a speech on Independence Day in 2009, he explained that “it is in this base of the National Unity that we can lay the foundations of a real national reconstruction, exploiting and developing our abundant natural resources” (Bozizé 2009d). Bozizé was linking a number of themes here. With unity, reconstruction and development are possible and natural resources could be exploited. Disunity cannot deliver all those. The

⁹¹ For the 2008 Independence Day Bozizé stressed that “You must not be afraid to work for your country. You must put the Central African Republic in the forefront in your lives before your personal needs. Central African Republic first. If it was important to you, today the country would be at peace” (Bozizé 2008c).

country needed unity for development. This was a call to support him since he was the president of work.

Bozizé was framing the debate to show that unity was linked with a sense of loss. In the context of rebellion, this is significant. Bozizé romanticized the unity of the past in comparison to the present rebellion that did not allow such unity which would be the basis for development: again, rebels are against development. In the speech of the fourth anniversary of his swearing in, he claimed that

The Central African Republic, which was advancing and progressing well, since it had remarkable natural assets, began to recede, since we have lost the essential point of references that vanished in the turbulence that tore us apart and bruised us. First, the benchmark of the general interest in particular, that of this compelling unity around our homeland which does not exclude the diversity of opinions [...] Then the benchmark of the preservation of the common good, the largest of which is the future of the Central African Nation, the protection of the citizen and its soil. Finally, the benchmark of pride, the dignity that wants us to fight to live standing by the intelligence that our country has, by the hard work and persevering, which requires method so that work does not mean disruption (Bozizé 2009a).

The country lost unity and the preservation of common good and dignity. Bozizé knew that the CAR is a diverse country, displaying an accommodating stance when he said that diversity of opinion is not a threat to unity. However, his emphasis was on unity and it was a compelling unity that had been lost in the country (in French, *impérieuse unité*). A compelling unity around homeland was lost. In other words, patriotism was lost.

Bozizé was mostly interested in his development achievements and proving that he was the president that the country needed. In 2009, the CAR qualified for debt reduction as part of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative.⁹² This achievement reinforced the development-focused rhetoric, and it helped Bozizé prove his point. At that point, his speeches target both the international and domestic audiences. Bozizé used his development achievements to frame his regime as a good student of aid conditionality, a theme important to international donors. As a good student, the regime is rewarded with the HIPC. That Bozizé was granted HIPC demonstrates that themes of development and security resonated with international partners, as I showed above. Simultaneously, domestically, it served to prove

⁹² The World Bank and the IMF started this initiative in 1996 (Fonds Monétaire International 2016).

to his political opponents that his regime was legitimate (different from his predecessors) and was bearing fruit. To further his point, he advanced that

we have been lent a lot of money, but the previous governments have eaten all the money, they have embezzled the money. That is why you see suffering is present here. I cannot tell you what they did with the money. They did not do anything concrete with it. They did not even arrange the roads, they did not even arrange the schools, they did not do anything (Bozizé 2009b; see also Bozizé 2009a).

This speech shows that he was clearly blaming previous politicians for poverty, despite all the money that the country had been lent. Importantly, it was through his achievements that donors were relieving the CAR from some debts. Bozizé was working to fix the damages that previous governments created.

Bozizé did not completely let go of foreigners in his speeches at this time. Further, other elites in his regime explicitly claimed that rebels who were not respecting the IPD recommendations were not Central African (Yekoua-Kette 2009). In a speech in Sango at the creation of the KNK party in 2009, Bozizé warned,

Watch out for strangers who come to coax you with food, drink, making you believe they love you. These are lies, be very careful about their intentions. When they tell you that Bozizé is a bad person, you have to do this, you have to do that, be very careful. But I do not see what I did wrong! I did not kill anyone! You are coaxed even with money. But know that they are bad people, that is witchcraft. It is witchcraft [*likundu*] that destroys the Central African Republic (Bozizé 2009c).

At the creation of his political party, Bozizé presented speeches both in French and Sango. In the audio file of the speech, he used words that demean so-called foreigners. Bozizé made sure that foreigners remained relevant as a theme even if a peace accord had been signed with several rebel groups. Elsewhere, he claimed that if “the gendarmerie or the OCRB [Office central de répression du banditisme] arrest someone, it is because he is a gang member, a bandit, someone involved in the rebellion. We cannot be eternally weak. I solemnly say this, and it should be heard” (Bozizé 2009d). He opened doors to the instrumentalization of security forces as he would deploy it against anyone who would be the de facto supporter of rebellion.

Although Bozizé kept discussing his favourite themes “work” and “unity,” the government’s

actions increasingly excluded political opposition and disregarded the various peace deals. It did not appear that Bozizé focused on instrumentalizing ethnic identity for political support in his speeches during this period. One plausible explanation for not emphasizing ethnicity could be that he already presented himself as a president of unity, which is a persistent, yet ambivalent, theme in his speeches. In any case, elites' public speeches "rarely accurately mirror reality, but instead embellish or disguise it. Such rhetoric represented a strategic effort on the part of leaders to manage what they wanted people to see of authorities. Projections of leadership therefore had a purpose: to impact [the] publics' perceptions and, hence, behaviour" (Desrosiers and Thomson 2011, 437). Moreover, when political elites presented implausible information "It discredits itself and perhaps the regime with it" (Schatz 2009, 207). In that sense, Bozizé knew that previous presidents used ethnic mobilization for political purposes in their discourses, especially Patassé and his allies (Mehler 2005; Danzi 2011). It did not work and Bozizé used that to present himself as the president of unity, designating him as different from his predecessors who divided Central Africans by instrumentalizing ethnicity.

Even if Bozizé seemed to care about unity, it might be because of the instrumentalization of ethnicity in the CAR political life. Previous presidents mobilized ethnicity in their governing style, and Patassé even retaliated against specific ethnic communities associated with his political opponents. However, Bozizé did not seem to work towards unity, even if he pretended to. For instance, if we reconsider the speech he gave at the closing ceremony of the IPD, Bozizé was explicit that he would not implement the recommendations of the IPD. Some of the recommendations included forming a "consensus government, hold free and transparent elections, install a follow-up committee, and create a truth and reconciliation commission" (Herbert, Dukhan and Debos 2013, 13). These could be considered concrete steps towards unity. In the closing speech of the IPD, Bozizé explained that

it is important to be cognizant of the means of our policy in relation to our ambitions. Central Africans, I appeal to your maturity and realism in the way of approaching the politics of our country. Our country is in crisis, it is a very indebted poor country. State revenue is not enough to cover the state expenses [...] The state does not have its own income to invest in new projects. It remains, in

this area, dependent on development partners. (Bozizé 2008e)

The President presented that he would not be able to implement recommendations because of finances, or at least that because the responsibility fell on international partners for providing funds. Structural constraints would not allow him to implement the recommendations. Moreover, he advanced that “the outcome of the IPD should not be an opportunity to allocate positions of responsibility among the participants, [in other words] the sharing of the cake. The Central African Republic is not a cake to share” (Bozizé 2008e).⁹³ Two arguments then serve to establish that the recommendations of the Political Dialogue were stillborn. First, financial means were an excuse to disregard it. Second, inclusive participation into government was not an option. Ultimately, Bozizé did not commit to peace and inclusion. In fact, other rebel groups appeared after the IPD (such as the CPJP *Convention des Patriotes pour la Justice et la Paix*) claiming that Bozizé did not respect his commitments and that he did not want to implement the recommendations of the IPD (M’Bringa-Togbo 2009; Madimba-Nimba 2009; *Le Confident* 2009). The CAR held joint elections – presidential and parliamentary – on January 23, 2011, and a second round of parliamentary elections on March 27, 2011, amidst tension and Bozizé’s non-inclusiveness. Bozizé won the presidential election during the first round, scoring a majority vote.

3.4 Séléka Rebellion and (Re)escalation of Foreignness Themes: A Déjà Vu

The reasons behind the Séléka rebellion have been highlighted elsewhere (Lombard 2016; Carayannis and Lombard 2015). What I am interested in is showing that Bozizé’s speeches adapted to

⁹³ In the speech, Bozizé claimed to be quoting Patassé (2008) for that sentence but in the Patassé’s speech that the newspaper provided, I could not see the exact sentence. I suppose the mismatch could be that part of Patassé’s speech was in Sango and that the newspaper provided only the French part of his speech. A second explanation could be that after a French speech, Patassé delivered a Sango one and the newspaper did not provide it. A third understanding could be that the speech was in Sango only and the newspaper translation differed from Bozizé’s interpretation. In Patassé’s speech, a sentence close to what Bozizé claim to be quoting would be “You have seen for yourself the limit to the power of weapons [...] The solution is not to ask you to leave power. It [the solution] lies essentially in the style of leading the people to democratic, transparent and fair elections in 2010.” In French “Vous avez vous-même vu la limite de la puissance des armes [...] La solution n’est pas de vous demander de quitter le pouvoir. Elle réside essentiellement dans le style de conduire le peuple aux élections démocratiques, transparentes et justes en 2010” (Patassé 2008).

that shifting internal challenge. Bozizé's speeches, after his re-election in 2011, mirrored the 2006 period, but also built on the continuous boundary drawing between his rule and his opponents. In the post-2011 election period, there was another escalation in the mobilization of foreignness similar to the 2006 period. Bozizé was removed from power in March 2013, which means that he spent approximately two years in power after the 2011 elections.

Foreignness reappeared in Bozizé's speeches based on the situations he faced, not only in the last years of his regime. For instance, Khabure (2013, 43) advanced that since 2011, Bozizé's government developed an anti-Muslim discourse in their politics: "They have repeatedly referred to the presence of Sudanese 'Janjaweds' and other Chadian 'Islamists' in rebel movements and the SELEKA coalition. ... and numerous arrests of Muslims and northerners have increased in Bangui." Similarly, Kilembe (2015, 96) advanced that, with the rise of Séléka and starting from December 2012, "Several public speeches were delivered which expressed hatred towards the Muslim community." It gives the impression that it is only in the last years of Bozizé regime that he instrumentalized Muslim identity as foreign. I have shown this to be inaccurate: rather, Bozizé (re)escalated issues of foreignness, and was consistent as he repeated that he built a lot in the country and people were angry despite of his successful work. Remember that when information is implausible, it runs the risk of being discredited and also delegitimize the regime that puts the information forward (Schatz 2009, 207).

After the elections in 2011, there were frustrations among political elites and uncertainty around how Bozizé's rule would unfold, especially knowing that the elections were full of irregularities (*Le Citoyen* 2011a). Bozizé gave a speech at his swearing-in ceremony in 2011, where he focused on the need to consolidate his achievements (Bozizé 2011a). The speech at his swearing-in ceremonies evolved over time. In 2005, when Bozizé was sworn in, he equated his election to the acceptance of his campaign program around peace, security, and development. In the 2011 elections, when the social dynamic had changed, he spoke of consolidation. Doing a continuous self-assessment is a way to remind people of

where the country came from, and that it was because of him that the situation improved no matter what his opponents said. In that sense, having someone else in power would be detrimental to the country. He understood at this swearing in ceremony that, with his re-election, the population sent a message of “peace, national unity, socio-economic development as well as the improvement of living conditions” (Bozizé 2011a). Specifically, he reproduced and reinforced the fact that he represented everything that was positive for the country. The second mandate, as he claimed, would be one of “the national reconstruction, the consolidation of the economy and the finances, the rebirth and reinforcement of the nascent democracy in our country” (Bozizé 2011e). He could continue focusing on these achievements because the previous mandate, “has had the merit of reconciling the Central Africans with themselves, of restoring national harmony by promoting political and social dialogue and of giving a new impetus to our country” (Bozizé 2011a). Indeed, the peace theme waned in the sense that peace was taken for granted, was attained, and no longer something to search for since everyone is reconciled. Another type of work was required.

The vision for the future was clear, and this implied a continuous rejection of the past, one that Bozizé consistently mobilized, and which the population would have been familiar with at the time. During his swearing-in ceremony, Bozizé explained in Sango, “I am going to work because we must not go back. Our country is so ruined that we must not regress. I will assume my duties in peace and in peace alone. We do not want trouble anymore” (Bozizé 2011b). Bozizé continued mobilizing the past regime and past fears to establish his rule. That he continued with the same strategy reveals that he was not confident in his rule. He knew that elections were rigged in his favour. Bozizé was also setting the stage for less space for inclusive governance. That Bozizé would rule in peace shows that peace is taken for granted and not problematized. That he would rule in peace meant that political opposition will be “destroyed” (Bozizé 2011b) and that “there will therefore be no places for the agitators, or for the gravediggers of the Republic, neither for the corrupters and the corrupts, nor for the lazy. Recreation is

over! I repeat recreation is definitely over!” (Bozizé 2011a).⁹⁴

There was a significant shift in the discourse. Bozizé had not spoken of attacking the opposition that strongly before, although he always tried to delegitimize them. Choosing the swearing-in ceremony to convey the message was an important symbolic moment since several national and international actors were present and the event was widely broadcast. In that context, “Recreation is over” was meant to signal to both rebels and any opponents that he would be intolerant of dissent. The post-election phase set the stage for a confrontation. The meaning of “recreation” derives from context and it is implied here that whatever was happening prior to that exact moment was a distraction, a parenthesis in history. In other words, real politics started at that moment.

Bozizé was more consistent in this period laying out his vision for the country, and he emphasized development as a theme that reached multiple constituencies. Bozizé’s speeches provided an understanding of how he wanted the regime to be perceived and the ideology behind his actions. For instance, another point that shows continuity at this stage was the emphasis on rebel activities as against development. Indeed, for him, rebels had halted development work (Bozizé 2011c). In a Sango speech he delivered to demobilized combatants in 2011, he used an accusatory tone explaining: “we asked the Germans to build roads and houses for you [population of Bocaranga]. But the conflicts, the noise of the Kalashnikovs have made these projects fail. Whose fault is it? Whose fault is it? Is it the fault of Bozizé? It is your fault” (Bozizé 2011c). Again, he was establishing a relationship between underdevelopment, poverty, and rebels. To further establish that perception in a context where Séléka rebels proved to be a threat, Bozizé held various rallies to build support.

As presented, other armed groups formed after the IPD, Bozizé did not implement the conclusions

⁹⁴ In his discourse in Sango during the swearing-in ceremony, he explained that opposition parties that created the FARE (*Front pour l’Annulation et la Reprise des Élections de 2011*) “to blind [him], will never succeed! I am going to destroy this FARE so that it cannot blind me” (Bozizé 2011b). He used a metaphor that is better understood in French. FARE is homophonic with *phare* (light, beam, car lights, lighthouse) (Ibid.). Suggesting that the opposition movement would stop him from accomplishing his vision. Metaphors take the familiar to push forward specific rearticulation of reality.

of the IPD, and his government became more exclusionary (Smith 2015b). In that context, the armed group in the north-east formed a coalition and proved to be a serious threat to Bozizé. But Bozizé brought back accusatory speech against foreigners just as in 2006. As he explained: “It is the foreigners who cause trouble and do whatever they want in the country. Therefore, the Central African Republic is only receding, receding, receding. I always said it” (*Le Citoyen* 2011c). It was not Bozizé’s actions that were creating dissent, but foreigners. The novelty during this phase was that Bozizé constructed himself as a victim. The strategy was to claim not to know the reason for the war. For instance, Bozizé asked, “What fault did I commit? There are currently no political prisoners, the press is free. Why did they [rebels] begin to rape, kill and harm the Central African population? That is witchcraft. One cannot build a country like that” (Bozizé 2012b). In the same speech, he advanced that “they [the rebels] want to take power in Bangui with the Ndjandjawid [Janjaweed] and others” (Bozizé 2012b). Bozizé was denying or minimizing his responsibility and shifting the responsibility of the situation (rebellion against his regime) to external causes. Janjaweed is a foreign term, mostly associated with Sudan. Bozizé remobilized his previous 2006 themes. By asking, “What fault did I commit?” Bozizé sought to demonstrate innocence, or at least that there was no reason to be against his regime. Even the mention of Janjaweed was not innocent since he had already attacked Sudan in previous years (2006).

To understand this, one must keep in mind two preceding points: First, Bozizé presented himself as the president of “work,” a pathway to development.⁹⁵ He was the president of development; he walked the walk, and was improving the situation of the country. Second, he constructed foreign rebels not as against his rule, but as against the development of the country. It is possible to imply here that if rebels were against Bozizé, they were also against the development of the country. But why would Central African people be against the development of the country? There seems to be no apparent reason other than locating the origins of rebellion elsewhere, leading to the focus on foreignness. It is in this sense

⁹⁵ In his speech of March 2013, few days before the coup, he continued presenting rebels as against national cohesion and development (Bozizé 2013).

that Bozizé presented himself as a victim of foreigners. By not knowing what he did, he justified that he was unjustly attacked. He, as the father of the nation, was protecting the country, and standing between the rebels and the population. He was a victim of these foreign rebels because he was developing the country. None of his governance tactics were up for reconsideration or blame. Moreover, the link with the invisible is laid out. He links foreign rebels with witchcraft or *Likundu* as he previously claimed. This shows how the invisible is mobilized in Bozizé's speeches in relation to foreign rebels.

Bozizé was taking advantage of the conditions he created and the way he framed issues throughout his reign. Themes of development, work, and unity cut across divisions and did not emphasize ethnicity. However, when it came to insecurity, Bozizé mostly targeted foreigners. During a speech at Independence Day of August 2012, an event usually widely broadcast, he explained that “some foreign forces have seen in the nascent instability an opportunity for criminal adventures at the expense of the Central African people. The presence of the LRA (Lord's Resistance Army) in the east of the Republic, as well as that of the various armed groups obeys these dark designs” (Bozizé 2012a). In that sense, rebellious activity was nothing but criminal and had a foreign origin. To make the argument plausible, Bozizé brought in the familiar LRA, which originated from Uganda but whose actions affected the CAR. He connected and conflated all other rebellions, hence attributing foreign origins to them. To him, other armed groups and the LRA were linked. He attributed characteristics of “dark designs” and foreignness to them. In the same vein, he connected rebellion to natural resources, a strategy reminiscent of 2006 (Bozizé 2012b). However, he spent more time laying down and linking rebellious activity to the presence of oil (and other natural resources) in the north-east in the speech of the rally in December 2012.⁹⁶

Rebellion against Bozizé started around his election in 2005 and the timing of the rise of Séléka is

⁹⁶ In 2011, there was an international dispute between CAR and an American oil conglomerate, and the government sought to instrumentalize the affair to point to foreigners once again, here Americans, as those financing rebellions. The dispute allowed Bozizé to suggest that foreigners want the natural resources of the country (*Le Citoyen* 2011a). For more details about the affair, see RSM Production Corporation v. Central African Republic (ICSID Case No. ARB/07/2), <https://icsid.worldbank.org/fr/Pages/cases/casedetail.aspx?CaseNo=ARB/07/2>.

strikingly similar in 2012, when Bozizé had just been re-elected the year before. Both periods show similarities. In that moment of threat against his regime, Bozizé held a rally at the end of 2012 explicitly accusing rebels of being thieves and sorcerers. At the rally, Bozizé warned his followers that “there were no Central Africans among them [rebels] but Janjaweed. Be especially vigilant with foreigners who are in the houses. They have people inside who they hide and who will come out when the moment arrives come to attack us” (Bozizé 2012b). With the various links he already established, it was easier to bluntly claim that “there are no Central Africans” among the rebels. This type of information was immediately followed by a previously assumed assumption that the danger was already within the country. Foreigners, he claimed, “will take our resources and we will become slaves” (Bozizé 2012b). Slavery was not a common theme in the speeches I have analyzed here, and any conclusion must accordingly be tentative. Nevertheless, by bringing slavery into his speeches Bozizé invited his audience to remember the slave raiding that the Muslim Sultanates conducted during the pre-colonial period. As discussed in the Introduction, slave raiding was common in the pre-colonial past and was perpetrated primarily by the sultanates from Sudan and Chad. Bozizé played on fear and the gravity of the situation. According to him, if Muslims were to rule the CAR, the population should remember the ills their ancestors committed in the name of slave raiding. On top of Bozizé’s claimed “innocence,” this was another reason to oppose Muslim-foreigners and rebels. Bozizé presented information in a way that played on the urgency of the situation but also demanded reaction against the past. Around December 2012, following Bozizé’s speech, various militias started erecting roadblocks in Bangui to check IDs and keep the Muslim population under control.⁹⁷ This could be the consequence of Bozizé’s understanding of the end of recreation as he did not take such actions in 2006.

⁹⁷ Especially the *Coalition Citoyenne d’Opposition aux Rebellion Armés* (COCORA) and the *Coalition pour les Actions Citoyennes* (COAC) (Kilembe 2015, 96). In that December speech, Bozizé has asked young people to organize themselves, to defend the country. It was a rallying speech and Bozizé spent a lot of time motivating his followers.

Concluding Remarks

Elsewhere, authors and reports have discussed how brutal and exclusionary Bozizé's regime was (ICG 2007; HRW 2007; Carayannis and Lombard 2015). I do not seek to disprove their points. If we put Bozizé in comparison to previous CAR presidents, his behaviour is not entirely new; he was brutal and relied on a patrimonial, clientelistic style of governance by putting his ethnic kin into government positions, public administration, and the security forces. Hence, if his rule resembled his predecessors, the question of how the period after the 2013 coup turned out to be the most violent episode in the country's history becomes intriguing and important. It is less clear why there has been a counter-mobilization against the rebels' rule. Hence, my focus on how Bozizé constructed rebellion as foreign, how he constructed the legitimacy of his rule, and how he actively deployed a negative vision of foreignness. I show that Bozizé constructed foreignness as against his regime, against the unity of Central Africans, and against development. A question like that prevents a deterministic view of the country's politics and recognizes each leader agency in the conditions surrounding him. That said, Bozizé's speeches are key to understanding anti-Balaka's actions because of a constructed representation of foreigners as dangerous and problematic.

By analyzing the public speeches of the regime, seeking to understand the soft authoritarianism tools he deployed, this chapter focused on how Bozizé sought to legitimize his 10-year rule. This goal of this analysis was to render comprehensible the war that followed. This chapter improves our understanding of Bozizé's regime beyond his last speeches about Muslims and foreigners.⁹⁸ Bozizé presented himself and his regime as oriented towards development, work, focused and driven towards peace and national unity. In that sense, "Rhetoric often reflects one's situation, one's standing, strength or context" (Desrosiers 2014, 219). Throughout time, this ultimately revealed the leader's vision and

⁹⁸ My findings are similar to that of Desrosiers (2014, 203) in Rwanda. Desrosiers finds that outside Rwanda's regimes terminal phases, leaders "deployed rhetoric more moderate than generally proposed as a strategy to ground their power."

ideology. In the CAR case, the speeches conveyed the regime's concern with legitimacy the entire time. Bozizé was selling his program and consistently mobilized past regimes to legitimize its own. Speeches sought to justify his actions and reassure people. It means that he did not think his regime was set on firm grounds even after he had won the elections.

Two main findings emerge from this chapter: First, Bozizé's speeches were not overtly ethnocentric. Bozizé's speeches changed and adapted to both external and domestic challenges when simultaneously promoting positive themes such as development and unity of Central Africans.⁹⁹ In the early years, he qualified his coup as a *sursaut patriotique* (patriotic uprising), as something of a superior moral order. Bozizé and his ex-liberators embodied the national will or equated their will with the national one. This served to obscure the undemocratic means through which he came to power (the coup) and to prevent people from questioning those means. Of course, there were counter discourses, but they did not get attention or enough support. For instance, opposition leader Joseph Bendounga of the political party *Mouvement Démocratique pour la Renaissance et l'Évolution de Centrafrique* (MDREC) disapproved of the coup of March 2003 and opposed Bozizé's rule at various moments (Placit 2003d; Bendounga 2006; 2007). As Bozizé continued selling his regime, dissent rose among his armed supporters, the ex-liberators, and other armed groups formed as well. Armed opposition and political opposition disagreed with Bozizé's solitary and ethnic governance style proving that rhetoric rarely mirrors reality (Desrosiers and Thomson 2011, 437). It does not mean that those speeches are less important, but rather that the stability of the positive themes allowed Bozizé to bring in themes of foreignness that he set against his positive regime.

The second important finding is that Bozizé constantly framed opponents (both political and armed groups) as those who would undermine development and the unity of Central Africans. Work or *Kwa na*

⁹⁹ For Desrosiers (2014, 221), a focus on the president's regime analysis "should be read as a series of non-deterministic junctures, resulting from past choices yet opening the door to new, very real choices and actions taken by actors reacting to how they perceive their situation, and to their perception of their, other actors' and the environment's influence on that situation."

Kwa represented the regime's vision and was a consistent theme for the 10-year Bozizé was in power. He actively promoted a negative understanding of foreigners as "lawless robbers," "bloodthirsty," and "criminal individuals" who disrespected the country and have a greed for the wealth (natural resources) of the CAR. This negative construction waxed and waned depending on the challenges Bozizé faced. Foreignness was not mobilized in a positive way in Bozizé's discourses. Foreignness appeared in times of challenges to the regime and at several points during his presidency such as in 2005-2006, when rebellion started, or in 2012, when Séléka proved to be a threat. Bozizé's speeches expressed frustration and aggressiveness towards those he designated as foreigners. The broader point is that this finding joins Bøås and Dunn (2013) in that targeting foreigners represents a political strategy for political elites to maintain political power. But in this case, foreignness was constructed over time and instrumentalization was not mechanical.

4. The Mining Sector: The Politics of Concessions and Belonging

4.1 Introduction

During my fieldwork, I was surprised by the way several respondents alleged that rapacious foreigners were pillaging their country's resources without nationals being able to benefit from it. In fact, "CAR's resources are all quite difficult to exploit. The gold and diamonds are widely dispersed and most profitably mined artisanally. The oil is in a part of the country that becomes a marsh for half the year" (Lombard 2016, 60). Considering these difficulties, the mining sector represented approximately 5% of the GDP in 2009 but fell to 2.8% in 2011 (Touadéra 2009). There are more than 470 mining indicators including oil, gold, diamond, and uranium and the full extent of natural resources is not yet known (Ibid.). Although the mining sector only contributes a small percentage of the GDP, there is a widespread popular perception that it brings in much more and that all the money - and by extension the economy - is in the hands of the foreigners. Many Central Africans have come to believe that diamond production has failed to improve the country's economic standard because they, Central Africans, are not in control of their economy.

The focus of this chapter is on the economic competition that autochthony renders possible at the macro level, and more specifically in the mining sector. Although exclusionary, autochthony is about owning both the economic and the political space and not simply about the soil. The various articulations of the CAR mining codes of 2004 and 2009,¹⁰⁰ give insights into the government's understanding of *vrai Centrafricain*: a form of capital to access a dominant position in the diamond sector. Using the mining codes, newspapers, and interviews, I found that diamond collectors are always problematized in the mining sector. My data shows that the objective of the government was to put "nationals" in control of the sector. The government's rhetoric, as I illustrate, is that foreigners are the ones to blame for poor

¹⁰⁰ Ordonnance 04.001 portant Code minier de la République Centrafricaine, http://www.droit-afrique.com/upload/doc/rca/RCA-Code-2004-minier_Abrogé.pdf and Loi n°9-005 du 29 avril 2009 Portant Code Minier de la République Centrafricaine, <http://www.droit-afrique.com/upload/doc/rca/RCA-Code-2009-minier.pdf>.

economic performance of the country as they do not invest in the CAR. In media discourses and the Bozizé government's argument, Muslims are portrayed as the foreigners pillaging the economy and not helping the development of the country. In that sense, the government was able to take advantage of the World Bank (WB) reforms to increase revenues from foreigners and make some of the intermediaries in the mining chain less necessary. It reveals how Muslims contribution to the CAR's development is not recognized exemplifying autochthony capital competition.

The chapter evidences that discourses of autochthony are not always about land alone. It is an identity capital that illustrates competition between social groups. That competition is discursive, social, and material. It is separate from elite instrumentalization but should be analyzed alongside it. To illustrate this, this chapter makes four points. First, I briefly present the history of diamond mining. Second, I show that, historically, presidents have been concerned with maximizing the revenues they could get from diamonds, but also with the Africanization of the economy. To this end, I mobilize the concept of concessionary politics. Third, I analyze the World Bank's mining code reforms, showing that these technical reforms were in fact political from the government's perspective. Finally, I reflect on the contentious operation Closing Gate of 2008 in which the government dispossessed several diamond businessmen. While the operation itself has been criticized already (ICG 2010; Dalby 2015), not enough attention has been paid to the way the government sought to justify its actions by accusing the diamond collectors and deploying a legal argument followed with repression. Bozizé's government and the independent media portrayed collectors in the production chain and problematize them as "profiteers," "threats," "invaders," or "exploiters" of artisanal miners. This way of linking Muslims and foreigners illustrates how the latest articulation of concessionary politics is parasitic upon the discourse of autochthony.

4.2 A Short History of Diamond Mining

The concessionary regime in the CAR, as discussed in the introductory chapter, started in 1899 and

shaped the diamond sector. A concessionary agent discovered the first CAR diamond in Ippy (central-eastern CAR) in 1914 (Kalck 1992, 241–42). Diamonds were later found in Berbérati (south-west) in 1931 by the *Compagnie Minière de l'Oubangui Oriental* (CMOO) (Barthélémy et al. 2008, 28). At the time, diamond exploitation was not really promising for the companies, which were interested in rubber collection, cotton, and coffee. Diamond mining itself began in 1927 and soon became the second-most important export commodity after cotton around the 1950s (Kalck 1959, 189-190; ICG 2010, 1). One specificity in the CAR is that the alluvial diamonds are of “gem” quality and type, hence they are highly valued.¹⁰¹ As an example, in the DRC, the diamond quality is worth USD 30 average per karat,¹⁰² while in the CAR, it is USD 180 average per karat (Barthélémy et al. 2008, 21). At full potential, the diamond sector’s estimated production could reach 650,000 karats a year (Kimberley Process Report 2003, 3).

The discovery of diamonds and the rush that ensued disrupted the ways of living of rural populations (Kalck 1971, 31). The rush for money pushed peasants to leave their villages and they “deserted villages and plantations extended for miles” during the colonial period (Kalck 1971, 127). The presence of foreigners in the diamond sector originated from the vast number of companies that obtained concessions during the colonial period.¹⁰³ In fact, Belgian Congo prospectors formed a mining syndicate after the WWI in Ubangi Chari and, between 1928 and 1930, close to 1,500 mining permits were delivered under the colonial concessionary regime (Kalck 1971, 66). Under colonization, the first companies were the *Compagnie Équatoriale des Mines* and the CMOO (Ibid., 66 and 87).

Several French companies were involved in diamond mining since the late 1920s. They formed partnerships and syndicates to prevent an “influx of newcomers” in the mining sector (Kalck 1971, 74). Interest in diamonds and their revenues quickly rose prior to independence. In 1930, diamond production

¹⁰¹ “Gem diamonds are diamonds with colour and clarity that make them suitable for jewelry or investment use” (King nd, sec.3). CAR diamonds rank fifth in the world (Chupezi Ingram and Schure 2009, 15).

¹⁰² A karat is equivalent to 0.20 gram (Diamant-Gems, nd).

¹⁰³ Out of the several companies present during colonial times, “26 mining companies and [20] individual entrepreneurs operated in Oubangui-Chari” from 1927 to 1964 (ICG 2010, fn.4, 1).

was just 3,000 karats (Kalck 1971, 66), and, in 1952, it was 146,148 karats (Ibid., 87). Concessionary officers obtained these results through forced labour. In the 1950s, the United States became the principal importer of the CAR's diamonds (Kalck 1971, 87) as the diamond sector drew the interest of an American company, Diamond Distributor Inc. (DDI). The company "increased its holding in the *Compagnie Minière de l'Oubangui Oriental*" (Kalck 1971, 87). At first, the exploitation of diamonds was mainly done by these mining companies, and they strived to support the artisanal sector in order to optimize output and professionalize the sector (Barthélémy et al. 2008, 34).

After independence in the 1960s, the government battled a drop in its revenues. Some diamond production areas were exhausted, and no new explorations were done (Barthélémy et al. 2008, 33). As a result, diamond production fell to 49,500 karats (Kalck 1971, 126). In fact, the abandoned sites turned out to be richer than originally expected, as peasants later became involved in the diamond digging to increase their revenues (Kalck 1971, 127).¹⁰⁴ In 1964, DDI and the CAR government formed the *Syndicat des Grands Collecteurs* in an attempt to discover industrial diamonds and control the artisanal diamond production (Ministères des Affaires Étrangères 2006, 20-21). They closed their activities in 1967 due to poor results (Barthélémy et al. 2008, 33). According to Barthélémy et al., mining companies have, since that experience, "initiated, alongside their main activity, support of artisanal miners/diggers who work on their permit and are thus playing the role of a collector." This matters to understand how mining production operates in the CAR. Companies are not industrial companies. They operate alongside artisanal miners whom they also finance. Foreign companies shaped the mining sector, but they were obliged to cooperate with presidents who sought to benefit from mining revenues to stay in power. The concept of concessionary politics is a useful starting place to analyze the interaction between foreign companies and presidents.

¹⁰⁴ The first president, David Dacko, passed a law on 17 January 1961 that allowed villagers "to exploit diamonds outside the mining concessions" and established purchasing offices (Kalck 1971, 127). That law "gave Central Africans the right to start their own small gold and diamond mines" (ICG, 2010, 1).

4.3 Presidents, Concessionary Politics, and the Mining Sector

Diamonds are the country's most emblematic mineral resource (Dalby 2015). To stay in power, presidents used mining concessions to secure revenues and to manage their relations with foreign companies. The concept of "concessionary politics" (Hardin 2011; Smith 2015b) is used to characterize elites' behaviour in power and the role played by diamonds. The concept evolved historically and differ depending on the president in power. Under Bozizé, the politics of concessions followed an autochthony framework, that is, increasing competition to secure revenues implied an exclusion of Muslim-foreigners from the mining chain.

Previously, concessionary politics took on another meaning in the authoritarian politics of the CAR as developed by two key authors. For Hardin (2011, 115), concessionary politics refers to "social and territorial struggles for control of natural resources, labor, and knowledge." In this case, various groups compete for the control of resources and their production, and redistribution (Ibid.). Drawing on Hardin's work, Smith (2015b) argues that concessionary politics refers to the ability of elites to generate revenues from the state's weak institutional capacity. State authorities outsource their sovereign capacity and "draw benefits from [...] the broader lack of institutional capacity" of the country (Smith 2015b, 103; Pegg 2009). As groups compete for the control of resources, those resources do need not to be natural in Smith's iteration of concessionary politics or, at least, the resources could be natural and institutional. For Smith, concessionary politics reflects what he calls the paradox of scarcity, that is, "the ability of a ruling elite to draw substantial benefits from its own incompetence and the broader lack of institutional capacity in a poor country" (2015b, 103). In that sense, the governing elites have found a way to make the poverty of the country work for them. From these authors, I can state that concessionary politics reveal both local and national forms of struggle over the production of resources. Foreign companies and political elites play a role in it. However, the autochthony dimension of such competition has been missing from these accounts.

Central Africans often assume that there is a straightforward link between the presence of diamonds and development. In 2011, the CAR was the world's 11th largest diamond producer (EITI Report 2015, 21). It is useful to reflect on how various presidents have worked with foreign actors in the mining sector. Indeed, upon surveying various presidents' control of the mining sector, it is clear that increasing revenues from the sector was their main preoccupation. Successive presidents have always considered being in power to be a way of enriching themselves (de Vries and Glawion 2015, 14-17; Marchal 2015b; Smith 2015a). Various presidents' strategy was to "subcontract the management of national goods to non-nationals in return for hefty compensation" (Dalby 2015, 124). This is linked to the fact that the country lacked the required human capacity at time of independence and failed to develop it after independence. Presidents outsourced state capacity to various foreign companies and made revenues, therefore increasing CAR's institutional weaknesses. Here, concessions are personal mining authorizations that the presidents could give to whomever they wished.¹⁰⁵ They make concessions as long as they can benefit from it. Presidents did not hesitate to retaliate when those receiving concessions did not meet their demands. They threatened not to deliver or renew permits. That behaviour, at times, overlapped with the management of the mining sector by the presidents' cronies. Since independence, presidents have kept the personal power to grant licences to mine, until Bozizé stopped this practice in 2003 and gave it a new twist.

At independence, President Dacko, as well as his successor, President Bokassa, were concerned with the place that Central Africans held in the economy. At that time, development economics regarded the state as the main actor that would spearhead economic growth, and modernization theorists in the 1950s were confident that economic development would bring democracy (Lipset 1959). Moreover, Africanization was a policy ambition of most African countries at independence, that is, Africanization was a means of development and a means of gaining legitimacy through inclusion in the economy.

¹⁰⁵ Concessions can play out differently depending on the resource. See Hardin (2011) for how concessionary plays out locally, nationally, and internationally in CAR regarding forest conservations.

Under the first president David Dacko, ministers were interested in taking advantage of their position and enriching themselves (Kalck 1971, 116-7). The few educated people were interested in making more money.¹⁰⁶ President Dacko himself had a deliberate development strategy that sought the “complete reorganisation of all existing economic structures [...] starting with the production sector” (Ibid., 136). There were reforms in the cotton sector as well as the mining sector. For instance, he decided to create the *Union Cotonnière Centrafricaine* with French private companies in order to “take charge of the whole sphere of production, ranging from cultivation to commercialisation” (Ibid., 137). They sought to control the cost of cotton cultivation to improve the revenues for the state. Dacko sought to industrialize the textile industry, and even had planned to make the CAR access the ocean, but the project did not materialize (Ibid., 142-144). Dacko also planned several industrialization programs in the domains of oil, soap, and cement (Ibid., 142). For these plans, several French companies were involved.

Meanwhile, the behaviour of the post-independence elite exemplified that the state was the place to get rich, not the business sector. There were few educated people, and not enough technical skills to carry out Dacko’s vision. Under a politics of concessions, non-nationals were welcomed to provide revenues for the government. For instance, in 1961, shortly after independence, French individuals teamed up with the Minister of the Home Office, Jean Arthur Bandio to create *Société Centrafricaine du Diamant*. President Dacko did not allow the company to operate, but instead entrusted another company (*Société Israélo-Centrafricaine du Diamant*, ICAD) formed by Israelis and other Central Africans (Kalck 1971, 127). He exempted the company from taxation, despite his need to increase revenue (Ibid.). French companies were also involved in the economic sector from the mines to uranium, and to breweries and hardwood (Titley 1997, 76).

At the time, Dacko wanted diamond purchasing offices to invest in the areas under their control,

¹⁰⁶ For instance, Kalck (1971, 116) advanced that “Central African political life centred entirely around this privileged caste [of the 55 more or less uneducated deputies], who seemed to be entirely indifferent to the low standard of living of the thousands in the villages.” For him, “The clerks of yesterday, now Ministers of the Republic, were consumed with a thirst for power and took no interest in the miserable conditions of the ordinary people” (Ibid., 117).

but he allowed DDI to become a monopoly in the country (Kalck 1971, 139). He then built on the presence of the company to establish the first *taillerie* (diamond-cutting factory) in Africa. The US company and Dacko established an agreement that the diamond cutting factory was to solely use Central African personnel (Ibid., 139). The total diamond output rose to 442,281 karats in 1964, a significant improvement from the 1930s. The increase in production was due to the liberalization effect of Dacko's 1961 law. Moreover, the mining companies that abandoned their mining sites because they thought the areas were no longer profitable produced skilled miners in search of work. In that sense, "former employees of mining companies formed [...] the bulk of a new wave of artisanal miners/ diggers who exploited deposits that have been deserted by these companies as they judged them industrially unprofitable. The former employees knew the places and the techniques of exploitation" (Barthélémy et al. 2008, 35). Although Dacko wanted Central African personnel involved in industrial companies, the law followed a deliberate development strategy.

President Bokassa's coup in December 1965 echoed the policy of Africanizing the administration, underlining the fear that the mining sector was benefiting foreign profiteers. In April 1966, "Various adventurers of different nationalities were given forty-eight hours to leave Central African territory" (Kalck 1971, 159). Revenues from the diamond sector increased from CFA 390 million in 1965 to CFA 875 million in 1968. Diamond production rose to 609,327 karats in 1968 (Ibid., 161). At the same time, Bokassa's presidency marked a break from concern over the country's development as he searched for a solitary management of power (Kalck 1971; Bigo 1988; Titley 1997). He started managing natural resources and the country's budget as his own money. This was clearly different from Dacko's period.

Bokassa tried to "gain control of the diamond trade, claiming that it did not bring the state enough profits" (Kalck 1971, 171). For instance, Bokassa allowed DDI (the American company) – to form an international consortium with other buying offices from France, the Netherlands, and Israel – with 40% of the profit going to the CAR. In the mid-1960s, the government derived CFA 174 million francs from

this source (Ibid., 160). A consistent theme appearing in the histories of both Dacko and Bokassa is thus the revenue that the mines could potentially bring to the country, though for different reasons. Bokassa put one of his ministers in charge of a new purchasing office: The *Office National du Diamant* (Kalck 1971, 159, 171; Titley 1997, 74). While Dacko did not tolerate his ministers' involvement in business, Bokassa promoted it. This pushed the politics of concessions further under Bokassa, allowing governing elites to make deals with foreign companies and enrich themselves. Bokassa collected money from several companies (Bigo 1988, 91). The rule under Bokassa was to invite him to become a director in the company and, after that, pay him (Titley 1997, 75; Bigo 1988, 117). Bokassa nationalized ownership to use the revenues of state companies to enrich himself (Bigo 1988, 117-119). Moreover, in continuation with Africanizing¹⁰⁷ the economy, he issued a decree on August 6, 1971, that Africanized the decision-making position in the industrial companies present in the country (Ibid., 93). He replaced French decision makers with Central Africans.

The concessionary politics still existed within the Africanization environment at the time, allowing presidents to secure revenues and make deals with companies. In 1969, a diamond company – Centradiam – became a new player in Bangui. Bokassa created the company with Greek investors¹⁰⁸ and Bokassa was the majority shareholder (Titley 1997, 74; ICG 2010, 2). In the 1970s, another dubious company, SADECA, arrived, involving various people of questionable reputation including Adrien Geddaï, a Lebanese national with criminal connections, Adnan Khashoggi, a Saudi arms dealer, and René Tamraz, a Lebanese Banker (Titley 1997, 74). Bokassa had little regard to the origin of the diamond investors as long as they paid him. When companies “did not meet his demands for kickbacks, he had no scruples about withdrawing their [mining] licences, expelling their personnel and confiscating their

¹⁰⁷ In the agricultural sector, Bokassa sought to eliminate the key positions and jobs French occupied in the economy claiming that French were exploiting the country. He also accused French of causing famine in the country (Bigo 1988, 120).

¹⁰⁸ Dimitri Anagnostellis served as Bokassa's secretary between 1966 and 1974 (Titley 1997, 74). He “represented Arslanian, the Antwerp-based diamond company that was later known as Sodiam” (Titley 1997, 74).

assets” (ICG 2010 2). For instance, in October 1969 Bokassa requested that mining companies¹⁰⁹ pay hundreds of million CFA as their permit renewal rights. He arrested all European technicians, expelled them from the country, and revoked all mining permits (Kalck 1971, 172–73; Bigo 1988, 92). In another example, Bokassa’s made diamonds companies and others (coffee, cotton) permits of operation conditional on contributing to his own coronation (Tittley 1997, 91).

Bokassa was replaced by Kolingba who increased support to mining cooperatives. It was under his presidency that the diamond evaluation office was created. Elected in 1993, Patassé replaced President Kolingba and presented himself as a businessman. He was a former Bokassa’s minister. Patassé set up his mining company, *Colombe Mines*, and was involved in benefiting from the companies. While Patassé was in power, “he took an increasingly tighter grip on the diamond business. If given enough incentive or if he saw a political need, Patassé handed out concessions that exempted their holders from responsibilities.” The various mining permits Patassé granted “covered almost 70 percent of the diamond zones” (ICG 2010, 3). Patassé also created the *Centrafricaine de taillerie de diamant* (Catadium) which had a Lebanese operator,¹¹⁰ and established a close relationship with Antonio Teixeira, the South African businessman, forming various mining companies “through Teixeira’s companies, Central Africa Mining Company (CAMCO) and Central Africa Diamond Company (CADCO)” (Dietrich 2003, 2). In the 2000s, Teixeira was involved in various diamond deals in the Central African region. It is known that Jean-Pierre Bemba from the *Mouvement de Libération du Congo* (MLC) in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) rebellion had diamond deals with Patassé. When, Patassé was battling rebellion in 2001, Bemba sent troops to defend Patassé’s regime. At the time, Bemba used official Bangui channels to export diamonds from the DRC to finance his own rebellion (ICG 2010, 4). Moreover, Bemba had married the daughter of Antonio Teixeira (*Centrafrique-Presse.com* 2008).

¹⁰⁹ Centramine, N’Zaco and SAM (Bigo 1988, 92).

¹¹⁰ Patassé’s cronies took control of the company because the president’s notary said that the company could not function without a Central African in it (Mokambo 2003a).

Bozizé toppled Patassé in March 2003, and like his predecessors sought to control the mining sector and increase revenues for his cronies and ethnic kin. For instance, one mining company reported that it was obliged to “employ Alfred Ndoutingaï, the mining minister’s younger brother, as assistant general manager” (ICG 2010, 6) and “Socrate Bozizé, the president’s son, was given an honorary position on the managerial team of another company” (Ibid.). On various occasions, Bozizé threatened and closed buying offices because they did not sufficiently contribute to the national budget. Two main moments are important under Bozizé presidency. First, the introduction of two mining codes by which Bozizé carved more space for the state in the mining sector, and second, the legal argument his government used to dispossess diamond owners who happened to be Muslims. Bozizé did not set himself up as a businessman like Patassé or Bokassa. If anything, “Presidential concessions ceased to exist” under Bozizé (Kimberley Process Report 2003, 4).

Under Bozizé, there was a key change: Bozizé seemed to care about international approval, and the CAR became part of both the Kimberley Process and the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI). In fact, participation in the international certification schemes was the guarantee that the country’s diamonds could legally reach international markets and bring revenues to his government. The rest of this chapter focuses on how Bozizé sought to transform the mining sector and depart from his predecessors to increase revenues from mining concessions, albeit differently than blatant misuse of permits or establishing official diamond businesses with foreign criminals.

4.4 The Fragmented Mining Sector and the Muslim-Foreign Dominant Collectors

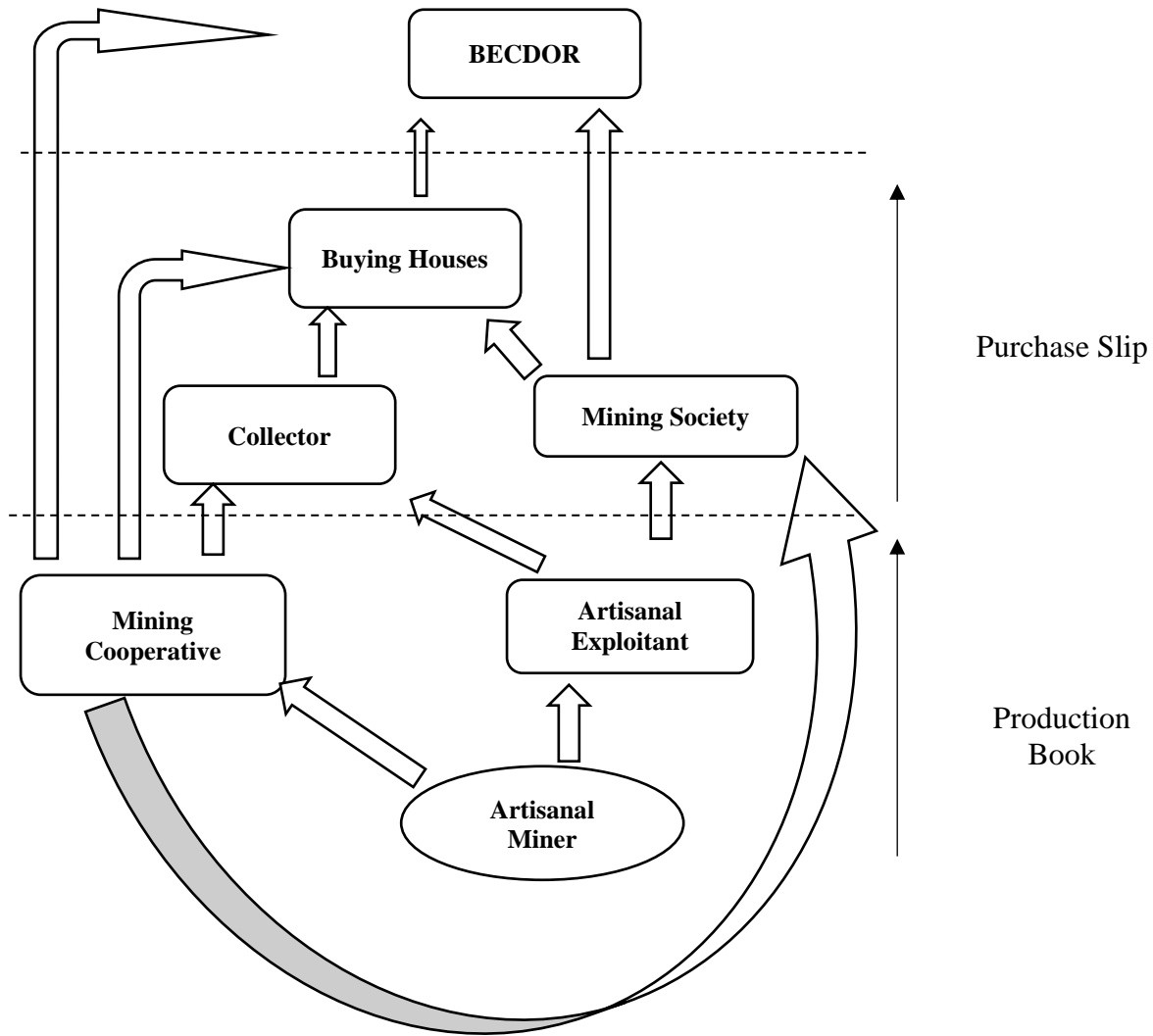
The government’s use of the category “foreigners” has helped fuel anti-Muslim sentiment in the last episode of violence in the CAR’s most recent armed conflict. Several actors are involved in the mining production chain because of the nature of the artisanal exploitation of gold and diamond.¹¹¹ On

¹¹¹ Artisanal mining “refers to the mining activities of small groups (whether integrated into a cooperative or not) and individuals, who use little basic mechanized equipment” (Van Bockstael and Vlassenroot 2008, 3).

the other hand, Bozizé's government excluded foreigners and perceived foreigners by establishing a new mining code. Before delving into the mining code changes, a better depiction of the mining sector and the production chain are necessary. Only then can we understand the depth of the changes that Bozizé's government brought.

There are several actors, intermediaries, and levels in the mining production chain. At the lowest level of the production chain is the artisanal miner, and at the top is the *Bureau d'Évaluation et de Contrôle de Diamant et d'Or* (BECDOR) that oversees exporting diamonds (see Figure 1). The BECDOR is a government institution that was set up in 1982 "to value diamonds for export, calculate tax and check proof of origin" (ICG 2010, 3), and to tackle increased smuggling of diamonds. It is a measure to reduce the illegal mining trade.

Figure 1: Chain of diamond production (also applies to gold).



Source: BECDOR

As illustrated in Figure 1, there are mining cooperatives, usually a collection of ten artisanal miners,¹¹² artisanal operators, collectors, mining society, diamond buying houses (*bureaux / comptoirs d'achat*),¹¹³ and, finally, artisanal miners can sell diamonds to the cooperative or artisanal operators; the mining cooperative can sell to a collector, a buying house, and the BECDOR or a mining society. The artisanal operator has two choices: sell to a collector or to a mining society. The collector can sell only to a buying house. The buying house takes the diamonds to the BECDOR for expertise and export. The mining society can take the diamonds to a buying house or the BECDOR for the same purpose. The official organization reveals the presence of several middle steps. Companies and individual business operators must go officially to the BECDOR to export diamonds.¹¹⁴ On the ground, the mining sector is less organized than Figure 1 presents.¹¹⁵

The artisanal miners or diggers (*artisan minier*) work directly in the mine with their rudimentary equipment. Artisanal operators (*exploitants artisans*) control a group of four to five artisanal miners who work directly for them. In turn, these artisanal operators work for the collectors (*collecteurs*).¹¹⁶ The collectors usually (pre)finance the activities of the artisanal operators in order to secure exclusive access to the products the miners find. The collectors use their economic capital to buy diamonds and to finance extractive activities. Their involvement in the mining chain since at least the 1970s has been beneficial for the CAR diamond production. Concretely, collectors have

encouraged the diamond miners/diggers to work during a longer period of the year and also favoured the arrival of new artisanal miners/diggers tempted by the prospect of “easy” gains. As a consequence, production went up from 284,246 karats in 1978 to 531,387 karats in 1994

¹¹² See article 1, Loi n°9-005 of 29 April 2009. The EITI estimated that there were approximately 100 cooperatives in 2009 (Initiative pour la Transparence dans les Industries Extractives 2010, 4).

¹¹³ In fact, the buying houses favour diamond but gold and diamond follow the same production chain and organization (Interview, ORGP, Bangui, September 4, 2017). Historically, buying houses fared better at overall level of diamond export than mining societies (Barthélémy et al. 2008, 32).

¹¹⁴ In Bangui, the BECDOR is situated right behind the presidency. The Ministry of Mines, Energy and Hydroelectric, and EITI office are located elsewhere downtown Bangui.

¹¹⁵ It is not a complete chaos either. The artisanal mining sector “has its own logics and structures, which can differ from region to region. Generally speaking; however, the basic structures are similar in many countries” (Van Bockstael and Vlassenroot 2008, 4).

¹¹⁶ They are usually the first to buy diamonds from miners. But, when they do not have enough means they look for others who have money (Interview NIGE, Gaga, August 10, 2017).

(Barthélémy et al. 2008, 35).

The collectors do not have the legal right to exploit a mining area, they finance others and buy from them (Matthysen and Clarkson 2013, 14-15; ICG 2010; Dalby 2015). The mining code protects artisanal miners in the sense that a non-national cannot become an artisanal miner, a non-national cannot dig. In the mining codes (2004 and 2009), the artisanal miner is a “person of Central African nationality, authorized to mine in a more or less mechanized way for his own account.”¹¹⁷ Collectors fall into several categories depending on their origins. As they cannot dig, it creates a situation where ethnicity, religion, and nationality differences become salient. For instance, a Central African cannot mine because he is a collector and a non-Muslim Central African can mine. Collectors are

West Africans (including Malians, Senegalese, Mauritians, Guineans), Nigerians and Chadians. The arrival of West Africans is partly explained by the social norm that young men from those countries are expected to travel abroad to make money before returning home. There is also a strong family tradition in West Africa of working with gold and diamonds. [...] Following the establishment of a Lebanese buying office, Primo, in 1996, Lebanese also started to arrive and work as collectors (ICG 2010, fn 10, 2).

These various migrant groups have an established presence in the CAR for several decades. Muslims in the north-east are also involved in the mining chain as collectors (Pswarayi-Riddihough et al. 2010, 28). Hence, the collector category encompasses various actors who can be foreigners and nationals, and the Muslim-foreigner term might capture the amalgamation and contradictions inherent to the collector category. This is a term I use to encompass interviewees polyvalent utterances. Muslim is a broad category that encompasses both foreigners and nationals and interviewees do not always differentiate. As a result, not all collectors are foreigners, and not all foreigners are collectors. However, one can see Islam as a common denominator for the various migrant groups plus the involvement of the CAR north-east Muslims in the collector category. This means that Muslims from the north-east are closely associated with the diamond business sector. There are at least two unintended consequences of this rule that forbids collectors from mining. The first is that in the mining areas, collectors hold a

¹¹⁷ See Loi n°9-005, article 1, 29 April 2009 and Ordonnance 04.001.

privileged position and can even act as buying houses (Smith 2008b).¹¹⁸ The second is that miners are

almost entirely Central African Christians, they face the added challenge of breaking into a profession dominated by foreigners and Muslims. Shared language and religion play an important role in fostering trust among collectors and among collectors and buying office agents. They also create a closed trading network with few openings for Central Africans (ICG 2010, 10; see also Matthysen and Clarkson 2013, 31).

The CAR's diamond deposit is mainly alluvial. This means that the barrier of entry to exploitation is low because deposits can easily be found. Exploitation of alluvial diamonds does not require heavy industry machinery. Moreover, industrial exploitation of the CAR's resources in general has proven to be difficult because of the high costs of importing machinery, as well as poor road infrastructure (ICG, 2010, 2; Smith 2015b; Dalby 2015).¹¹⁹ Since 1931, more than 84 % of diamond exploitation have been artisanal (Matthysen and Clarkson, 2013, 13). The artisanal mining sector employs approximately 80,000 to 100,000 persons, and the income it brings supports approximately 600,000 persons (ICG 2010, 9).¹²⁰ Hence, the income from the mining sector supports to a quarter of the total population of 4.5 million. As a high number of people depend on the income of miners, a "miner needs a huge income to pull out of poverty, or else his dependents need to generate income from other sources to increase the overall household income" (Chupezzi, Ingram and Schure 2009, 26). What happens in the mining sector usually sparks the interest of citizens as opposed to what happens, for example, in the logging or farming sectors.

4.4.1 Dominance of Muslim-Foreigners in the Mining Sector

Collectors, a category where several Muslim-foreigners operate, are above artisanal miners in the production chain. Muslims from the north-east are Central Africans, but their involvement in a sector where several foreigners operate is the source of confusion and amalgamation of identities. So, the perception that foreigners exploit and take advantage of Central Africans does not come from anywhere.

¹¹⁸ The mining code forbid collectors to sell to another collector. Doing so means that collectors are behaving like a buying house (Interviews MOCDD, Bangui, August 21, 2017; ORGP, Bangui, September 4, 2017).

¹¹⁹ This is generally the case when diamond deposits are alluvial and is not specific to CAR (Van Bockstael and Vlassenroot 2008).

¹²⁰ It was estimated at 50.000 licensed diamond diggers in 2003 (Dietrich, 2003, 3).

From the collectors' dominant position, Matthysen and Clarkson (2013, 31) infer that collectors are part of the reason why miners are in a poverty trap. That is, artisanal miners move up the production chain with difficulty and the perception is that their work only enriches others (the higher part of the mining chain). However, for collectors, artisanal mining is inherently risky because of the nature of diamond deposits and the terrain where they are located. A collector might invest money in a mining operator and a mining site that - in the end - is not as profitable as expected (Matthysen and Clarkson, 2013, 16).¹²¹ Still, as a senior member of one of the country's political party stated in our interview, "the mining sector did not bring much money [to the government]. There are alluvial diamonds and not a lot of Central Africans are in the sector. There are Malians, Cameroonians, Senegalese, Sudanese. That sector has enriched a lot people except us" (Interview, NABP, Bangui, 26 July 2017). From the organization of the sector, it is clear that when this politician refers to the absence of Central Africans, he is referring to their absence from higher position in the mining chain, one where Muslim-foreigners are seen to operate since "Central Africans" are the only ones who can mine.

On top of bringing their financial means to the mining sector, the role of collectors is reinforced by the fact that the miners themselves have little to no training in the valuation of the diamonds they find. In fact, "most artisanal miners do not have the equipment or the technical skills to estimate the real value of their production. In addition, miners have very little information on the current price of stones on the world market, thus relying on the goodwill of collectors" (Matthysen and Clarkson 2013, 17). This corroborates the lack of development and education hypothesis. Miners need to be trained and educated about the diamond business to make the most out of their work. Few miners become collectors because of the lack expertise and capital (ICG 2010, 10).

At least two other factors perpetuate the dominant position of collectors. First, artisanal miners –

¹²¹ This is not the only risk. Artisanal mining production "will always be impacted by [...] international market conditions. Some collectors have felt obliged to trade some stones on the international market at conditions inferior to those they had negotiated at the time of purchase" (Barthélémy et al. 2008, 39).

who could become collectors – might, in time, be interested in local politics where they can gain a higher status than within the diamond chain. For instance, in Boda, a city in Lobaye Prefecture where diamond mining is the main economic activity, the mayor is a former artisanal miner (Préfecture de la Lobaye 2017, 2). Even several Séléka rebels in power at the time were involved in the diamond mining business (Dalby 2015, 134–138). This is in line with the fact that politics is a route to economic wealth as previous presidents did. Secondly, there is a deep belief that relates to the nature of the wealth that originates from the mining sector. As a jeweller told me in Bangui, “Gold and diamond come from the devil.”¹²² As we embarked on a whole discussion about the nature of that money, he explained that, as long as money comes from gold and diamond, it would always disappear without the miners knowing what they did with it.¹²³ Hence, for miners, and also some politicians I spoke with, “diamond money is perceived as something that does not last. You cannot realize anything with that money. That money disappears and you cannot do much with it.”¹²⁴ This might also be a general perception that is enduring considering the lack of economic development and the low level of education. The organization of the mining chain, as well as miners’ misperception about their economic activity, perpetuates the dominant position of collectors.

Another element that works in the favour of collectors is the corruption and government taxes in the mining business. Government regulation of the sector is hampered by the view that miners believe the government agents in charge are corrupt. The sector prevents control because miners avoid reporting their discovery to the government.¹²⁵ Only 5 to 10% of miners regularly possess a mining licence and, in some instances, it is the collector that provides the miners with the licence (Matthysen and

¹²² Kalck (1971, 31) already noticed the tendency to squander diamond money because it is “money from the devil.”

¹²³ In a newspaper article, one journalist reports that “diamond comes from the devil as well as the resources it generates” (A.P.M. 2003). During field work in 2017, I have heard similar interpretations from well-educated people (Interview SSEX, Bangui, July 12, 2017).

¹²⁴ Interview, SSEX, Bangui, July 12, 2017.

¹²⁵ Due to the predatory nature of the CAR state, people do fear interacting with state officials. Also, governments do not usually consider artisanal mining organization from the perspective of local realities. In that sense, “illicit mining, and the underground marketing of diamonds, is not something illegal which occurs ‘out of want,’ but rather something a-legal because it occurs ‘out of necessity’ instead of from a desire to break the law” (Barthélémy et al. 2008, 268).

Clarkson 2013, 20). Moreover, the general level of taxation in the country does not incentivize various actors to use government channels to export. Matthysen and Clarkson (2013, 20) estimates that 30% of the diamond and 95% of the gold production are smuggled out of the country. For instance, export taxes for diamonds in the DRC is 3.25% and 5% in the Congo, compared to 12% in the CAR (Matthysen and Clarkson, 2013, 20). Later, the government lowered the tax to 6.25% for diamonds. In December 2019, the government finally decided to adopt competitive taxation rates; hence, their effects remain to be seen. Precisely, “The export tax on diamonds will be lowered from 6.25% to 4 % while that on gold will fall from 5.25 % to 2.25 %” (*French.xinhuanet.com* 2019, par. 2).

However, collectors are blamed for the failure of miners to succeed in the business. For instance, in 2003 an independent newspaper reported that

on the mining sites the workers are poorly remunerated. The collectors retrieve from the already derisory value of the diamond expenses related to the food of mining workers. The rest of the [miners’] money is used towards paying motorcycles, used vehicles, clothes, shoes and especially big radios. The little money that miners receive is wasted in alcohol (A.P.M. 2003; see also Kalck 1971, 127).

In this story, the collectors are presented as those who do not pay their workers well and immorally recover the money they invested. Diamonds have a low value, and, despite that, collectors are taking more than they should. Moreover, artisanal miners have a higher number of dependents, which means that they need more income to be able to make a living. The collectors are a key node of the mining production chain, more important than Figure 1 indicates. They are key intermediaries between the buying houses and the artisanal miners. They inject money into the production chain. As one Ministry of Mines senior civil servant explained to me, “Mining workers do not always have the means/funds, they benefit from collectors’ money” (Interview, MOCDD, Bangui, 21 August 2017).

Mines are heavily discussed in the CAR, but agriculture and logging remain the main economic activities.¹²⁶ In rural areas, where people have poor to non-existent asphalt roads connected to Bangui,

¹²⁶ The wood industry represents 40–50% of the CAR exports and it is the sector that offers most of the formal private sector jobs (Pswarayi-Riddihough et al. 2010, 38).

the mines represent an effective employment opportunity because its “exploitation requires little capital, knowledge and technology” (Matthysen and Clarkson, 2013, 13). For Van Bockstael and Vlassenroot (2008, 13), “There is no sense in trying to stop people from mining, if that is one of the only options they have to keep alive, even more so when everyone knows that the chance to escape poverty lies just a few metres beneath their feet.” Hence, mining is also about livelihood. However, the government certainly loses money due to the way the sector is organized, sparse deposits of alluvial diamonds, several actors far from the control of the government, and high taxes that incentivize smuggling.

Now that I have portrayed the mining chain and the factors leading to collectors/Muslim-foreigners domination, I can better depict the specific actions through which concessionary politics became parasitic upon an autochthony discourse. After seizing power in 2003, Bozizé suspended all the mining companies’ licences and established a committee in charge of organizing the sector (Matthysen and Clarkson 2013, 8; ICG 2010; Kimberley Process report 2003, 4).¹²⁷ Under Bozizé, collectors became a category that the government sought to bypass when simultaneously increasing its tax revenues from them. I now turn to explaining this process.

4.5 The Government’s Attempt to Bypass Collectors: The Operation “Closing Gate” and the Mining Code Reforms

To understand the workings of the discourses of autochthony, I will examine the government’s actions to bypass collectors. The government undertook two main decisive actions to weaken collectors, who many claim are the Muslim-foreigners. The government targeted them in its various public speeches and sought to ground its approach in a legal argument in which foreigners were opposed to investment in the country. It ensues that non-foreigners, hence the *vrai Centrafricain*, should get control of that economic space and invest in the country. Through the reform of a World Bank sponsored mining code, the government rendered the presence of collectors less necessary. Probing the *vrai Centrafricain* in

¹²⁷ It also sparked debate in the independent CAR media at the time (Bakwa 2003c; Madimba-Nimba 2003a).

actors different than the anti-Balaka is not self-evident and goes through its other, the foreigner. This section addresses how Bozizé's regime explicitly targeted the Muslim-foreigners in the mining sector. I first analyze the government's move to dispossess collectors and second the reform of the mining codes. These two moves reflect how the competition and exclusionary logic of autochthony happened at the macro level.

4.5.1 The 2008 Operation "Closing Gate"

Bozizé's government consistently voiced its concern about mining investors pillaging the national economy through the Minister of Mines Sylvain Ndoutingai.¹²⁸ The rhetorical construction of *vrai Centrafricain* transpired through the othering of foreigners in the independent media and continued throughout Bozizé's government tenure. That I treat autochthony as an identity capital means that it signals "a rank in the access to various resources in the context of rivalry or unequal cooperation between groups" (Dorrnsoro and Grojean 2018, 9). The government, through mining policies clearly sought to push collectors – a category that overlaps with Muslim and foreigners – out of the mining business signaling rivalry over access to resources from the mining sector. This suggests that the government made explicit that foreigners are not playing a role in the history of development of the country, hence the need to replace them with Central Africans. But, as we know, foreigners overlap with Muslims in CAR. The independent newspapers and the government's actions deployed two arguments that led and justified operation "Closing Gate" and that targeted collectors. First, the concern of the previous regime's deals with foreigners in the mining sector, and second, the Central Africans' place in the national economy. In many independent media articles, collectors are perceived as "crooked" and Patassé was seen as profiting from the diamonds.

The Minister of Mines targeted Muslims collectors during the 2008 operation in which the government dispossessed collectors and diamond owners on the basis that "those people [collectors –

¹²⁸ The minister, prior to coming to power, was involved in the mining sector (ICG 2010, fn43, 6).

foreign businesspeople] do not invest in ‘our’ country. They manage millions of CFA francs but only rent houses. If you consider Bangui, there is no single skyscraper that belongs to a buying house.”¹²⁹ The government consistently confronted and blamed collectors for not contributing to the country’s economic improvement. In targeting Muslim-foreigner collectors, Bozizé’s government reflected a general concern of the population which wanted the government to no longer be dependent on Lebanese traders, used as a shortcut for foreigners in general (Placit 2003c). This theoretically illustrates that Muslims, through collectors and businesspeople categories, are being denied the social status accorded to groups that are deemed to have contributed to the realization of the community and reveal the competition in that sector. They do not have an autochthony capital and must be pushed from the economic sector as they do not contribute to the development of the country. Those who have autochthony capital, the *vrai Centrafricain* must occupy the economic space.

Through in-depth analysis of newspapers prior to the 2008 event and after, I found that the mining sector and the presence of collectors were not well perceived. The first argument that transpires in my analysis of newspapers is that the targeting of foreigners was necessitated by the previous regime’s deals with foreigners in the mining sector. In June 2003, a few months after Bozizé’s coup, the Minister for Mines addressed the press claiming massive frauds in the sector. Setting the Bozizé government against Patassé’s actions, the Minister claimed that licences issued prior to their seizure of power were illegal so, “licenses that do not participate in the interest of the country must be withdrawn” (Placit 2003b). Bozizé’s government presented itself at the time as an actor with the interest of the country at heart, by dispossessing foreign actors, demanding more money, and getting rid of foreigners in the interest of the country. For example, in November 2003, then-Prime Minister Abel Goumba decided to close buying houses or make them pay CFA 300 million francs (*Le Confident* 2003; Sopo Yong Ne Ndendi 2004).

In 2004, the government, continuing its purge of the Patassé regime and in search of legitimacy,

¹²⁹ Off the record discussion with a member of the UN Panel of Experts on the Central African Republic, Bangui, 28 July 2017. The UN expert reported what the ex-minister told him.

arrested an individual implicated in one of Patassé's mining companies, Igor Kombonaguemo.¹³⁰ He was the head of the office of independent collectors (*Bureau des Collecteurs Indépendants*) in Bria and of Central African citizenship. Apparently, he was detained at *Section d'Enquêtes, de Recherches et de Documentation* (SERD) in Bangui because of a partnership with SOPICAD, which was linked to the Patassé regime because it was a partner of Colombe Mines. One of the main independent newspaper, *Le Citoyen*, states

there has never been a Central African who has reached this level [Igor's level] and who also really helps miners to live from their work. Igor has succeeded in setting up a network of miners and collectors in Haute-Kotto who [...] have succeeded in their business (*Le Citoyen* 2004a).

As the article continues questioning Igor's arrest,

Is it because he is the only Central African to want to work honestly in this hermetically closed area to Central Africans? Or is it because this mafia circle, [...], does not approve his practice of seeking to organize Central Africans in order to benefit from a key sector of their economy currently in the hands of foreigners? Who will build the Central African Republic? The foreigner has never built a country. As proof, it was enough to cancel Colombes Mines license for SOPICAD to try to leave (*Le Citoyen* 2004a).

From this excerpt, it seems that Bozizé's witch hunt of Patassé's regime collaborators did not supplant the Central African argument. The newspaper concern was that as a "Central African" Igor should have not been arrested but other foreigners involved with Patassé's regime should have. In other words, Bozizé would arrest foreigners associated with Patassé, but not Central Africans. It illustrates the autochthony capital in the sense that Central Africans involved in the economic sector have a social status different than foreigners, Muslims. The state should not arrest, hence should allow, a Central African to access the resources of the mining sector and we know that identity capital is important in determining which group has access to which resources (Dorronsoro and Grojean 2018). Moreover, the argument of the newspaper illustrates, as Hilgers (2011, 150) advanced, that belonging to a community determine the value of autochthony capital. Here, it is the community of the *vrai Centrafricain*. The newspaper article

¹³⁰ Also written Kombot-Naguémon. He died in 2014 and was President Michel Djotodia counselor in mining affairs (*Centrafrique-Presse.com* 2014).

does not mention if the person is accused of any wrongdoings. It was important that he should not be arrested because he is a Central African who “organize Central Africans in order to benefit” from the mining sector, something that foreigners did not do. The journalist depicted the mining sector as a mafia circle, arguing that foreigners do not build countries, but governments and presidents have always been looking for ways to generate more revenues from those foreigners. Nothing good can come out of that sector, the author argues. However, when a national is involved in mining sector fraud, the journalist appears to suggest that the person should not be arrested because he is Central African. The same division between central African and foreign collectors plays into some 2005 independent media excerpts where they frequently address the presence of collectors in the mining sector as a “threat” or that they “invade” diamond mining areas (Nyéréré 2005).

The second argument from the newspapers framed collectors as a problem; they disorganize the mining production chain and benefit from it at the expense of Central Africans. Hence, there was a concern over the Central Africans’ place in the national economy. In autochthony competition, a group without the capital cannot benefit from resources. For instance, another independent newspaper journalist claimed that the “new national authorities must restore the image of a key sector of the national economy” (Bakwa 2003b). In fact, “Diamond zones are full of foreigners who exploit Central Africans” (Madimba-Nimba 2003a). It remains unclear when the key sector of the national economy was impeccable to the extent that it needed to be restored. As part of the politics of concessions, presidents had usually welcomed foreigners.

As Bozizé’s government removed mining permits from buying houses, the objective was also explicitly stated to extend the action to collectors because they are part of the disorganization of the sector (Placit 2003b). Issues with collectors were present well before the operation or at least since 2003 (Bakwa 2003b; 2003c; A.P.M. 2003). The Minister for Mines stated in 2003 that the government needs to “avoid making foreigners only benefit from those riches that belong primarily to Central Africans” (Placit

2003b). In that sense, if the riches belong only to CAR, it follows that only Central Africans should benefit from it.

Moreover, during a meeting with representatives of buying houses in June 2008, the Minister for Mines voiced concern over the decline of diamond production. He doubted the genuine investment of the buying houses in the sector: “there is a steady decline in production whereas the government has taken steps to improve production. The rainy season and the insecurity caused by the road cutters can contribute to the decline in production. However, these two reasons alone cannot justify the constant decline which is also in the dry season” (Remangai 2008). The Minister argued that “a vast network of fraud is maintained by some buying houses and some collectors, or even artisanal miners” (Remangai 2008).¹³¹ This means that, officially, the area where Muslim-foreigners are present as collectors was linked with fraudulent activities that supposedly restrained the government from benefiting from the country’s riches. At the time the Minister was raising the issue, he overlooked the fact that, in 2008, there was an international financial crisis that hit international markets and diamond prices fell globally. For instance, a karat in August 2008 was worth less than half its price in 2000 (Matthysen and Clarkson 2013, fn 27, 7). As such, profits from diamonds were likely to decrease regardless of CAR politics.

Though many authors (Dalby 2015; Matthysen and Clarkson 2013) have focused on the October 2008 seizure, these authors overlook that the government was already voicing discontent since 2003 as I have shown. The government arrived at the conclusion that “Closing Gate” was the solution to controlling the mining chain, hence putting autochthony capital and exclusionary logic into use. My research has found that the operation was infused with a concern over the positioning of what they considered to be true Central Africans in the mining sector. Now, I present what operation “Closing Gate” entailed.

¹³¹ At times, the media accuses the network woven by West Africans as the one smuggling diamonds out of the country (Madimba-Nimba 2003a).

On October 5, 2008, the Minister of Mines, Sylvain Ndountigai, launched an operation to check if buying houses were paying their legal fees correctly. The Ministry's operation extended to collectors and other official diamond buyers. The government deployed soldiers to mining areas in the west and centre of the country, including Boda, Carnot, Berbérati, Nola, Bria, and Nzako. Officials seized collectors' goods without presenting warrants. They seized diamonds and money from multiple collectors. Ministry of Mines officers, as well as mining brigade officers, entered buying houses local branches. According to ICG, these officials

demanded staff open safes and confiscated diamonds and money. They also took back to Bangui cars, equipment for weighing and valuing diamonds and personal belongings such as telephones, televisions and clothes. They did the same to many of the wealthy collectors for operating as buying offices, that is buying diamonds from other collectors and miners in town instead of at the mines (ICG 2010, 6).

During the operation, the government fined eight (out of eleven) buying offices for not investing enough in property in the CAR. The fine amounts ranged between CFA 20 and 25 million francs (ICG 2010, 6). On top of the fine, several buying houses were closed, namely ORDICA, ADC, BELDIAM, DIAMSTAR, DDC, and GEMCA. A lot of the mining actors disapproved (Siopassa 2008; Mokambo 2008). After the operation, "collectors who had come to Bangui to claim back their belongings managed to retrieve some of their goods but not diamonds" (ICG 2010, 6). According to the mining code, the seized diamonds should have been sold and the money transferred to the state treasury. Yet, after the operation, "The government did not sell any diamonds to buying offices" (ICG 2010, 6). This was a clear sign that the operation sought to dispossess collectors and diamond owners rather than establishing control over the mining production chain.

After the operation "Closing Gate," the government sought to legally ground those actions by referring to the 2004 mining code. The Minister of Mines claimed that the government was lenient enough not to have dispossessed buying houses prior to 2008. For him, "The law [mining code] was promulgated in 2004. It was not retroactive, so the government gave the buying houses 3 years to comply

with the mining code. The offices had until 2007” (Madimba-Nimba 2008).¹³² Clearly, if collectors and buying offices have been dispossessed, it is because they did not follow the law. Operation “Closing Gate” had been justified on legal grounds. Accordingly, the government claimed its full right to have acted the way it did. When one looks closely at the mining code, it remains difficult to explain why the government targeted collectors. The mining code did not specifically impose an investment on collectors. In that sense, my explanation, and argument is that it is through the various representations that independent newspapers and government attached to collectors (i.e., Muslim-foreigners) that I can make sense of their dispossession. They articulated their autochthony capital in the speeches and materially by dispossessing collectors. The collectors have been dispossessed so that those labelled Central Africans can reclaim a better position in the mining chain even if, in the end, it is the government that benefited from the operation.

In the independent media, it seems that the government actions received public support. The operation did not receive criticism. It was perceived as normal for the government to have acted that way, probably because it was in the interest of the country to target collectors who exploited Central Africans and were part of a vast fraudulent network. One journalist in independent media reiterated after the 2008 operation that buying houses do not invest in the country, although he tried to distance himself from the government action. For him, buying houses “have been in the CAR since 1961, they have made considerable profits on the backs of CAR and only rent buildings. It has happened in the past, in 1996, that some buying houses have preferred buying an extraordinary villa to a mine minister rather than to build an official headquarter” (Mokambo 2008). In a sense, buying houses and collectors deserved operation “Closing Gate.” The assumption is that if buying offices are profiting from CAR’s riches, they should invest it in the country and not take the money abroad. The government’s actions reflected concerns among the general population over being able to benefit from their economy. This is still

¹³² I have been given similar information during fieldwork as well (Interview XKVE, Bangui, 31 August 2017).

important now. As the national coordinator of EITI analyses, “We had closed 14 firms and there was a lot of money” (Interview XKVE, Bangui, 31 August 2017). For him, this served as evidence that Muslim-foreigners (collectors as well as buying houses), were looting the country. They were keeping the money rather than investing it. It seems that the government’s self-interest in keeping diamond revenues corresponds and interacts with the concern of the population for the welfare of the nation.

Many people that I interviewed in 2017 recognized, several years after the operation, that it was a contentious operation. One ex-prime minister acknowledged that, “it is with his minister Ndoutingai that they [Bozizé and his minister] stripped several mining business owners. They seized the jewellery of their wives, their diamonds” (Interview ex-prime minister, KPZS, Bangui, 31 August 2017; Interview official BECDOR, ORGP, Bangui, 4 September 2017). The ex-prime Minister makes no reference to the legal argument that was deployed at the time. In that sense, it is the operation’s legitimacy that remains debated among various officials today. Should the government have carried out the operation, and should it have been implemented in that manner? In other interviews with officers involved with mining, I noticed that the legality of the operation was also not questioned. A senior public servant at BECDOR argued that “Although this [the 2008 operation] was done to comply with the law, it was not properly implemented” (Interview ORGP, Bangui, 4 September 2017), but for the EITI officer, it was completely normal that foreigners were stripped of their diamonds (Interview XKVE, Bangui, August 31, 2017). That the EITI officer finds the government’s actions normal reveals that he supported that dispossession. This might indicate that he was aware that the government was targeting collectors, the Muslim-foreigners. Autochthony capital competition was enacted in the economic space with the objective to replace Muslims by Central Africans. Although a government policy, it was different from Bozizé’s instrumentalization. The independent newspapers supported the policy and senior officials supported it during fieldwork too. This is linked to what people do every day to invest in autochthony as a form of capital.

4.5.2 Consequences of the 2008 Operation

The 2008 operation caused several damages for the mining production chain, both for miners and collectors. The operation had two kinds of shocks on the collectors. As the government dispossessed them, there was the departure of the buying houses, which affected the work of the collectors because buying houses financed them. As a result, several miners were also jobless after the operation (Matthysen and Clarkson, 2013, 30).

The official number of collectors involved in the diamond sector decreased, as Table 1 shows. There were approximately 400 collectors in 2003 (Dietrich, 2003, 3). With the ongoing armed conflict that also affected the collectors, there is no recent official figures regarding their number in the sector (Initiative pour la Transparence dans les Industries Extractives 2015, 20).

Table 1: Evolution of the Number of Collectors

Years	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Number of Collectors	348	298	315	280	190

Source: author compilation from IPS report 2013 and EITI reports

As the number of collectors decreased, the revenue the government collected from that level of the chain increased. In 2010, the EITI reported that the government collected more money from collectors than mining cooperatives, a total of \$701,248 and \$34,304 respectively (Initiative pour la Transparence dans les Industries Extractives 2012, 15). Either mining cooperatives had better strategies to avoid government officials or government officials did not target them as strictly as it did collectors.

The operation might have been considered a success because “the share of tax revenues collected from the mining sector as a whole thus represented 11% of the State’s tax revenue in 2010 compared to 9% in 2009” (Initiative pour la Transparence dans les Industries Extractives 2012, 16). At the same moment that revenues increased, two combined factors made the overall production of diamonds decrease, even if revenues increased. This might indicate that the collectors were previously avoiding the

government and, not to lose everything, they started complying with regulations. First, diamond production fell¹³³ in 2008 due to the international financial crisis. Matthysen and Clarkson (2013, 7) reported that “the average annual diamond production in the period before the economic crisis (2004-2007) was 404,550 karats. The average production in 2008-2011 dropped to 328,530 karats. A drop of 19%.” It directly affected the capacity of miners on the ground to live and afford their basic needs (Dalby 2015, 129). Hence, the government collected more money at the expense of miners.

Second, the government was also responsible for eliminating important actors with its 2008 operation. The government’s self-enrichment was at the expense of miners when one considers the important position of collectors who inject money in the mining chain with the risk of a mining site being unproductive. One ex-Minister claimed that some collectors died of stress and despair after the operation because they lost everything, both diamonds and money (Interview RREU 2, Bangui, 2 July 2017). It is arguable that the operation contributed to the March 2013 Séléka coup. In fact, in December 2012, when the Séléka alliance organized its rebellion, one of their claims focused on the “unconditional return of diamonds and gold, cash and other property expropriated by the government in 2008” (Askabiol 2012, par.9). I also interviewed a Séléka leader – one of the top three masterminds – who brought up the issue of diamonds in an indirect manner. For him, “If someone was a diamond collector and has lost everything and got involved in the rebellion because he was pillaged, and that the DDR propose him to become a carpenter, it would not work” (Interview Bangui, KSFC, May 27, 2017). Indirectly, he was advancing that diamond collectors who lost their goods were among those who became involved in the rebellion. This still has implication for the DDR program that is supposed to bring peace.

The closing of the buying houses slowed economic activity in mining areas. The mining brigade officers that the government used also seized the goods of miners. As a result, everyone in the production

¹³³ The country still has not reached record-level figures of the pre-armed conflict period. Currently, “From January to June 2018, approximately 74,000 karats of rough diamonds were officially exported from the Central African Republic” (UN, S/2018/729, par.110).

chain suffered. In fact, the closing of some of the buying houses allowed the remaining ones to determine buying prices as they wished because the sector became less competitive (Matthysen and Clarkson, 2013, 30; Smith 2009). After buying offices were closed, the companies just left the country entirely (Matthysen and Clarkson, 2013, 17).

Another effect of the 2008 operation was that it provided indirect incentives for diamond smuggling. A report by ICG (2010, 7) advanced that, “the Kimberley Process secretariat in Bangui estimate[d that] illegal exports rose from 20 percent of all exports to 30 percent after the operation.” The lack of competition created “greater incentive for artisanal miners and collectors to sell diamonds to smugglers. Many collectors who lost their licences also continued to operate on the black market” (ICG 2010, 7). This is not surprising since the export taxes in neighbouring countries are lower and the government exerts little control over the mining areas.

4.5.3 “This crisis, when it arrived, it made us happy.”

I retrieved the above quote from a YouTube investigation on miners after the 2013 war started in the CAR. As I have shown above, collectors held a dominant position in the mining chain, and as a result, they have been problematized even if some of them are Central Africans. As I watched the YouTube documentary, I noticed that the miners expressed joy that the war allowed them to get rid of collectors. This joy exemplifies the usefulness of the autochthony discourse and its consequences in this armed conflict. That is, claiming to be Central African has allowed the exclusion of the Muslim-foreigners in the economic space.

In June 2014, a TV5 Monde investigation in a mining area of Boda in the west showed an artisanal miner expressing relief that Muslims had left the mining sector because of the conflict: “this crisis, when it arrived, it made us happy, because now, we, artisanal miners, *we have taken back the resources of our work*. When Muslims used to find diamonds, it brought them a lot of money and with that, they bought weapons to kill us for free” (Amnesty International 2015). In the mining areas, the idea of taking one’s

place back in the mining sector is present. In fact, it is unclear if and how Muslims were killing artisanal miners since the interdependence of miners - collectors - buying houses is one in which everyone depends on each other.

The *vrai Centrafricain* represented a struggle over the control of the mining sector in front of its other Muslim-foreigners who are collectors. The 2008 operation was one in a series of government's struggles to legitimize itself, to differentiate itself from its predecessors, and to take control of the economy by either demanding more from foreigners or simultaneously excluding them. For instance, the EITI national coordinator asserts that "in the new buying offices, there are nationals" (Interview XKVE, Bangui, August 31, 2017). In a sense, this quote is a manifestation of the fact that "we" succeeded in taking control of the sector, irrespective of the fact that there are Central African Muslims involved in the sector. Having chased away Muslim collectors, some artisanal miners have looked for training into how to certify diamonds and legitimately replace the now-gone collectors. Similar dynamics were present in other mining cities. In Berberati (in west of the country), an international NGO country representative noticed that "Muslims were in control of the mining sector and had the network to exploit and sell the mines" and they have been chased away (Interview SYEM, Bangui, 18 May 2017).

The struggle for control over the mining areas is also where the dichotomy of *vrai Centrafricain* and foreigners is used and deployed against Muslim-foreigners to exclude them from the sector. This is the competition that happens alongside elite instrumentalization as highlighted in the theoretical framework. The government receives support or, at least, does not receive a harsh critique when it targets Muslim-foreigners. The independent newspapers reveal that people share the government's discourse. Independent media reported Ministers' positions, but also journalists commented and represented Muslims differently as shown. The *vrai Centrafricain* discourse does not appear to be only top-down, but rather it is welcomed by the people. This is supported by the fact that independent media represented Muslims negatively. For Muslims, these practices are unfair and contribute to the ways they perceive and

understand themselves as Central Africans. Beyond the 2008 operation that the government justified according to a 2004 mining code, there has been a change of the code in 2009 which was similarly infused with the exclusionary logic of the *vrai Centrafricain*.

4.5.4 The World Bank and the 2004 and 2009 Mining Codes in Comparison

Under Bozizé's government, concessionary politics takes a new twist overlaid with the discourse of autochthony. The government can blame outsiders, while continuing to ensure it remains the key beneficiary of the diamond sector. This move is explicit in mining codes. By comparing both the 2004 and 2009 mining codes, it is clear that the government carved less space for the collectors. We must keep in mind that in the mining sector, several Central Africans Muslims and foreigners are collectors. Under a 2009 code supported by the World Bank, Bozizé implemented corporate taxes. In fact, one of the main reports – ICG 2010 – addressing the mining sector focused only on analyzing the 2009 code and could not catch the significant difference between both codes. Those laws provide insights into the government's understanding of *vrai Centrafricain*: a form of capital to access a dominant position in the mining sector.

That the government was able to take advantage of the mining codes should be placed in a broader context. The WB intervention in mining codes has a history. The WB was involved in developing new mining codes across the continent as part of its drive to make resources a growth strategy for developing countries (Kimberley Process Report, 2003, 3-5; Campbell 2004). From the 1980s, the WB moved from demanding that African states retreat from the mining sector to recognizing that “states do have a role to play in facilitation and regulation” (Campbell 2004, 8). From the WB's perspective, African countries needed to do more to attract foreign investments by changing their mining codes. The rationale was that “because Africa's mineral potential is not in doubt, the main factor determining an investment decision is perceived risk, especially political risk” (Ibid., 17). By that logic, more regulations, economic, judicial, and other capacity building were the answer. This context underlines that what happened in the CAR had

parallels in other countries and was similar to the failure of the WB's intervention in the Chad-Cameroun pipeline project (Pegg 2009). What happened in the CAR reveals that policy interventions cannot offset the quality of pre-existing institutions for improved economic performance. Like in Chad, the WB provided incentives for the adoption of the policy changes,¹³⁴ and the CAR politicized these broader policies designed to improve mining governance and maximize growth. The policies raise the question of whether technical reform can beat politics. The government proceeded in three interconnected ways: it increased the mining investors' financial obligations (buying houses, collectors), decreased the collectors' relevance in the mining chain, and simultaneously increased government presence in the sector.

I first examine the government's use of legal instruments to increase financial obligations of collectors and directly increase revenues from mines. The move was based on the claim that the mining sector was full of foreigners as represented in the independent media above and we know that Muslim and foreigners are two overlapping categories. In terms of financial obligations, the 2004 codes required that diamond buying houses invest CFA 250 million francs in the country after three years of operation (art. 103).¹³⁵ Subsequently, the 2009 mining code sought to increase government benefits from the sector and to make the conditions of involvement more difficult for foreigners. Under the 2009 code, buying offices were obliged to invest CFA 350 million francs in the country (art. 154), an increase of CFA 100 million. The 2009 code also demanded that businesses involved in diamond carving (*tailleries*) invest CFA 50 million francs in building infrastructure after three years of operation. That requirement was not present in the 2004 code.

¹³⁴ CAR government had an incentive to adopt the new 2009 mining code because its adoption would have led to the reduction of the country's debt of USD 800 million (Matthysen and Clarkson 2013, 8). Apparently, the government altered the WB consultant's version of the code and "the version that became law displays, even more than the 2004 code, a lack of state flexibility that makes it difficult for entrepreneurship to take root within legal bounds" (ICG 2010, 12). Government authorities contested this and claimed that the consultants approved the final version (Matthysen and Clarkson 2013, 8).

¹³⁵ In fact, this argument was advanced in 2008 when the government sought legal grounds to justify dispossessing collectors and buying houses.

The 2004 code was vague about the taxes that could be paid to local administrations where the mines are situated (art. 87, par 2).¹³⁶ The 2009 code specified that all holders of a mining title would pay a 20% tax to the local administration (art. 121). Since the article made no specification regarding the holder of the permit, it is possible that both buying houses and collectors could have been targeted and forced to pay the 20% tax. This proved an open door for various corruption and embezzlement problems, particularly outside Bangui where there is little government infrastructure. The banking system is also limited, and the remote administrations do not always have the human resources to manage such funds. Moreover, the government also demanded specific dividends¹³⁷ from mining companies in order to get their licence (ICG, 2010, 8). Taking advantage of the imprecise 2004 code, “in 2005 one company reportedly agreed to pay \$750,000 each year for the first two years of exploration and \$500,000 for the following three. In 2008 another company reportedly had to pay, in addition to regular fees, 100 million CFA francs (\$200,000) plus vehicles and computers for its exploration permit” (ICG, 2010, 8). In the gold sector, the government received a USD 11 million signing bonus from AXMIN, a Canadian mining company (Matthysen and Clarkson, 2013, 26).

By changing the mining codes, the government made it harder for collectors and businesspeople to become involved in the mining sector. To become a collector, one previously needed to prove their financial capacity (mining code 2004, art 100). In 2009, more specificity was added. Now, a collector needs to prove a financial capacity of at least CFA ten (10) million francs (mining code 2009, art 150). The code makes it harder to become a collector, and, by the same token, extracts more revenue from that level of the chain.

The government’s second move was to become a key player in the mining production chain. This seems to have allowed the government to increase its presence in the mining chain, not necessarily its

¹³⁶ Art 87: par 2 stipulates that “Un pourcentage de ces montants de redevances superficielles déterminé par la Loi des Finances doit être reversé à la collectivité où se trouve la superficie.” (“A percentage of these area royalty amounts determined by the Finance Act must be paid back to the community where the area is located.”)

¹³⁷ There is no precise way of calculating that dividend from the code’s dispositions.

control of the production. The government established an organ called *Comptoir des Minéraux et Gemmes* (COMIGEM). It is a new government institution that functions as a buying office and commercialize precious stones. The 2009 code credits its creation (art. 143). With the already present BECDOR, the role of this organ was to carve an official space for the government. As presented previously, buying houses finance collectors who in turn also finance artisanal operators. The government now has its own buying house and can finance its own collectors.

Another remarkable difference between the two codes is that the government in 2009 signified its preference for industrial mining, but simultaneously made government presence necessary in any mining activity. For instance, the specific industrial mining licence was not covered in the 2004 code, which was imprecise and referred to “licence of exploitation” rather than “licence of industrial exploitation.” According to the 2009 code, the government must have at least a 15% share in the industrial mining company (art. 36) and private Central Africans must have a 5% share of the company (art. 52). In 2003, the government did not hold shares in mining companies (Dietrich, 2003, 2). In addition, the government will receive 15% of the company’s raw production (art. 52). Those provisions were absent in the 2004 code. By relying on these codes and specific articles, I show that the government sought to get rid of the collectors whom they perceived as owning the economy at the expense of Central Africans.

The mining code that the WB financed was thus highly political for the government. Probably that Bozizé sought to raise more money to sustain his network of cronies and to realize his vision of *Kwa na Kwa*. However, the mining codes also reveal that the government was competing with collectors and really wanted them to be a less important node of the mining chain when raising money needs not to be at the expense of collectors. For instance, a Muslim ex-minister, who was involved in the discussion around the mining code reform, recalls that “the reform of the mining code wanted to eliminate the collectors and the artisanal miners would be responsible for exporting their product themselves” (Interview RREU 2, Bangui, 2 July 2017). Of course, the reformed mining code did not get rid of

collectors, but as the Muslim ex-minister recalls, everything he contributed during those meetings was considered to be supportive of Muslims because his loyalty to the regime was questioned. Discussions about the modification of that code revolved around the support (or not) of various actors in the production chain. In an interview in 2017 with a Ministry of Mines senior public servant, he seemed to assume that Central Africans were not present in the mining sector. For him, “The reform of the mining code was also supposed to encourage the sons of the country (*les fils du pays*) to enter the sector” (Interview MOCDD, Bangui, 21 August 2017). Importantly, these two interviews contrast. Whereas the mining official considered that Muslims were not sons of the soil even though they were involved in the mining sector, the ex-Minister experienced that his views were devalued because he was Muslim. Clearly, autochthony infused competition between the government on behalf of true Central Africans and the collectors, an activity where several Muslims operate.

Finally, the government had been trying to reduce miners’ dependence on collectors prior to the crisis in 2013. For instance, the government promoted the creation of cooperatives since 1980 in order to bring the sector under control, but also to diminish miners’ dependence on collectors (Matthysen and Clarkson 2013, 15; A.P.M. 2003). In the 2009 mining code, the cooperatives can pay a lower export tax by taking their diamonds directly to BECDOR (art 144, 178). This corroborates what the former Muslim Minister said above regarding the fact that the mining code changes were supposed to help the artisanal miners export their product themselves. The export tax is 9% (Matthysen and Clarkson, 2013, 15), but the official buying houses’ export tax is 12 % (ICG 2010, 12).¹³⁸ At the same time, the buying houses also finance collectors who then buy diamonds on their behalf (Matthysen and Clarkson 2013, 17). So, the channels that diamond buying houses and collectors use for export could actually be more expensive. This measure can then force companies to go through BECDOR and which would increase state revenues. Moreover, in order to institutionally make the collectors less relevant in the production chain,

¹³⁸ That tax was 20% in 1982. In 2003, the Minister of Mines did not believe that lowering taxes would reduce smuggling (Kimberley process report, 2003, 3). As of December 2019, there seems to have been a shift in that idea.

the 2009 code provided space for the government to become more involved with artisanal miners through capacity building. This provision was not present in the 2004 code at all even if the government was already helping miners prior to the code.¹³⁹ According to the 2009 code, the mining administration “can provide any assistance to artisanal miners. This assistance concerns the improvement of methods and operating techniques appropriate to artisanal mining” (art 71, par 2).

Artisanal miners, members of mining cooperatives (not cooperatives themselves), or groups of miners can sell to collectors, buying offices, and COMIGEM. Artisanal miners were not previously allowed to sell directly to buying offices and with the new mining code, they can. This is one way to bypass collectors. Moreover, as Figure 1 shows, that fact is not included in the official diamond circuit. The 2004 mining code mentions that “managers and purchasing agents of buying houses and buying centers are authorized to purchase rough precious and semi-precious stones and metals from approved collectors, artisanal mining cooperatives and licensed *artisanal operators*” (art 105, my emphasis). In 2009, the article was tweaked to include COMIGEM. Article 145 stipulates that “patented *artisanal miners*, members of cooperatives or groups licensed artisans are authorized to hold, transport or sell their products to authorized collectors or authorized purchasing offices and COMIGEM” (art 145). From this overview of the sector, the difference between both levels is important. An artisanal miner is at the lowest level of the chain. An artisanal operator already controls 4 to 5 people and he is pre-financed by a collector. It follows that an artisanal miner can bypass a collector. The article also represents a liberalizing move in the sense that the miners can now sell to a broad range of actors. Prior to both mining codes, this was already done informally as Dietrich (2003, 3) noticed. But the 2009 operated a significant move by legalizing it. In the mining areas, miners just look for the highest bidder (Interview NIGE, Gaga, August 10, 2017). Since they are themselves not well trained and lack information about the diamond market, they sell to the artisanal operator or the collector. So, this means that the Muslim-foreigners still hold

¹³⁹ The Ministry of Mines even provided tools to facilitate the work of cooperatives (Kimberley process report 2003, 5).

their dominant presence in the mining production chain.

As “foreigner” is a category broad enough to be confused with Muslims, these various technical reforms target their presence in the mining sector. So, where Muslim-foreigners could be found, they have been targeted institutionally by the changes made to the mining code. Simultaneously, the state has displayed a capacity to generate more revenue by taking control of the sector and introducing their own representatives. The CAR government under President Bozizé was able to out-manoeuvre the mining codes changes that the WB promoted and take advantage of them. The 2009 code expressed the preoccupation of a government that wanted the economy to belong to Central Africans while simultaneously targeting an area in the mining production chain where Muslim-foreigners were present.

Concluding Remarks

As this chapter has demonstrated, the *vrai Centrafricain* logic was based on the Bozizé’s government’s and previous presidents’ constant preoccupation with increasing their own wealth at the expense of the people, while, at the same time, sidelining collectors who invested in the diamond business. Although it made economic sense to allow collectors to operate given the lack of skilled personnel in CAR, their presence – as Muslims-foreigners – was no longer welcomed. This is because in autochthony identity capital competition, the group that do not belong cannot be taking advantages of resources. The interviewees did not acknowledge Muslims/collectors contribution to the development of the mining sector, but rather sought to exclude them. The group’s status is unrecognized but a community that is torn at a particular moment is one that exists only by the virtue of the participation of various groups in its formation. Since Muslims are perceived not to belong, the true Central African must occupy the economic space. They were accused of keeping artisanal miners at the lowest place possible while taking advantage of them and not investing that money back in the country. Artisanal miners on the ground who were not disadvantaged by conflict, sought to take control of the mining areas. It is in discourse and representation that exclusion starts, and the accusation of Muslim-foreigners is part of the

broader exclusionary politics of autochthony.

The autochthony approach I presented here reveals its exclusionary logic. The politics of mining is now articulated within the discourse of autochthony, unlike before. The idea of a *vrai Centrafricain* allows discrimination against collectors and by extension Muslim-foreigners. Collectors have a dominant place in the mining chain production. It is a job specialization where many foreigners and Central African Muslims have been involved; hence Muslims as collectors are both domestic and foreign. This chapter also presented how the politics of concessions have allowed presidents to welcome foreigners in the mining sector. Keeping with that logic, concessionary politics became parasitic upon an autochthony logic under Bozizé. Even if other presidents threatened foreigners and welcomed them, it is Bozizé who initiated operation “Closing Gate” and changed the mining codes. Bozizé’s Minister for Mines justified the operation claiming that foreigners in the mining sector do not invest in the CAR. Independent journalists framed the Muslim-foreigners as exploiters, threats, or invaders. An example of the *vrai Centrafricain* rhetoric is that Central Africans need to own and control their economy.

5. Contrasting Non-Muslim and Muslim Discourses of Belonging: Sango, Religion, and the Immigrant-Guest Metaphor

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I focus on the discourses of non-Muslims and Muslims. I investigate the discourses of non-governmental elites, civil society, and Séléka armed group actors. Interviewees articulated their belonging through entitlement to the management of the political space, as well as other national symbols such as language and religion. Autochthony as a concept helps us understand the social context in which Muslims operated in the CAR and how this context is constitutive of Muslims being attacked by the anti-Balaka during the war. I explore autochthony competition, at this non-governmental meso-level, how narratives of belonging operated independently of the elite manipulation and operated separately from Bozizé's instrumentalization. Probing into different understandings of the same theme can lead us to better understand how instrumentalization is effective. If the true Central African narrative was powerful, it is because of its capacity to accommodate all these various discourses of armed men as well as civilians. These discourses manifest the symbolic, the discursive, and the social importance of autochthony.

This chapter, and the next, focus on autochthony and its politics, i.e., the broader logic of who is entitled to govern the CAR as well as some of the national symbols that allow the exclusion of Muslim groups. Muslims are often presented as foreigners and as not belonging to the CAR. This research finds that the autochthon-foreigner dynamic also represents the struggle to own both the economic and the political space and not simply about soil. Although interviewees focused on diverse attachments, land does not occupy an important position. Both Muslims and non-Muslims focused on the political space, the national language Sango, and religion. The political question revolves around whom the interviewees think should be allowed to govern and also the questioning of the Muslims' support of Séléka. That is,

supporting the Séléka rebellion raised tensions and is seen by non-Muslims as an abuse of the generosity that they claim to have granted to Muslims. This chapter is mainly interested in the symbolic and discursive effects of belonging. Through these discourses, I show how autochthony is conceived as a form of identity capital. In fact, identities can signal “a rank in the access to various resources in the context of rivalry or unequal cooperation between groups” (Dorransoro and Grojean 2018, 9). As capital, autochthony reveals the value that interviewees assigned to the role, or the lack thereof, their communities played in the history of the development of the country (Hilgers 2011).

The analysis in this chapter is based on interviews with civil society actors such as university professors, NGO activists, and former government members. These interviewees are non-Muslims. I contrasted their views to those of Muslim armed actors and also former government members and politicians who are Muslims. I highlight that these categorizations are for analytical purposes because many interviewees are invested in several activities simultaneously. However, these discourses necessarily reflect the views of a certain CAR class. The chapter begins by addressing the main national unity tool, the Sango national language. I explore how non-Muslims deploy the metaphor of Muslims that has been welcomed in the country. Non-Muslims present themselves as hosts who have done a great deal to “accommodate” Muslims. By that representation, they suggest that they are those who have done the most to make the land “humanly viable” (Hilgers 2011) and this serves to deny the Muslim’s grievances and refocus any considerations around non-Muslim issues.

5.2 Identity and Exclusion Through Language: Is Sango a National Unity Tool?

There are multiple ways to claim belonging. In the CAR, Sango, the national language has played the role of building the national identity to the point that I would commonly hear (in and out of Bangui) that “if you are Central African and you do not speak Sango, then you are not Central African” (Interview EJIU, Bangui, 9 June 2017). A Bangui University professor is the speaker of this quotation, and it was a common syllogism even in the highest level of government. Even an advisor of Touadéra

inner circle held the same view. Sango was one of the first symbols that non-Muslims advanced in interviews as the basis of belonging. Sango defined nationality and citizenship. That Sango and Central African identity are thought of together and show that they are discursively considered as the same. It follows that beyond the economic space, minorities (Muslim groups) are cast in the role of foreigners. This section examines Sango as a language that socializes and normalizes Muslim exclusion. As discourse is part of identity formation, then Sango itself is a basis of Muslim exclusion. This may sound controversial, especially to Central Africans, but if we take discourse analysis and its theoretical implications seriously, then this is an imaginable hypothesis.

Sango has come to define the CAR's identity. The CAR is one of the few African countries that, in 1991, officialised a language other than a colonial language (French, English, Portuguese or else).¹⁴⁰ The language has become a marker to determine who is and who is not Central African. Sango's status has been discussed in existing literature. For Lombard (2016, 189), Sango is an "invented tradition." Building on Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983), she explains that the language is quite recent in the country's history, although people hold on to it as if it had existed since time immemorial. Central Africans also continuously participate in grounding Sango and branding it as an invention is not to remove their agency or overemphasize colonial power actions in this discussion. Instead, this invented tradition of Sango builds on institutional support to anchor it as a tradition. Various laws and decrees have supported the codification and spread of Sango, such as decree n° 65-022 on the national commission for the study of Sango (Diki-Kidiri 1986, 94) or the literacy code in the Law n° 97.014 of December 10, 1997 (Piamalé 2005, 42).

Sango served as a communication medium for the French colonizers (Diki-Kidiri 1986; Samarin 2007). It is originally the language of the Ngbandi ethnic group, which was very active in trade, and the first group to be in contact with colonizers. Diki-Kidiri (1986, 85) locates Sango's origin in the

¹⁴⁰ Sango is the second official language after French, see (Leclerc 2016).

interaction of different ethnic groups in the CAR. Colonizers and missionaries helped its spread and promoted “Sango as the working language of the colony” (Lombard 2016, 188). Later, Central Africans popularized Sango through their own artists, music, and culture (Diki-Kidiri 1986).

For non-Muslims, it is nearly impossible to be a Central African and not speak Sango. The capacity of being a national is predicated on the capacity to speak the language. During fieldwork, Muslim interviewees argued that such oversimplification via language should not be the case. Language should not determine belonging but unfortunately language and its representations have been used as a determinant of who is in or out, in addition to religion, ethnicity, and politics. Muslims, however, dispute this national symbol. This is the case because it is another basis non-Muslims use to justify the exclusion of Muslims.

One interviewee, an FPRC cadre, vehemently disagreed about the status of Sango:

Him: Go to Birao [a city located in north-east] right now, you will find a Goula, a Rounga or Sara there, who was born there, who grew up there, but who only speaks his language. So, he does not speak Sango. Are you going to say that this person is not Central African? Language is not a criterion of choice to say that such or such is not Central African. It is not up to you and me to tell the person that he is not a Central African. It is the state, it is the law.

Me: Here in Bangui, this is what people are claiming on the radio

Him: Go right there, I will take you and you will find that there are children born there and they speak only their dialect eh. They speak Goula, Rounga, Sara or Banda. It is in the village because it is part of their world. The Sango language is not so widely diffused in these areas. Children only learn it at school, not in villages¹⁴¹ (Interview CEND2, Bangui, August 27, 2017).

The fact that non-Muslims claim Sango as the defining identity of the CAR is an expression of its contentious standing. The 2003 CAR census reveals that this symbol that non-Muslims cling to is a part of myth-making process and an exclusionary vision of the country. The 2003 census showed that 58% of the population is illiterate. French is the main literacy language, but only 17% of the population masters it. Literacy in Sango (those who read and write) is 4% (Piamalé 2005, 33), though spoken Sango is higher

¹⁴¹ This might not be totally accurate. Samarin (2007, 352) reports that “School, [...] is not the only place where Sango is acquired in rural areas.”

in urban areas (70.1%) than in rural areas (28.4%) (Ibid., 38). Sango is used for communication rather than education despite various attempts to have Sango in the education system (Ibid., 42).

The census reports that Sango, as a mass communication medium, is spoken by 87 % of the population. Although the percentage is high, it means there is a percentage of Central Africans who do not speak Sango. The highest percentage of Sango speakers live in Bangui (98.4%). This percentage decreases in the countryside, reaching 41% in Vakaga (the extreme north-east, the region where some rebels come from) (Yangoupandé 2005, ii). The overall percentage of spoken Sango decreased by 1.5% when compared to the 1988 census (Ibid., 27). The more detailed statistics reveal that 32 % of persons aged between 3 and 14 years old do not speak Sango (Ibid., 29). The percentage is 45.8% for those aged between 60 and 75 years old (Ibid., 30). In a group interview, a CAR NGO director said that his NGO brought Sango to the indigenous Aka (Group Interview, Bangui, 29 June 2017). The status of spoken Sango in the CAR is far from unequivocal.

Non-Muslims hold to Sango reveals that the language is part of their construction of national identity. However, focusing on Sango is important for another reason, namely Muslim exclusion within that language. In Sango, Muslims are designated as *Arabo/Arabou*. During fieldwork, I was not always sure whether my interviewees referred to ethnic Arabs, in CAR, or any other CAR ethnic group practising Islam. The Sango term *Arabo* conflates all Muslims, and, at the same time, points out that Arabs are not part of CAR. In Sango, it designates that they have a foreign origin. Since *Arabo* is used on a daily basis, it helps naturalize Muslim' exclusion from the polity. Romier (1999) and de Vries (2018) already noticed this when referring to Fulani. Conflating Arab and Muslims under *Arabo* in Sango has thus been an enduring speech practice in the CAR. Even, at times, in French discussions, interviewees would say *Les Arabes* as a way of translating from Sango into French. During discussions, interviewees, at times, would say “*ah les arabes ont encore attaqués*,” “The Arabs have attacked again,” but it was not clear if they meant Muslims in general or ethnic Arabs. Furthermore, Islam in Sango is *Nzapa ti Arabo*, the God of

Arabs. It also means that this God is not the same as “our” God, even though monotheist religions refer to the same God. Further, in popular perception, “Muslims” also refer to Chadians (Marchal 2015b, 129).

In short, *Arabo* can refer to Muslims, Chadians, Sudanese, Arabs, Fulani, or any other group practising Islam. I was drawn into that vision during my fieldwork as well. In popular discourse around me, Central Africans and Muslims were addressed separately in the same sentence due to that discursive dynamic. While I was puzzled by this at the beginning of the research trip, I caught myself in the last months using the same distinction. I reproduced the same divisions I sought to understand, and I felt uncomfortable with that. Other researchers also changed their discourses unexpectedly during research.¹⁴² I have felt the influence of this daily speech practice as I conducted interviews using “Central Africans” and “Muslims” in the same sentence. At times, using that binary was the only way to establish rapport with interviewees. I was reproducing and participating in boundary construction through discursive means.

In Bangui, Muslims speak Sango, but some are more ambivalent towards adopting Sango as their language. Muslims in the CAR conflate religion, ethnicity, and politics. However, there is one last distinction between those who do not know Sango, as revealed in the census data, and those who purposefully refuse to adopt Sango. A woman, Member of Parliament and heavily involved with civil society actions, puts it well:

Among Chadian, there are people who are born here, grew up here but refuse to speak Sango to their children. They only speak Arab. They [Muslims] say that Sango is *haram*, a language for the sinners, the wicked. It is possible that in the KM5, you meet people who are born here and who do not speak Sango (Interview SSEX, Bangui, 12 July 2017).

To some extent, you cannot hold a full citizenship, a full belonging if you do not speak the language. As the quote presents, you can be born in the country, but it is insufficient if you do not speak the language. The member of civil society exposed frustration and, ultimately, shares the view that one must

¹⁴² Cohn (1987) for instance when researching defence intellectuals. As she immersed herself into their world, she ended up speaking like them.

speak Sango as a CAR citizen. As “they” (Muslims) refuse to adopt Sango as their language, it reinforces the fact that, even if they are a third generation of migrants in the CAR, they refuse to integrate into the nation since Sango is now the “basis for nationalism” (Lombard 2016, 188). Moreover, some mosques in the KM5 preach in Arabic instead of Sango, which is a practice at odds with the non-Muslim conception of Sango. Overall, Muslims contest the conception that one should be Central African and speak Sango. This reveals a tension that lies with adopting Sango as a national language.

5.3 Autochthony and the Host-Guest Metaphor

The introductory chapter highlighted the impossibility of determining which ethnic group was really the first in CAR, but non-Muslim ethnic groups have deployed a narrative of autochthony to create a Muslim other. Non-Muslims use the immigrant-guest metaphor to emphasize and highlight that they “welcome” Muslims, and, by that virtue, Muslims could not turn their back on them, let alone protest, if they are oppressed. In the metaphor, the immigrant is conceptualized as “a guest who is expected to abide by certain rules of hospitality” (Jenkins 2012b, 577). Bøås and Dunn (2013, 45) identified a similar metaphor as the “stranger-father” relation by which “the stranger behaves in accordance with the rules and regulations of the community.”¹⁴³ Here, I explore how the metaphor was used to legitimize the exclusion of Muslims in the current war. There are two main ways non-Muslims used the metaphor: first, they portrayed Muslims as nonconforming to rules, suggesting that Muslims should not engage in politics, and, second, interviewees cast doubt on the legitimacy of Muslims to govern the CAR.

On the first point, Muslims, whether or not they are born in the country, have been conceptualized as ungrateful guests who took up weapons against their hosts. According to non-Muslims, Muslims should have not behaved the way they did, and this is not about the human rights violations of the Séléka that have been documented (Amnesty International 2014). Non-Muslim interviewees complained about

¹⁴³ For Bøås and Dunn (2013, 44–45) a “‘stranger’ who seeks to settle in a village or community needs to be adopted by an autochthonous ‘father’” (Bøås and Dunn 2013, 45). In Ivory Coast, this system is known as *tutorat* Bøås and Dunn (2013, 114). However, Bøås and Dunn (2013) address issues of land tenure when in CAR land was not contentious.

the fact that young Muslims were “boasting” once Séléka was in political power. This is not to diminish the fact that Séléka rule was brutal. I interviewed a retired senior civil servant of the Ministry of Mines who also serves as a political advisor to the King of Bangassou.¹⁴⁴ His explanation of the war reveals a sentiment that I encountered several times:

What is it that they [Muslims] have been blamed for? People blame them on the basis that us and them have never had any problems and now that bandits came, highwaymen, criminals, killers, you take them, you keep them and they begin abuses when it is thanks to us that you [Muslims] are what you are today. Because you do not cultivate, you do not even breed, you do not even do crafts. You are only traders. If we were not buying from you, how would you evolve? So, we have welcomed you, we have always, now that you harbor bandits against us, you and your bandits should leave [the interviewee used the French word *dégagez!*]” (Interview CPBF, Bangui, 30 June 2017)

He makes clear that Muslims’ support of the Séléka rebellion against non-Muslims is a problem. One former Minister provides a further example. He presents how, as the host community, non-Muslims have done a lot to incorporate the migrants: “We have established rural livestock communities (*commune d’élevage*) for the Fulani and we had Fulani mayors in order to integrate and to settle these communities” (Interview MTNL, Bangui, 7 June 2017). “We,” as he says, are the non-Muslims and the political elites who present themselves as hospitable and generous.¹⁴⁵ Because of everything they have done for them, they believe it is unacceptable that Muslims express any other types of demands. He echoes the non-Muslim sentiments of righteousness expressed by other interviewees: “Yes, Fulani were living with us, they were our brothers but when Séléka came, they took weapons against us; they should have remained

¹⁴⁴ This is a city located approximately at 700 km in south eastern CAR away from Bangui. Violence erupted in Bangassou few weeks after I started fieldwork in May 2017.

¹⁴⁵ Other researchers explored Fulani integration to CAR (Romier 1999; de Vries 2018). These accounts focus rightly on what CAR successive government did for nomadic and sedentary Fulani. Indeed, Fulani groups could be said to have been integrated to CAR polity with various initiatives. However, for this Fulani, former minister I interviewed in 2017, non-Muslims are not completely honest. For him, “If there is a Muslim community that has been adopted, the expression is carefully chosen, adopted, tolerated, it is the Fulani. But they [the non-Muslim] did it in a Central African way. It means that they strip you, they steal from you a little from time to time, and if you do not protest, we get along (Interview RREU2, Bangui, 2 July 2017). Importantly, the initiative around the rural livestock communities cannot be put solely to the credit of non-Muslims as they claim. One rebel cadre of the UPC, a Fulani, advanced that ‘The rural livestock communities started when there was a bovine illness killing the cattle and we did not know how to deal with that. That is how my father went and met Patassé who was the minister of livestock and asked him to build a case so that they can find a solution. That is how they were able to bring medicine to treat the disease’ (Interview KSSC, Bangui, September 23, 2017).

with us” (Interview SSEX, Bangui, July 12, 2017). For them, Fulani, Muslims, Séléka, and affiliates should simply not have taken up weapons against “us.” As these interviewees show, non-Muslims expect Muslims to not (overtly) engage in violent politics, let alone protest about being included in the CAR polity. Muslims rebelled as other politicians did in the CAR; they received support from neighbouring countries as other politicians did as well. What this reveals is that the guest metaphor is enduring and open-ended since some Muslims were also in the country, but it failed at trumping the guest metaphor when Muslims took up arms. You might not be considered a guest if you behave according to the hosts’ expectations/rules, but you are no longer welcome when your behaviour no longer conforms to these rules. Through the host-guest metaphor, the non-Muslims enact autochthony capital, draw boundaries for the group and signal how autochthony “capital corresponds to the principles that determine its value [such as] belonging to a community” (Hilgers 2011, 150).

In the host-guest metaphor and corollaries, it follows that the rules of engagement for the guests in anything other than what the host community laid out are unclear and this is where the guests’ place is challenged and contested. “We welcome you,” says the host, suggesting that guests should accept being discriminated against because they are welcome. Further, in the case of hardship, the guest should support, fend for us (the father), or live the same suffering as us. In addition, a *de facto* separation happens when people accuse Muslims of being supporters of Séléka. Non-Muslims believe that one cannot be Central African and support Séléka. Several non-Muslims I interviewed complained that “the Séléka never attacked a Notable Muslim” (Group Interview, CAR NGO workers, Bangui, June 29, 2017). Of course, this is their representation because Muslims did suffer from Séléka’s violence too.

The host-guest metaphor further implied an expected behaviour that Séléka and Muslims should have adopted while in power, but Muslims did not follow these unwritten rules. This generated underlying tension and resentment. In Bangui, for instance, political elites and civil society members mentioned that Muslims and Séléka were “boasting” because they were in power. Other respondents used

the French term *fanfaron* to convey how Séléka and Muslims were pretentious. One local authority in Bangui's Miskine arrondissement advanced that "when Séléka was there, they [Muslims] took the weapons and they were boasting in the neighborhood [the interviewee used the French word *fanfaron*]" (Interview ADSL, Bangui, August 23, 2017). For instance, the King of Bangassou, who lives in Bangui, argued that "as these people [Muslims] got rich with time, they began displaying a haughty behaviour" (Interview GAGAR, Bangui, June 20, 2017). Similarly, a journalist said, during our interview, that for "the first time a Muslim minority comes to power, well they had wings, they had wings. Some will say that the Fulani became a man" (Interview HDKF, Bangui, May 27, 2017). Séléka did not only have wings, they were also "chanting their victory" (Fieldwork Notes, Bangui, July 14, 2017) as a resident of the neighbourhood I resided in claimed. These interviewees, who were all non-Muslims, manifest a concern about how one should behave once in power. For non-Muslims, there is a tension at seeing Muslims enjoy power. As the journalist commented after the Séléka felt that they fully attained a status of manhood, indeed the Fulani did become a man. It is a powerful metaphor that shows that non-Muslims, in their daily encounters with Fulani, might not see them as men. In Africa, the meaning of manhood varies depending on the social group, as there are different rites of passage to adulthood and different perceptions of manhood. That Fulani claimed that manhood is in relation to the pride they felt as their co-religionists were in power. This might also be linked to the fact that Fulani had weapons and could be harassed less. However, in the absence of further investigation, a question remains unanswered. How should "guests" or a deprived group behave once they manage to wield power? For non-Muslims, the behaviour of Muslims was inappropriate. It means, at least, that how non-Muslim presidents behave when in power was appropriate.

These interviewees made obvious that, as guests, Muslims had no explicit place in the political sphere and should conform to the host's political choices. As other scholars have pointed out, democratization in Africa in the 1990s ignited questions of autochthony. In the CAR context, what is at

issue is both Muslim' involvement in violent politics and in opposition to the host community that sparked the violence and targeted them. Although non-Muslims resent the Muslims' dominant presence in the economy (Chapter 4), civil society and political elites were concerned with who should own and be in the public political space. Hence, they problematize the Muslim presence in the political sphere. The perception that the "guests" are occupying the political space generates tension. I interviewed non-Muslims of various ethnic groups in 2017 and their strategy builds on the resentment about the economic dominance of Muslims. The belonging of several Muslims to the commercial sector becomes an argument mobilized against them to obstruct their access to the political space. Politics manifests in the attempts that these groups should be represented in power. Since Muslims are perceived as guests, non-Muslims find it frustrating that Muslims seek to control the political space, especially because they are perceived to have a space that they can already dominate. Non-Muslims adopt a range of justification and legitimation strategies. For instance, in Bangui, the director of a prestigious national school argued,

If they [Muslims] had said "no, no, no" listen, if the brothers, ah "no, no, no, no, no" your stories of political power do not interest us, we came here for trade, we will not interfere. There should not even have been a problem! I do not know if you understand what I mean. "No, no, no, no, no," your stories, if you want to do politics, do. We are here traders at KM5 we are there to simply trade and leave us alone (Interview NALAI, Bangui, June 16, 2017).

In non-Muslims' political and civil society discourses, the political space is problematized, and by Muslim presence this problematization, in turn helps them legitimize their occupation of it. According to this civil society actor, Muslims should self-declare that political power does not interest them because then their perceived problems would not arise as Muslims would remain in the economic sphere. The King of Bangassou, living in Bangui in 2017 stated that

The Muslims are in the business and all that, they use the locals and pay poor salaries. I do not know, maybe the Muslims had in mind to rule but they have not manifested it. So, in any case when they wanted to seize political power, it looks like it did not work (Interview GAGAR, Bangui, June 20, 2017; Doubane 2015, 186).

This interviewee removes agency from non-Muslims. By stating that "it" did not work, he does not reflect on the push back of the anti-Balaka towards Muslims and Séléka. It is impossible to ignore the

role that anti-Balaka played in defeating Séléka and Michel Djotodia.

The host-guest metaphor was also deployed when civil society actors cast doubt on the legitimacy of Muslims to govern. Again, this was because Muslims were already dominating the economic space, giving non-Muslims the sense that they should not occupy the political space too. In Bangui, one evangelical pastor argued that “it is parents [Muslims parents] themselves who take their kid out of school so that they can go and sell in the market (Interview B12K, Bangui, July 19, 2017), indicating that Muslims cannot govern the country because they are not educated, they are in the commercial sector. One former Minister similarly argued:

People speak of Fulani being abused and all that or even Muslims and all that. But when sedentary [non-Muslims] people send their kids to school, Fulani and Muslims are doing something else. The Fulani would tell you that he is a herder and the Muslim is already counting millions in the commercial sector. So, when it is time to recruit in the public sector, obviously they are excluded because they do not have the prerequisite (Interview MTNL, Bangui, June 7, 2017).

Guilt attribution, in this sense, suggests that Muslims should blame themselves for not being able to be more present in the public administration. Indeed, from these interviewees’ understanding, Muslims are absent from schools and public administration, so how could they possibly govern? The coordinator of the Interfaith Religious Platform argued that

Some Muslim elites came during the period when Séléka was in power and stated that it was their turn to govern. For me, they could not govern because within the Muslim community, there is no qualified elite who can lead this country (Interview RQSI, Bangui, May 23, 2017).

This “blame the victim,” erases and silences non-Muslims’ role in perpetuating discrimination against Muslims. The height of it all was that when a senior member of a marginal political party¹⁴⁶ in our interview argued that “if you [Muslims] want power, do like us [non-Muslims], go to school!” (Interview NABP, Bangui, July 26, 2017). If anything, Muslims acquired power exactly like their non-Muslim counterparts, by staging a coup and engaging in violent politics. Schooling was a marginal factor, but this reveals the attempt of the host to dictate the guests’ behaviour. This kind of reaction suggests, at

¹⁴⁶ This is the *Union des Démocrates pour le Renouveau Panafricain* (UDRP).

least, that non-Muslims presupposed the political/administrative space belonged to them. They have the identity capital to claim occupation of that space and deny presence to Muslims on the basis of their identity as they employ the host-guest metaphor. These discourses capture what people do every day to invest in autochthony as a form of capital.

There is a strong perception that Muslims' marginal place in the CAR renders their political rule untenable. One interviewee, a Central African working for the International Organization for Migration (IOM), advanced in our discussion that because the ethnicity practising Islam is minority ethnicity, they could have never governed the CAR, thus normalizing that Muslims were rejected. During the interview, he went as far as asking me: "in which country have I seen that a minority can govern a majority?" I could have simply replied his own country, but I did not. Indeed, several CAR presidents came from ethnic minority groups. Presidents such as Bokassa, Dacko, or even Kolingba came from ethnic minority groups. The interviewee continued and presented the "real issue":

The real issue in this conflict: look on the demographic. Since when is a minority allowed to govern a majority? Djotodia is a Goula, less than 1% of the population. Nourredine Adam is Rounga, from a minority group as well. Arsène Sendé is Youlou, from a minority group. In the same vein, the Muslim religion is not that well spread in the country. It has made the governance of the non-Muslim community impossible (Interview GTBN, Bangui, May 10, 2017)

This quote presents Muslims as suffering a double alienation. Rebels who came to power are minorities from their ethnic grouping and from a religious perspective. Both reinforce each other and their "guestness." Further, the fact that the interviewee ignores the minority origin of previous CAR presidents signals that being from a minority group might be less relevant if you are a non-Muslim. Bozizé only was from a majority ethnic group, the Gbaya. The way non-Muslims contest Muslims' presence in the political space sheds light on latent thinkability; I mean internalized and expressed ideas that serve as a permissive condition for violence. This is explored further below.

5.4 The Host-Guest Metaphor as a Centre-Stage Problem

Autochthony, as a politics of hospitality, has an element of denial. Autochthons expect the current

war situation to be overturned, but do not expect Muslims to be treated with equal rights. As non-Muslims have come to understand the CAR as belonging to them, it helps to facilitate denialism and threat construction, which are mechanisms that “encourage [...] people to commit, or permit, mass violence” (Maynard 2014, 828). In fact, non-Muslims challenge the discriminatory discourse of Muslims. In simple terms, they deny that they have been discriminated against. Denial is a way to promote a political agenda (Lemarchand 2011, 14). This is clear in CAR. As interviewees in 2017 sought to explain the rebellion to me, they unintentionally marginalized Muslims. This politics of hospitality perpetuates non-Muslim domination through discursive practices related to autochthony capital. At the meso-level, people do not wait for elite to instrumentalize autochthony, they also articulate it in their everyday experience. I explore this denial as a center-stage problem demonstrating how it is perpetuated and enacted.

The host-guest relationship has been observed in other cases (Socpa 2006; Marshall-Fratani 2006; Jenkins 2012b). Authors do not pay attention to the fact that this metaphor, serves to further marginalize the recipient of the discourse, here Muslims. To make this marginalization and denial more explicit, I rely on Grillo and Wildman’s work on how dominant groups can perpetuate domination through discourse. Grillo and Wildman (1991) have analyzed what they call the centre-stage problem. These are situations where a dominant group seeks to take back the stage from minorities and their issues. Indeed, “The centre-stage problem occurs because dominant group members are already accustomed to being on centre stage. They have been treated that way by society, it feels natural, comfortable, and in the order of things” (Grillo and Wildman 1991, 401). Dominant groups’ norms feel natural to the extent other perspectives are erased and rendered unimportant. They produced this work in the context of Critical Race Theory in the United States. They showed that “Members of dominant groups assume that their perceptions are the pertinent perceptions, that their problems are the problems that need to be addressed, and that in discourse they should be the speaker rather than the listener” (Grillo and Wildman 1991, 402). From their approach, I retain two main strategies that the CAR non-Muslims adopted but that are used

simultaneously. Non-Muslims take back the stage from Muslims' grievances and use analogies of marginalization experiences that undermine Muslims' engagement in rebellion.

Non-Muslims expect that issues of concern to them will be central in every discourse, this is how they take back the stage. In the CAR, it goes that Muslims' grievances are acknowledged but equated to non-Muslim issues. It serves the host community because non-Muslims can re-enter the debate with their problems. I noticed this strategy in intellectual circles in Bangui. A professor and politician in Bangui seemed surprised that Muslims wanted power. In a book published in 2015, he delegitimized Muslims' rebellion by analogizing their frustrations to those of other ethnic groups in the CAR. As clearly illustrated in this quote, Muslims simply did not have the right to take up weapons:

[...] these frustrations do not only affect Muslims. The Zande, for example, how many presidents did they have, how many ministers? We too, because of our proximity to Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo, could have taken up arms under the pretext that we were marginalized. But we did not do it. We made the choice to stay in the republic. You must think bigger than the family, the ethnicity or the region. We must think what we can do for the Central African nation. (Doubane 2015, 187; Interview CCKR, Bangui, June 6, 2017)

This perspective circulates widely in the CAR educated circles. A prominent civil society actor that I interviewed shared similar points. The quote from the book presents that the public figure's ethnic group has also been marginalized and this serves to perpetuate the occupation of the stage by the dominant group, the non-Muslims. Hence, for the politician, Muslims are *pretending*. They have no real reason to rebel and this is because all regions of the CAR are marginalized. Non-Muslims centre issues on marginalization – of virtually all ethnic groups. Similarly, one ex-Prime Minister, a prominent lawyer and political leader in the CAR alluded to the same issue when he stated that “people have taken up weapons to claim that they were excluded from the state governance. But it is a fake problem since all the other region are marginalized. Even in Bozizé's village, there is nothing at all” (Interview KPZS, Bangui, August 31, 2017). Every time politicians compare Muslims' marginalization and discrimination to theirs and to that of their communities, Muslims' issues are further marginalized, obscured, and overlooked. This is because they bring the spotlight back to their own issues. In that sense, as members

of the dominant group, they “attempt to take back the pivotal focus. They are stealing the centre usually with a complete lack of self-consciousness” (Grillo and Wildman 1991, 402).

Non-Muslims re-centre the debate but also reject the differentiated experience of the marginalization of the Muslim community. In at least two ways, Muslims feel their marginalization differently than those of other communities. I illustrate this with examples from the education sphere and economic development project domain. In education, a former minister, cadre of the Séléka, made an interesting remark.¹⁴⁷ In the north-east, he argued, “we receive teachers starting from January when the road is practicable. When people in Bangui have 9 months of school, we only have four or five and after that we have to sit for the same exam and competition” (Interview DEBH, September 4, 2017). These kinds of structural barriers account for the differentiated experience of Muslims in the education system. It also suggests why parents find other activities for their kids. However, these experiences are unaccounted for when non-Muslims imply that it is the Muslims’ fault for not having conformed to non-Muslim expectations, such as going to school. For instance, a CAR national working for the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian affairs (OCHA), mocked Muslims by saying that “these people cannot even write their names, how can they be employed in the public administration?” (Interview HPHS, Bangui, May 10, 2017). In this othering utterance, the interviewee clearly showed closure in the discourse operating a key distinction between both groups. That is, non-Muslims are better educated (they can write their names) than Muslims. However, being marginalized and discriminated against does not mean that Muslims and Fulani wish to become high public servants – they simply want to stop experiencing discrimination. For instance, Fulani have always complained about their cattle being stolen (Tennebaye 2015; Seignobos 2011; Chauvin and Seignobos 2013) and Muslims traders complained about exorbitant taxes (Carayannis and Lombard 2015).

¹⁴⁷ He is a cadre of the armed group *Rassemblement Patriotique pour le Renouveau de Centrafrique* (RPRC). This armed group is also a faction that broke from Séléka. The movement was created in November 2014. At the time of this writing, the interviewee is back in Government.

Regarding the economic development domain, there is evidence that the north-east, where many Muslims live, has been denied development project funding. Ndélé is one of CAR's north-east cities where rebellion has found supporters. Under President Bozizé, the government deemed Ndélé too close to rebels and directed development funds towards Bossangoa and Paoua, which are areas close to Bozizé's supporters. As Chauvin (2015, 493) presented,

The "development poles" program was launched in 2008. Funded with € 48 million under the 10th European Development Fund (EDF), it aims to revive the economy and improve the influence of the State from secondary cities. It [the project] was confronted with growing insecurity. In 2008-2009, cities in the South-East and North-East were withdrawn from the project. Cities like Ndélé deemed too insecure by the European Union and *too close to rebellions by the central government*. Funds were redirected to eight urban centre (Bouar, Bozoum, Paoua, Bossangoa, Kaga-Bandoro, Sibut, Bambari, Bangassou) and two bipolar centres (Batangafo-Kabo and Mobaye-Alindao) (my emphasis).

Although the EU had concerns about the insecurity in the region, CAR government managed to redirect the funds because of rebels who, were demanding increased development funding and a better consideration of their region in development projects. Centring issues on marginalization gives non-Muslims a sense that they understand Muslims' experience. Since marginalization is a problem for the host, the group in the centre, the non-Muslims, they do not pay attention to how marginalization has affected Muslims and their varied experience of it. This is illustrated with the RPRC cadre quote above and through some of the jokes I heard about Séléka fighters during fieldwork. With the history of marginalization of the north-eastern region, it turns out that several of the fighters coming from the region were uneducated. In Bangui, several interviewees commonly joked about the uneducated fighters. They usually mocked Séléka fighters' behaviour with stereotypes. Apparently, Séléka fighters have mistaken computer screens for TVs or remote controls for cellphones and many other "backward" behaviours. So, non-Muslims were seeing themselves as better than fighters who displayed "backwardness." It reinforced the fact that Muslims should not be given political power. These stereotypes clearly demonstrate Ricoeur's (2000) insight that closure in the discourse is linked with closure in identities. By othering Muslims, non-Muslims show the closure of the true Central African identity. This demonstrates the social

practices of autochthony and its resonance with people. But more than resonance, these are deeply ingrained bodily practices and should be thought alongside elite instrumentalization of identity.

My research identified two more implications concomitant with the centre-stage problem. The first, is that Muslims' grievances are rejected because non-Muslims see these grievances as upsetting *tradition*. It is unclear if this discrimination is an "invented tradition" (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983) that Muslims are challenging, but Lombard (2016) has highlighted how the separation Muslims – Central African is a replication of colonial policy. My research did not specifically investigate if Muslim discrimination was linked to colonial experience. What interviewees suggested was that discrimination felt natural, removing their agency and deep discursive practices. Second, the implication is about non-Muslims' involvement in peace initiatives. One former government Minister of the transition period (2014-2016) highlighted the first point in the following interview scene:

Me: ... people [Muslims] complained that they had to pay more fees at roadblocks and everyone else found it normal.

Ex-Minister: All that is in the tradition, we have always lived like that with them [Muslims], it has always been like that. When I got here, that is what I saw, it did not even cause problems because they themselves knew already. It did not cause any problems, it has been into the mores, it could not have caused the known damages (Interview IPeM, Bangui, July 14, 2017).

This former minister himself grew up and was schooled in a neighbouring country but has come to see Muslims' differentiated treatment as tradition. The naturalization of Muslim discrimination is profound. Even some internationals share the same view as that former minister. As expressed by the director of an International NGO:

Me: ...some Muslims report that at the roadblocks they have to pay more than other people.

NGO director: But of course, the more you have the more you give, it is simply the law of nature (Interview WIWE, Bangui, June 13, 2017)

Muslims must struggle for their issues to be recognized and taken seriously. If something is equated to the law of nature, it is naturalized, and, at the same time, linked to unchanged deep history. But, if paying more was "natural," then rich individuals would not be avoiding paying taxes both on the African

continent and elsewhere. As international representatives come to share the same worldview in these discourses, intentionally or not, they reinforce the boundaries that non-Muslims constructed.

Based on the following fieldwork episodes, I can highlight how non-Muslim norms and symbols feel natural, thus highlighting their autochthony capital. When I was conducting the research, I participated in several civil society activities. In some of these events, I observed the CAR national identity being produced with little conscious reflection. In May 2017, I attended a social cohesion event in the district of Boy-Rabe, a neighbourhood that has witnessed violence during the war. One civil society organization decided to tackle identity issues in various neighbourhoods by doing a presentation and discussion of the book *Les identités meurtrières* by Amin Maalouf (2003). Maalouf's book pushes back against the notion of tribal identities, and one main point is that people should accept that there are multiple ways of belonging, and that we all belong to humanity. In brief, there is no need to reject others based on their identity. At first sight, this is an inclusive and peaceful message. People in the neighbourhood must welcome their Muslims brothers. The objective of the event was well intended, as they sought to tell residents in the neighbourhood not to kill people who did not share their ethnicity, or identity. However, as the event went on, a sociologist, Zephirin Mogba presented on the theme of identity in the CAR in which. According to him, two events marked national identity of the country: the Kongo Wara war in 1928, and the political work of Barthélemy Boganda (Fieldwork Notes, participant observation, civil society meeting, Bangui, 12 May 2017). The first event is the Gbaya revolt against French colonizers (see Introductory Chapter). Surprisingly, the anti-Balaka fighters mobilized symbols of that revolt, such as courage, resistance, and defender of the population, in their attacks of Muslims.¹⁴⁸ The second event is the work of Barthélémy Boganda, the Catholic priest turned politician, who drove the independence struggle and is considered as the “father” of the CAR. From a centre-stage perspective, the two symbols that the sociologist highlighted served to centre the view that non-Muslims, and

¹⁴⁸ I expose this in Chapter 6.

Christians constitute the identity of the country, even if this was not the intention of the presenter. He was keen to emphasize that the country is home to ethnicities that practise Islam but in no way did he present those ethnicities as having done anything for the country. But to determine autochthony capital value, one must demonstrate the role of the group in the history of the development of the country (Hilgers 2011), and that has been a lacking perspective in these activities.

Showing what one group has done for the realization of the country is associated with how that group acquires autochthony capital. I do not believe he did this out of malice; however, not engaging Muslim contributions to the national identity is a way for the centre to spread its dominant views and symbols. There were several similar events by the same civil society organization, and, in this version of CAR national identity, it was difficult to see the place they carve for Muslims. This suggests that non-Muslims initiate the debate about identity on their terms. It is a clear manifestation of how being a Central African equates with being non-Muslims and how the CAR non-Muslims perpetuate their domination, even if unconsciously. These kinds of practices are ingrained in the daily, bodily, and discursive habits of non-Muslims. They are not awaiting elite instrumentalization. It is through these practices that one can make sense of how elites' and people's understanding connect. These practices also give sense to autochthony identity capital as they signal whose contributions to the realization of the country matter, hence, who has the "natural" right to benefit from its resources, both political and economic. Autochthony identity capital, here, reveals another principle "that determine its value [...] the role [of a community] in the history of its development" (Hilgers 2011, 150). In other cases where the host-guest metaphor is present, scholars need to probe into this centre-stage problem as it can illuminate autochthony.

5.4.1 Muslims' Representation in the Public Space

In line with the discursive approach of this thesis, I demonstrate that Muslim othering did not start with this 2013 war. Muslim othering happened simultaneously, as non-Muslims conditioned the debate for years, with a focus on marginalization and instrumentalization of ethnicity by political elites. On a

daily basis, the representation of Muslims in the media allows us to better understand their targeting, because discourses in times of peace play an important role in the legitimation of violence when war starts. These public discourses reveal their closure, hence, the closure of the Central African identity. As the dissertation theoretical orientation suggest, if identity is produced through discourse, then closure in discourse is also linked to closure in our identities (Ricoeur 2000). It is also such closure in discourse that allows one group to build its autochthony capital while the other group cannot. The media played an indirect role in the construction of the Muslim other or at least they perpetuated that construction. Most of the time, Muslims have been represented negatively and tied to negative acts. To illustrate this, I rely on the independent newspaper sample, as outlined in the Introductory chapter (section 1.3). In Bangui, it is normalized to point out negative behaviour by a Muslim. For instance, in one independent newspaper article, the journalist wrote Muslim thief (*Musulman voleur*) in 2004 (Placit 2004). It was a story where the thief was beaten to death in the 5e arrondissement of Bangui. The journalist thought necessary to make explicit that it was a “Muslim” that was the “thief” when the religious affiliation of the thief was not necessary. When a Christian is engaged in negative behaviour, pointing out identity is treated as unnecessary; a thief can be simply a thief. This does not hold for Muslims. For Muslims, this article used a stronger way to address the act, depicting the thief as a true Muslim (*Musulman de souche*). In French, *de souche* usually locate or indicate the origin of someone. In this case, the thief is of Muslim origin, a native Muslim. This designation is significant because the result is that the thief is not Central African. By being of Muslim origin, he is not Central African. So, an original Muslim, a true Muslim is caught as a thief.

The media represented Muslims separately from the larger community, and also as troublemakers and virulent opposers to their host community, but broadly speaking it was opposition to state officers who were harassing them. As another example, an article in 2004 presents Muslims as opposed to the Central African Armed Forces (*Forces Armées Centrafricaines (FACA)*) (Mokambo 2004b). The author

describes how there is a “latent crisis between the autochthons and Muslims.” Another media headline in 2006 announces “...PK-12 under extreme tension: Muslim and Central African communities in disagreement” (Schengen 2006). Similarly to the thief *Musulman de souche*, Central African and Muslim are opposed, hence the closure in the discourse. There seems to be two different realities and origins to these groups. At the level of discourses, these realities seem incommensurable. Presenting Muslims as a separate entity is not just the media depiction, but also reproduced in official government documents. Therefore, we need to think of autochthony capital as deeply ingrained bodily and discursive practices. In various documents I obtained from the Ministry of Territorial Administration in 2017, Fulani and Muslims are usually singled out in opposition to autochthons. In a 2016 budget document from Bambari, I read that “Cattle breeding is practiced by Fulani and small livestock practiced by the autochthonous population” (Préfecture de la Ouaka 2016, sec.7.a). Similarly, in another 2016 budget document from Kaga-Bandoro, it is written that trade in the area is practised 70% by Muslims and 30% by autochthons (Préfecture de la Nana-Gribizi 2016, 7). So, even if Muslims have been living “peacefully” with the “autochthons” they are not considered as being part of the same larger community as Central Africans in these texts.

In 2011, another event prompted the media to present Muslims against inhabitants of the 3rd district in Bangui (Ngrebada 2011). The 3rd district is the area where most of the capital’s Muslims live, and, still, they were singled out. The newspaper spoke of a Bangui that has just avoided a “civil war.” The story goes that two young individuals were found dead in the car of a Chadian Muslim. It followed that the family of the individual had been attacked and accused of witchcraft (Martinelli 2014). The population in Bangui was quick to react; three mosques were destroyed, and several Muslims were killed. The Chadian government felt obliged to send envoys to the CAR to calm the situation. The CAR government even established a curfew as violence soon erupted in other Bangui districts (Martinelli 2014). As Ceriana Mayneri (2014b) advanced, it is as if an accusation of being “Muslim”

provoked specific form of violence.

KM5 is the main Muslim neighbourhood of Bangui. As Marchal (2015a, 130) points out, the market of KM5 is the market of the more modest population as opposed to supermarkets of downtown Bangui where expatriates run their errands. As Muslims come to be resented because of their economic power, Muslims in independent media are constructed as a problematic, as is the 3rd district where that population is concentrated. In other words, it is not just Muslims, but also the area in which they live that is singled out. Media usually depicts KM5 as a powder keg (*poudrière*)¹⁴⁹, an area where the situation is explosive or in military terms, an area where ammunition is stored. One independent newspaper recounts a story where a police officer arrested a Muslim for a routine check (Ndongo 2004). The latter resisted and brandished a knife, and later, his corpse was found at the hospital. For the journalist, it was a proof that “the KM5 has shown in the eyes of the world that it is a ‘real powder keg’ and a ‘volcano’ likely to boil at any time” (Ndongo 2004). That the Muslim was killed was unfortunate, but a civilian cannot brandish a knife. Moreover, the KM5 is the place where various ills happen, as demonstrated by the following few newspaper descriptions: “Muslims thieves” (Essango 2011), “violence” in the market (Le Passant 2011), a “boiling” neighbourhood (Danguia 2011b) or even a neighbourhood on the brink of “revolt” (*Le Citoyen* 2011d). Muslims, and that neighbourhood are seldom, if ever, attributed positive adjectives. It is treated as a neighbourhood that needs to be tamed or calmed down. The independent media perpetuates the perception that the KM5 needs to be taken care of. More than that, these public discourses signal that the Muslim community play no positive role in the history of the development of CAR except being troublemakers. These othering practices simultaneously define what makes the Central African. The Central African is not a thief, not violent, and the neighbourhoods where they live is not boiling or on the brink of a revolt. In that sense, Muslim integration in the Central African community is problematic and might not happen. It is not evident how Muslims can acquire autochthony as a form of capital if they

¹⁴⁹ See Madimba-Nimba (2003c) for the use of *poudrière* in relation to KM5.

are excluded from the community on a daily basis.

5.5 Autochthony Discourse Among Muslims and Some Séléka Armed Groups

Muslims also narrate their belonging. While the question of their belonging is a source of conflict, Muslims have been present in the country for generations, but little is known about how Muslims themselves legitimize their belonging in the CAR. The attention has been on the grievances of that community. A real engagement with the Muslim community merits a presentation of the Muslims' perspectives. In order to see the politics of hospitality and guest/host, one must go beyond how non-Muslims presented Muslims as guests and probe how a minority group position itself in relation to the *vrai Centrafricain* question.

Many Muslim interviewees expressed their belonging through various symbols, such as rejecting the very fact that someone could be the first in the CAR. They traced their presence in the country (being raised in the CAR) to the colonial protectorate, and also said they participated in the realization of the CAR as a country, which was important to demonstrating belonging, hence their autochthony capital.

Contrary to non-Muslims, who framed Muslims as people who have been welcomed, Muslims reject that one can really determine who belongs in the CAR on the basis of the primacy of the settlement. For instance, one municipal advisor in the KM5 neighbourhood declared that “because we are in the centre of the continent, all the various communities came from somewhere else. We cannot know who is who” (Interview CRME, Bangui, 28 June 2017; Interview FRTT, Bangui, 3 September 2017). Similarly, one Séléka rebel leader interviewed in 2017, put it in a similar way:

We know that everyone in CAR came from somewhere else. Gbayas from Cameroon, Sara, Zandé, etc. All have their origins in neighboring countries DRC, Sudan, Chad. Who can claim to be more Central African than someone else? Even when the colonizers came, there were already people. Historians claim that Boganda was born in another country. At the end of the day, this is a fake problem” (Interview KSFC, Bangui, May 27, 2017).

Muslims were the most frequent user of this argument even if it is a commonly accepted fact that several ethnicities populate the country, and that these groups might have come from neighbouring

countries. Although non-Muslims are aware of the same fact, this did not feature as a main issue in their discourses. Their belonging to the polity was almost natural, never in doubt.

Second, Muslim interviewees referred to the colonization period as a proof of their presence in the CAR. One former Minister, who is close to the Séléka, pointed to the protectorate agreement between the north-east and France to claim belonging:

We are present in this country since the 14th century and we even had a protectorate treaty with the French while the Gbaya came recently from the Adamaoua when they were running away from Dan-Fodio. We are also autochthon of this country (Interviews DEBH, Bangui, September 4, 2017; CEND1, Bangui, August 26, 2017).

It is a fact that the Senoussi Sultanate (see introductory Chapter) in the north-east had a protectorate treaty with French in 1897 (Simiti 2013, 75; Lombard 2016, 66).¹⁵⁰ This claim is about claiming ancestry, an aspect of the Muslim settlement period, and political relationship with the same colonizer as non-Muslims. Similarly, I interviewed one cadre of the *Front Populaire pour la Renaissance de la Centrafrique* (FPRC), a Séléka rebellion offshoot that remains one of the most threatening and capable rebel organizations in the CAR. For him, that protectorate serves as the basis of the secessionist demands of the Séléka even if they have toned it down (*El-Watan.com* 2013). He stated that “autonomy still exists in our body and spirit; we will claim it” (Interview CEND1, Bangui, August 26, 2017). Indeed, I am not aware of an equivalent protectorate with any other CAR grouping, and non-Muslims did not bring up such fact. Muslim statements show a discourse of belonging that is also based on political activity. As the French are the former colonizers, we are also Central African on the basis that we had a protectorate with them.

Another interviewee, a cadre of the UPC, similarly mobilized the themes of ancestry and political relationship, but in terms of the relationships with non-Muslim political elites and not the colonizer. The UPC rebellion is also an offshoot of the Séléka that has been growing and expanding territorial control

¹⁵⁰ The sultanate signed three treaties with French in 1897, 1903, and 1908 (Cordell 1985, 69).

in the past couple of years. They claim that they protect the Fulani community from which cattle were regularly stolen well before the war. In that sense, the Fulani situation differs from other Muslims from the north. The leader of the UPC is Ali Darassa, a Fulani whose origins remain disputed, but who presently lives in the CAR. Darassa has had a long career as a man of arms (Debos 2016) in the central African region. As cattle owners and keepers, Fulani people could be said to be dominant in the meat economic sector. Similar to other Muslim communities, they have complained about marginalization. I sat with this cadre of the UPC at three different occasions. As he began to demonstrate that he is a true Central African, he simultaneously focused on his family history in relationship to non-Muslim political elites.

I am a son of a sultan. The Sultanate of Kouï. [...] I arrived in Bangui in 1981, when Kolingba was taking power. [...] It is my grandfather who, with the Germans, started this sultanate thing but also the rural livestock communities. I am a prince, wherever I go, as soon as a state my name, I am well received. [...] My father grew up with Patassé. When I was a child, I used to play on Kolingba's knees [...] My father used to come every two to three months in Bangui and when Patassé was around, we would go eat at his place and even discussed until 1 a.m. (Interview KSSC, Bangui, September 23, 2017).

In his account, the links to CAR politicians emerge as important to show that he was no stranger to the politics of his country. However, in a following interview, he lamented:

Notice that with everything that happened, the Fulani did not have a single post [in government]. I met Darass on the ground. He was the man that they [Séléka] would send for difficult missions. Imagine that Darass would go for difficult missions for them and not have what to eat. The Séléka, now that they had weapons, would go on the countryside and strip herders. When it is the moment to eat, Fulani are forgotten (Interview KSSC1, Bangui, September 24, 2017).

So, the Fulani are mistreated by both non-Muslims and Muslims. However, his clearest statement on the importance of politics was during our third meeting:

If we did not have the right to take up weapons as people say, why did Bozizé take arms to topple Patassé?

It is Bozizé who brought Chadians here [...] This country is our country. Where else can we go? It is because we are the son of this soil that we have been working with all governments even if there is no reward. In Samba-Panza government, we had nothing, in the Government of Touadéra as well (Interview KSSC2, Bangui, September 25, 2017).

A few months after our interviews, he became a minister in the government of President Touadéra,

and he still occupies this post at the time of writing. According to these Muslim interviewees, belonging relates to a relationship with sultanates, but these sultanates have not even been brought up by non-Muslims.

Third, in addition to claiming historical linkages with sultanates, several Muslim interviewees were interested in proving their *actual length of stay* in the country and their involvement in politics. For instance, one ex-Minister, Muslim, spent time describing his activities, “You can see in my biography that I am not a foreigner. From the north-east, to Bangui and Bouar, *I am raised here*” (Interview FAPM, Bangui, May 28, 2017). Although he was also born in the north-east, he decided to emphasize that he was raised in the country because he lived in several areas and that mattered. The former minister continued and exposed that he has “refused all the bursaries and various opportunities to go study in Saudi Arabia because [he] knew that at [his] return [he] would have an Arab diploma that would not be considered in Bangui. Here it is French and all that is related to France that matters.” This is consistent with several other Muslims who had to change their names to a Christian name to be harassed less often by government agents in several domains (Kilembe 2015). Ultimately for the ex-Minister, his community is not considered autochthon because *they have not proven their worth in public administration*. It is clear for him that they needed to prove something, and this is not about demonstrating a link with the soil but with management of the government. Some Muslims desire to integrate the government in Bangui, but this can significantly alter their life choices. However, non-Muslims do not have to worry about which bursaries they can accept or not. They seem to be under a different standard. This is an important aspect of the ongoing struggle. Non-Muslims have used different arguments that serve to delegitimize Muslims’ presence in the political sphere, when Muslims see their presence in that space as the realization of autochthon status. These Muslim interviewees demonstrate how acquiring autochthony identity capital is linked to the state and competition to access the state. The state plays a significant role in that competition through its policies, investments, and public sector jobs (Dorrnsoro and

Grojean 2018, 9). The sociological dimension, the competition around autochthony status, at that meso level, relates to the relationship of a group to the state. But the discursive practices are also important. Both factors contribute to autochthony capital.

Fourth, some Muslims articulated their belonging through discourses that revolved around participation in the realization of the community and of the state. Hence, Muslims contributed to the realization of CAR but not being present in government apparatus signify that they have not attained autochthony status. This discourse did not figure in non-Muslims' understanding of belonging. For a former Minister and Fulani living in KM5, it is the Fulani community that has built the houses *en dur* (with concrete) in the KM5 neighbourhood. As he stated:

In the 1960s there were still Christians by the roadside here on Koudoukou Avenue. Progressively, they fled the areas. Today, nobody remembers that there were still Christians on Koudoukou Avenue. There were. Now there are no more. On the avenue we only see Muslims. They sold [their spaces]. And then, I admit that the government has also contributed to this change. What do I mean? In 1964 Dacko decided one thing, he said that on Koudoukou Avenue he does not want to see straw houses. All the houses must be with concrete. Also, he will later decide that all the houses must also have multiple floors and that had made things difficult. The Minister of the Interior at the time said that those who could not afford to build houses were to leave (Interview RREU2, Bangui, June 27, 2017).

This is a localist way of belonging, identifying a specific participation to a neighbourhood. He further explains:

The Hausa, the Fulbe, the Mbororo, Fulbe, Mbororo are the same thing, and the Borno, as well as some Senegalese and Malians have been here for a very long time. They have the houses with concrete that have been built for a very long time. Each of them can bring you a document from 1960, from 1950, stuff like that. Each of them. Land titles, dating from 1964, a subscription of the ENERCA [*Energie Centrafricaine*], with electricity, dating from 1962. He brings you papers made by whites or images made with whites of 1958. So, they are well-established people. It is them who are in these houses *en dur* that you see from the market to 7^e arrondissement. All this is them and they constitute the strength of the KM5 (Interview RREU2, Bangui, June 27, 2017).

For him, this is not about claiming historical primacy or historical presence of his community prior to others, but he highlights the length of time these Muslim communities have supposedly been around. However, they have contributed to the modern look of the neighbourhood. Belonging is tied to realization. This is further exemplified in the discourse of some refugees who fled the CAR to

neighbouring countries.

As Picco (2018) presents, refugees Muslims in Cameroon and Chad claimed that they were 100% Central African. When she asked them to narrate their experience of displacement as well as their loss, refugees focused on their material losses (Picco 2018, 20). In the context of this thesis, it demonstrates the importance that Muslims place on the contributions they had made. Refugee Muslims felt they belonged by virtue of the goods and businesses they had in the CAR. They were Central African because they had assets in the country. Refugees narrated that the CAR's government in the current crisis "lost traders who were able to connect the landlocked country to its neighbours in the region and it lost the expertise and resources of many mining professionals and cattle herders" (Picco 2018, 30). This points to the fact that those Muslims considered their various activities to be at the benefit of the country. With their trading capacity, they participated in improving the situation of the landlocked country by providing meat and bringing financial capital to the mining sector. Muslims show the role their community played in the history of the development of CAR and that represents their autochthony identity capital but not entirely because they have not attained the social status accorded to groups that are deemed to have contributed the most to making the land humanly viable. This is because they have not established a relationship with the state (government policies, investments, and public sector jobs).

In the CAR, the "state is for most citizens a painful absence *and* hurtful presence" (Smith 2015b, 115). This is important because Muslims felt their discrimination, not only by being denied inclusion in state jobs, but also by the hurtful presence of the government. Government officials often targeted Muslims based on their religious identity, which increased their awareness. Many interviewees argued that, by being Muslims, they were automatically foreigners (see also Picco 2018, Carayannis and Lombard 2015; Lombard 2016). Their belonging is being denied every time they pass a roadblock, for instance. Muslims would be asked to prove they are Central Africans through the birth certificates of their grandparents or baptism cards, or they would have to pay higher fees than non-Muslims. This

practice is ingrained in Muslims' understanding of Central Africanness to the extent that it struck me through many interviewees' behaviour. As I sat in the living room of a Muslim in KM5, former Parliamentary Member from the north-east, he started the interview automatically by showing me his birth certificate followed by "I am Central African, I am born in this country" (Interview FRTT, Bangui, September 3, 2017). Other Muslims I interviewed restated the fact that they were Central African at some point in our interviews. At the same time, my non-Muslim interviewees, of various ethnic backgrounds did not feel the need to state that they were Central African because it was just too obvious for them. In that sense, they have not felt the hurtful presence of the state through the targeting of their religious identity.

The belonging discourse, as it is framed by Muslims and some armed groups' members that I have met is concerned with being raised in the country and their practical worth for the country. Various interviewees had a different understanding of how politics could be useful to them. The discussion about the citizenship law has not been a prominent feature of my interviewees. Only ex-Prime Minister Nicolas Tiangaye and Imam Kobine Layama of the Interfaith religious platform referred to issues of citizenship, nationality, and law. There is indeed a citizenship law, but the law is not well known.¹⁵¹

5.6 How Important is the Religious Question?¹⁵²

You must convert into a Christian for you to be Central African.
That is the handicap of what will not work, and it will not work
(Interview FRTT, Bangui, September 3, 2017).

This quote is from a Muslim interviewee, a former member of parliament and a cadre of the Séléka rebellion. He lives in KM5, the main Muslim neighbourhood in Bangui. During my fieldwork, I had a sense that religion mattered in the conflict but that it had not been caused by religious differences. The puzzle at that point was to understand the extent to which religion mattered. This was an important

¹⁵¹ Loi n° 1961.212 of 20 avril 1961 portant code de la nationalité centrafricaine, <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/3ae6b55d4.pdf>.

¹⁵² Parts of the argument were published in Vlavonou (2017).

question as religion is a space where people feel they belong. As the quote above shows, the true Central African narrative encapsulates a religious reality for Muslims. It was a discourse, a feeling, an experience, and a discrimination that Muslims lived with on a daily basis in the CAR. In this section, I turn to that religious reality.

It is my contention that religion played a role to determine belonging both prior to the conflict and during the conflict. This is linked with the fact that autochthony is an empty signifier (Bøås and Dunn 2013; Geschiere 2009), hence malleable and plastic. But as I treat autochthony as a form of capital, as an identity there is a content and a boundary, but it means the content that crystallizes issue is malleable and contingent upon a specific situation. Autochthony identity capital was, in this case, linked with religion because Christianity is the religion of those who have signaled their contribution to the realization of the community, the non-Muslims. Since non-Muslims come to see themselves as defining the nation's identity, Islam was perceived as a threat to that identity. Non-Muslims feared that they would be Islamized, which needs to be recognized rather than dismissed.¹⁵³ It reflected that Islam is a foreign religion and that Christianity must be defended even if Christianity is also a foreign religion. Although religious differences did not cause the conflict, various actions were religiously interpreted and gave salience to religious difference through fear. Fear can “justify hostile attitudes towards the other group” (Kaufmann 2001, 31). That fear played the role of the catalyst during the crisis. I built on independent media representations of the religious question to see that religion has been part of previous Muslim

¹⁵³ Some newspapers instrumentalized the religious fear during the war. For instance, one independent media termed that Séléka rulers had a program of “Christian genocide” well after they left power (*Medias+* 2015). On the front page of the newspaper, they termed that “The program of Christian genocide is being carried out by the ex-Séléka and other Km5 Muslim terrorists allied to jihadism and their co-religionists from Nigeria, Sudan and Chad, with the complicity of France and UN.” In the news excerpt, the editorial brought up the “expansive objective of Islam in the Central African Republic through genocidal terrorism.” Whatever “genocidal terrorism” means, it would be a daunting task to address all the factual inaccuracies here but flipping the logic and accuse Muslims of the perpetrator is a significant move. The minority is then threatening the majority and Séléka was no longer in power. Muslims are “terrorists,” they are committing “genocide” with international partners and jihadists originating from neighbouring countries. The owner of the independent newspaper could suggest that this thinking might have circulated among intellectuals at the time. Indeed, Cyrus-Emmanuel Sandy is the director of publication. Cyrus-Emmanuel Sandy was a former minister of Youth and Sports in 1999 under President Patassé. At the time he was also a member of the political party MLPC. He worked later at the independent newspaper *Le Citoyen* and was an advisor in the parliament transition of 2013.

concerns well before the coup in 2013. Muslims sought equal treatment and recognition of Islam but were always faced with an argument about secularism (in its French version, *Laïcité*). I probe the religious question through the media representation of recognizing a Muslim feast in the CAR.

Religion, as used by my interviewees, has not been framed in terms of doctrinal differences between Christianity and Islam. If anything, Muslims and non-Muslims held that Christianity and Islam are religions of peace. However, religion was a prism to “interpret the world” (Ellis and Haar 2007, 387). That interpretation played the role the state should play regarding religion. Already in 1986, a CAR historian was mentioning that in the country, “The religious phenomenon polarizes feelings and *conditions social facts*” (Pounouwaka 1986, 2; my emphasis). In that sense, it is the social value that religion carries in the CAR that is of interest.

The killings in Bangassou during my fieldwork increasingly made me realize the importance of religion in the conflict. In Bangassou, between 1,500 and 2,000 Muslims found refuge in a Catholic church because anti-Balaka members of the city were attacking those identified as Muslims. The UN mission eventually protected the Catholic mission. Political elites in public spaces (media) at the time considered the fact that Muslims found refuge in a Catholic church as a proof to dismiss any role that religion played in the conflict. In 2017, I interviewed one former Minister of Commerce who wondered that “if it was a religious conflict, would Muslims be finding refuge in a Catholic church?” (Interview ECGW, Bangui, June 12, 2017). For him, the fact that Muslims found refuge in a Catholic church and not a mosque meant that religion had no role in the conflict. But, in Bangassou, the Mosque had been destroyed and the fact that it is those of the Muslim faith (in majority) that found refuge in a Catholic church merits attention. Although a Catholic church provided refuge, other Muslims targeted the buildings of the Catholic church (RFI 2017). These are indications that religion plays a role that should not be dismissed. Through that assertion, the interviewee wanted me to accept that Muslims and Christians have always lived peacefully together since ancient times, perpetuating denial of discrimination as I

highlighted with the centre-stage discursive device.

As religious actors and political party leaders are keen to fight the religious narrative, the following contradiction arises. They claim that everyone was living peacefully together, while Muslims claim to have been discriminated against historically in the construction of the state and this was part of the reason why some thought it was necessary for them to support the Séléka rebels. The narrative of discrimination challenges the narrative of peaceful cohabitation prior to this cycle of violence. Muslims were not targeted because of their religion but because of long-standing patterns of discrimination that signals their non-autochthon status.

From independent media *Le Confident* and *Le Citoyen*, every time the religious question has been raised, it has received a public backlash. In 2003, following Bozizé's coup, the national dialogue simply rejected the proposition that the government should consider the two main celebrations of Islam (namely the Ramadan and Tabaski) as legal holidays. President Patassé's government did the same (Sereze 2003b). In 2006, when various rebellions started in the north-east, Abakar Sabone a rebel leader who helped Bozizé in his 2003 coup, complained that he did not respect the fact that he was supposed to govern with a Muslim Prime Minister. This rebel leader was later involved with the Séléka. So, the religious issue is not in terms of doctrinal differences, but in the material and practical manifestations of religious difference in many Muslims' lives. In the newspaper, Sabone's claims were dismissed (Ding-Kpi 2006b). The journalist presented Sabone as having "a strong fundamentalist and Islamist temptation." The struggle over legitimacy in the political sphere was present well before the 2013 coup and armed conflict. In the same news article, the journalist interpreted Sabone's word in the following: "It is because Christians did not succeed into bringing the country to paradise that Muslims must substitute to them to lead the country into Islamist and fundamentalist hell." Here, there is clearly a strategy of positive in-grouping and negative out-grouping. Christians are equated to paradise and having a divine and well-being attribute while it is the opposite for Muslims. They cannot take the country

anywhere else than hell. Islam, fundamentalism, as well as hell are grouped and then linked with danger for the country. This bears similarity with Bozizé’s mobilization of the invisible in his speeches. The invisible runs along the various scales where autochthony is mobilized.

In the same vein, another article in 2006 pointed to the “Islamist hegemonic ambition” of the *Union des Forces Démocratiques pour le Rassemblement* (UFDR) rebel group (Fleury-k 2006). The UFDR is not seen as seeking improvements for the north-east in terms of development policies, but as hiding Islamist ambition. In January 2008, an article titled “religious fundamentalism” wrote about followers of a Christian church who destroyed the foundation of a building that *Agence des Musulmans d’Afrique* managed to build even after others had managed to block its construction for several days in October 2007 (Mokambo 2008a). The newspaper reports that destroyers of the wall thought it was the foundation for a mosque and protested with banners on which one could read, “No to Islam-Christian cohabitation.”

Other articles in 2006 brandished secularism to avoid taking Muslim celebrations seriously: the CAR is democratic and secular (Ding-Kpi 2006a).¹⁵⁴ If a question is consistently coming up in public debate and faces rejection, it gives a sense of the dominant representation. This pre-conflict dynamic clearly shows the expected behaviour of the state regarding religion matter in the CAR. Basically, when it is about Muslims, the media and independent newspapers are quick to use secularism to delegitimize the Muslim point of view. Moreover, during fieldwork, some non-Muslim interviewees understood the religion of Islam as “submissiveness,”¹⁵⁵ which is enough to doubt the project that a Muslim rule can

¹⁵⁴ Another newspaper article makes visible a hesitation about the qualification of the religious question. With the title “Abakar Sabone et la question de la laïcité : vrai ou faux débat ?” (Fleury-k 2008b) one sees that the French term used was *Laïcité*. The word is usually translated as secularism which might be confusing. Indeed, there are discussions over French and British forms of secularism (Turgeon et al. 2019). It is about “the role of the state in the promotion of freedom” (Turgeon et al. 2019, 250). As CAR is a former French colony, it is possible that their version of *Laïcité* is closer to the one in France. However, how a state needs to regulate religion can be at odds with which religion needs to be regulated.

¹⁵⁵ This is one interpretation of the definition of Islam, but the interviewee did not mention God’s principle. Islam is submission was a sufficient argument. The interviewee stated in the following quote: “Islam means submission. It is a religion of submission. It is submission. And if you see the history of Islam, it is a religion that has imposed itself by submission. One Islamizes by force. You accept or you do not accept, you are killed. It is the same thing. Obviously, it takes more or less softened tone but at the end of the day it is the same thing” (Interview CPBF, Bangui, 30 June 2017).

bring when in wielding power. Muslims feel discriminated against in terms of how they are seen and perceived in the public space. On the contrary, Christianity does not seem to face the same backlash. In the 1990s, President Kolingba decreed June 30 of each year a “national day of fast and prayers” (Danzi 2011, 210). Bozizé organized national praying days (2003; 2005) (*Sangonet.com* 2003; *Corbeaunews* 2019) or even fasting days (2004) too (Danzi 2004). Touadéra, the current president and his cabinet organize what they call breakfast praying sessions that a pastor animates, *petit-déjeuner de prière* (Radio Ndeke Luka 2018). So, religion is not completely separated from power in the CAR, and that religion happens to be Christianity. Indeed, Muslims feel alienated as their religion does not get the same recognition from government. As this former Fulani minister argued, “one cannot speak of a secular state, equally distant from both religion [Christianity and Islam] and that one does not celebrate Muslims feasts. That state lean towards Christians” (Interview RREU, Bangui, June 26, 2017). In brief, Muslims feel that the state discriminates against them. Autochthony capital is encoded, in this case, through religion. That is, it is the religion of the group that has always wielded state power and signaled its contribution to the history of development of the community. Once again, these data show the role that the state plays in reaching autochthony capital status because it is how the state regulates certain religions that has been contentious. This reflects broader societal views as independent media discourses made explicit. Hence, religion runs alongside the autochthony competition at this meso-level and reflect daily discursive practices of non-Muslims. Since the beginning of the conflict, one religious organization has tried to defuse these resentments, as discussed below.

5.6.1 The Religious Platform¹⁵⁶

Political elites and members of the Interfaith Religious Platform consider religion to have no role in what is happening in the CAR. To be clear, it is not a religious conflict (Carayannis and Lombard 2015), but religion is one dimension of it. It plays a role, an increasingly important one. In that

¹⁵⁶ This section builds on arguments developed in Vlavonou (2019).

sense, considering religion as doctrine is unhelpful because this is not where the differences lie. Nevertheless, many interviewees kept using terms like Muslims, Christian, church, mosques, and pigs, which are religiously coded and tells us something about the social life of religion in the CAR. One cannot dismiss the importance of religion in this case, but, of course, the religious differences are “ill-defined categories” (Lombard 2016, 185). Hence, it is the role that religion plays in autochthony competition to structure access to the state – with the objective to determine autochthony capital – that is important.

The platform gathers the three most prominent religious leaders in the CAR who have been calling for peace and social cohesion nationally and internationally. They have worked on moving attention away from religious motives for violence, citing the reality that religious differences did not cause the conflict. The platform’s religious leaders were active at the beginning of the armed conflict but proceeded with the platform’s official existence in 2016 hoping to change the conflict narrative (*RJDH Centrafrique* 2016). The platform is composed of Imam Kobine Layama, Head of the Central African Islamic Community - CICA, Cardinal Dieudonné Nzapalainga, who represents Catholic Christians, and Pastor Nicolas Guerekoyame-Gbangou, Head of the Evangelical Alliance. The message of the platform is ambiguous when considering the following factors below.

First, the members of the religious platform argue that it is not a religious conflict because no religious authority is leading the various rebels and self-defence groups on the ground. Under autochthony competition, that discourse needs to be reconsidered. Religious leaders do not need to be at the head of the armed groups for religion to matter. When Séléka went in villages and killed all their pigs, they did not need a religious leader for that, but the nature of the act presents itself as religious. There are other inequalities (economic and social) between Muslims and other segments of the population that are fused and reinforce the role played by religion. Muslims are perceived as the ones detaining economic power and in charge of economic wealth because the CAR has been home to Muslims involved in the

trade and the mining sectors. Many successful businessmen are Muslims. Several other political elites as well as civil society members bought into the message that no religious leader is at the head of the armed group.

Second, ethnicity and religion complicate how the interfaith platform message is received. The presence of Yakoma in the key position on the platform is a source of suspicion. All three key leading members belong to the same ethnic group, the Yakoma, a minority associated with former President André Kolingba (1981-1993) who has been associated with instrumentalizing ethnicity and promoting Yakoma to powerful positions in the government and army, with the consequence of provoking army mutinies in 1996-1997. In Bangui, Imam Kobine does not reside in PK-5, but in a mainly Christian neighbourhood where several Yakoma co-ethnics reside. During high levels of violence, it was the Cardinal who protected him. Moreover, Imam Kobine has converted to Islam in his 20s and studied abroad in Saudi Arabia. His views are ambiguously interpreted as he is not from the main Muslim region of north-eastern CAR. Some Muslims interviewees thought that Kobine was not a real Muslim because of this conversion. Other non-Muslim interviewees noted that the Yakoma want to take back power. This suggests that, through religious activity, some interviewees feared a return of a previous ethnic minority group in power. However, various political leaders from Emperor Bokassa I to Catherine Samba-Panza have used ethnicity as a political tool to govern and access power. For one armed group leader, the religious platform simply works for its own interests and is far from representing all religions in the CAR.

Third, some members of the platform have strong views about current events, and, they are leaders in their communities. For instance, one member of the religious platform clearly presented his side in these terms “They [Rebels] *humiliate* us, they rape our daughters and claim to provide security. They are *colonizing* us” (Interview NAPC, Bangui, June 3, 2017) Similarly, a pastor in Yaloké was inflexible regarding the return of Muslims in the area,¹⁵⁷ saying, “It is impossible to keep *enemies* like that despite

¹⁵⁷ However, to the credit of people in Yaloké, they welcomed a group of internally displaced Fulani community from another province. They did not want the previous Fulani of that specific area to come back.

the damage that they have made” (Interview WADP, Yaloké August 9, 2017). As religious actors not leading armed groups, their discourses were not as accommodating.

The Imam Kobine lost credibility in the main Muslim neighbourhood of PK-5 in Bangui. During high levels of violence, the Imam took a firm stand against the violent Muslim actors in PK-5. He also accused Muslims of being responsible for their fate. As a result, he was disavowed by many community leaders. Imam Kobine was one interviewee who, right away, disagreed that non-Muslims had a responsibility in the war and that the responsibility falls back on Muslims. For him, “Central African Muslims have marginalized themselves. They have been living in closed community for about a century now” (Kobine Layama, Bangui, 9 June 2017). As he spoke of the responsibility of his community, he even went to the extent of saying that “police officers know that people [Muslims] do not have their papers in rule and hence they harass them.” However, it is well documented that Muslims face more difficulty in getting their papers. He puts the blame on Muslims themselves for not having papers and making it easy for being police targets. Clearly, for him, as a religious leader, if Muslims do not feel they belong, it is their fault. The residents of PK-5 in Bangui I spoke with complained about Imam Kobine travelling and being rewarded for his messages of peace, but they did not believe he was accountable to them or represented their interests.

Additionally, there have been many concerns about Pastor Guerekoyame-Gbangou doing business with the church and his honesty. Many believe the 3rd member, Cardinal Nzapalainga, has taken advantage of the crisis to be promoted from archbishop to Cardinal. In Yaloké, pastors criticized him for being out of touch with the realities people were living with on the ground. For other pastors in Bangui, it is the platform that has asked the international community not to rearm the FACA. Various criticisms have been mounted against the platform and it diminishes the efficacy of their message. Even if this conflict is not a religious conflict, religion matters in people’s representations in terms of practices, perceptions, advantages, and entitlements. In the context where the state provides economic security,

who gets what becomes all the more important and religious beliefs can reinforce such perceptions. Ultimately, in addressing the non-religious aspect of the conflict, the members of the platform re-center issues on non-Muslim perspectives and contributes to reinforcing the autochthony capital of non-Muslims. This is evident when a member of the platform blamed Muslims for what happened to them. Even when it comes to religion, the members do not address the fact that Islam was constructed as a “threat” to the country in independent media discourses. This demonstrates the larger argument that Muslims and Islam are not playing a significant role in the development of the community, and re-center discussions on non-Muslim issues, which show the social importance of autochthony capital in the everyday individuals’ practices.

Concluding Remarks

As illustrated, there are multiple ways of claiming belonging in the CAR and this is not related to land alone. Non-Muslims were preoccupied with the politics of hospitality in terms of how Muslims should occupy the political and economic space, and non-Muslims engaged several argumentative strategies that excluded Muslims from the political space and cast doubt on their legitimacy to govern. The independent media also normalized the view that Muslims represented a threat to the country’s identity in terms of religion. Language, religion, and politics are the ordinary spaces where autochthony finds expression in everyday life.

The way interviewees used autochthony made it clear that, as an identity category, autochthony is an empty signifier but also a form of capital that articulates competition between social groups. It is determined by context, experience, discourses and practices as groups establish relationship with the state. Here, interviewees targeted the CAR state’s identity as well as the expected behaviour of Muslims. With the focus on non-Muslims’ discourse, one can see various strategies of delegitimization, in a way that their autochthony status is unrecognized. One of these is around the centre-stage problem where non-Muslims analogize Muslim issues to theirs and, in the same way, overlook the grievances at stake. This

allows non-Muslims to signal their autochthony status. On their side, Muslims advance competing notions of belonging while simultaneously disputing the non-Muslim generalizing narrative. For instance, they dispute the argument that, as a Central African, one *must* speak Sango or practise Christianity. They claim to belong by diversely pointing out their different contribution to the CAR polity from the neighbourhood level to the national.

What is clear from a theoretical perspective is that these discourses show no connection to globalization even prior to the 2013 crisis, nor did they await the President instrumentalization. Moreover, the religious question was not framed in terms of doctrinal differences but in terms of the role the state should play in regulating Christianity and Islam. In brief, spaces of everyday Muslim exclusion do not rely upon government or elites instrumentalization. Instead it is important to see the localized and discursive relevance of autochthony to be able to bridge the masses who follow to their leaders. Similarly, it is important to capture how Muslims position themselves vis-à-vis the true Central African claim and how that fits into non-Muslim narration of belonging, and how that influences everyday practices of autochthony politics because contrasting both groups discourses revealed forms of closure.

6. Exploring Autochthony Among the Anti-Balaka and their Supporters: Religion, Patriotism, and Humiliation

6.1 Introduction

They [Muslims] threaten the peace of the country. For me, we must bombard them, we must kill the Muslims, the Goula. When we would have finished with Séléka, there would be peace (Interview KAPB, Bangui, August 29, 2017).

I was confronted with extreme views in several interviews with non-Muslims as well as anti-Balaka fighters during my field research. In this interview, Muslims, ethnic Goula (in the North-East), and Séléka are all conflated, and this was not uncommon. During my field research, I found that interviewees took the meaning of the true Central African as so commonly understood as to need no further explanation. Few interviewees defined what true Central African meant to them. At the same time, they pointed out that Séléka was full of foreigners despite being a rebellion from the north-east of the country. This understanding overlaps with Bozizé's speeches in Chapter 3.

Two of the first scholars seeking to make sense of the CAR, Carayannis and Lombard, addressed the conflict as one of "identity, citizenship, and belonging" (Carayannis and Lombard 2016). This chapter complements their work in two ways. They did not put emphasis on discourse and its impact on identity; and secondly, they did not examine the nature of the main vigilante group chasing Muslims; the anti-Balaka. It is known that the anti-Balaka popularized the *vrai Centrafricain* discourse. Hence, a specific focus on the group is warranted. Why do they narrate belonging and issues of true Central Africanness? As Dunn and Neumann (2016) argue:

Representations are inventions based on language, but they are not neutral or innocuous signifiers. Because they enable actors to "know" the object and to act upon what they "know," representations have very real political implications. Certain paths of action become possible within distinct discourses, while other paths become unthinkable (Dunn and Neumann 2016, 60).

In that sense, conflict is imagined (Schmidt and Schröder 2001). It is expressed through discourse and then enacted upon. This does not mean that conflict is sequential. It means, however, that the discursive and imagined dimension of conflict should not be ignored. For instance, in a January 2014 interview with

anti-Balaka fighters on YouTube, one of them claimed that “we are going to kill all the Arabs in the Central African Republic, we do not need Arabs in the Central African Republic, we are the Central African people” (BFMTV 2014). Hate speech was common at the height of the violence. Séléka were equated to jihadists and Arabs. Hence my use of the term Muslim-foreigners to reflect such ambivalence in the interviewees’ speeches. I do not claim that discourses caused the death of Muslims, but it is important to understand the social context that makes these consequences possible. In line with my theoretical underpinnings, discourses reveal what people think and condition what people can do. Importantly, our experiences are narrated through discourses.

As identity shapes the conflict in the CAR, this chapter on anti-Balaka has two findings. First, ethnicity and religion were not the most relevant theme for the anti-Balaka leaders when discussing the *vrai Centrafricain* issues. This is important because anti-Balaka has been portrayed as a Christian militia. Religion and spirituality play an important, yet ambivalent, role for anti-Balaka. Second, anti-Balaka could be considered as a wider social movement which represents the discourse that seeks to discriminate against Muslims and enact non-Muslim autochthony capital. In that sense, identity mattered and even operated independently of elite instrumentalization, but this bottom-up process lacks in current understanding of the CAR armed conflict. This chapter seeks to demonstrate that. First, I approach the discourses of anti-Balaka on the nature of the group and second the discourse that expresses and denotes the entitlement related to autochthony identity capital.

6.2 Who are the Anti-Balaka? Investigating the Role of Religion, Invisible Superpower, and Organization

The anti-Balaka movement originated from Bossangoa, the hometown of the deposed President Bozizé. When the Séléka seized power in March 2013, the national army disintegrated, and many soldiers hid. Some commentators claimed that “anti-Balaka [was] not a new movement, but that the bulk of [their fighters] are from the Central African Armed Forces (FACA), who had dispersed into the countryside

after the coup d'état and were reorganized by former president Bozizé, who wanted to return to power" (Louw-Vaudran 2014). French soldiers complained in 2014 that they simply "don't know" who the anti-Balaka were, partly because there was no clear chain of command (The New Humanitarian 2014). Indeed, the literature has not engaged closely with the discourses the anti-Balaka deployed.¹⁵⁸ The predominant interpretation of the conflict is to say that anti-Balaka and Séléka represent an armed conflict between Christians and Muslims, but we need to ask if anti-Balaka is a religious group. If not, how does religion influence the movement?

During my field research trip, I conducted interviews with anti-Balaka leaders and fighters in Bangui and Yaloké in order to better understand their motivations. I do not claim to fully grasp the complexities of anti-Balaka and the multiplicity of factors that gave rise to their emergence; I can, however, expose their representations of Muslims since this is related with non-Muslims assumed autochthony capital and that is the broader goal of this dissertation. To be clear, the conflict has not been caused by a fundamental or incommensurable clash between two formal theologies that of Christianity and Islam as highlighted in the previous chapter (section 5.6). However, the invisible world was extremely important in the anti-Balaka narrative and one broader point of the dissertation was to show how the invisible cuts across all the various levels identified, from the macro to the micro. The relationship of anti-Balaka to the invisible world focused on local notions of relationship with ancestors. This is important because these are ancestors who did something for the country in the past. They played a role in the development of the country, thus giving value to autochthony capital.

To begin, I look at both the origins and organization of the anti-Balaka. The movement builds on several repertoires, both symbolic and historic. In terms of symbolic repertoires, the anti-Balaka are understood through their relationship with the invisible world. The group also mobilizes a connection with the past, a history of resistance against oppressors. Finally, the anti-Balaka are understood through

¹⁵⁸ Séléka and other rebels have received attention, but anti-Balaka, which are the main perpetrators of violence after the Séléka rebellion, has not been given much focus (but see Ceriana Mayneri 2014a; Koffia 2015).

their mode of organization, vigilantism. Vigilantism is not new in the CAR. Chasing an ethnic community away following a coup or failed coup is not new. However, young people rose separately from the anti-Balaka, and with the anti-Balaka, to chase Muslims, and that is new. The remainder of the section delves into these repertoires to make sense of the anti-Balaka and how these repertoires illustrate autochthony capital.

The name anti-Balaka has two popular meanings: anti-*Balaka* and anti-*Balle-AK* (47). *Balaka* means machete in Sango. Hence, the fighters' claim to be able to resist a machete blow. At the same time, there is the meaning as anti-*Balle-AK-47* in the sense that they are also able to resist bullets that Séléka fighters use, they are bulletproof. A first understanding of the movement is accordingly their claim to possess invisible power. In fact, *occult* power might be more accurate but using that word introduces a normative (negative) version that can oppose African interpretations of the invisible to a Western religious version of the invisible world. Anti-Balaka fighters claim they have a power that allows them to resist attacks.¹⁵⁹ They claim that that power did not come from a Christian God, but from their ancestors. Hence, the anti-Balaka establish a connection with a distant past and the invisible world to claim their actual power. To illustrate the importance of invisible power for the anti-Balaka, I first reflect on a moment of fieldwork in Yaloké. As history has shown, the invisible is part of all cosmologies at a general level. Fighters I met in Yaloké and Bangui in 2017 considered the supernatural as an integral part of the depiction of the anti-Balaka.

As I was discussing with some members, it was difficult to make them speak of the violence they committed because it was well justified in their eyes. Rather than insisting with the same question, I decided to let my interviewees speak of what was important to them. Moreover, I engaged in more intimate conversations, sharing information on community rituals that I underwent in Benin, such as rituals that sanctioned my passage from teenage to manhood. This helped me build rapport and the

¹⁵⁹ Some Séléka fighters also used various charms for their protection but did not put that forward as a defining feature of the rebellion as opposed to anti-Balaka.

interviewees' trust. I disclosed this experience to demonstrate my proximity to their reality, and to show that I took their beliefs in invisible powers and rituals seriously. After disclosing that story, the leaders I was discussing with felt more at ease in exposing their rituals and the kind of power they got from it.

When discussing with various anti-Balaka leaders in Yaloké, my Beninese origin became suddenly important. I was apparently preceded by a certain reputation that the Beninese excel in witchcraft and *Voodoo*, or invisible power. Specifically, one *chef de quartier* and anti-Balaka leader, surrounded by other fighters, was more interested in *Voodoo* than answering my questions around *vrai Centrafricain*. To be honest, in Yaloké, I was able to connect with the anti-Balaka fighters by demonstrating that I believe in the power of the invisible and the charms they use. The *chef de quartier* demonstrated interest in “testing” my power. Since people from Benin are all supposedly well versed in witchcraft and all sorts of invisible powers, they (him and the fighters around him) wanted to compare our strength and see who was stronger. Basically, it was about fighting with him. In that sense, he could show me how the anti-Balaka fighters were able to resist what they called the “Séléka invasion.” During the same discussion, the fighters wanted me to help them increase their superpowers. This was revealing because it gave insights into the war-prone attitudes of these fighters. The possibility that the fight would resume was still present in their mind. They were ready to fight and chase Muslims again! As I have been told in Yaloké, even if Séléka brings rocket launchers next time, they are ready, they will no longer hide in the bush (Interview QEOF, Yaloké, August 8, 2017).

A second moment that brought in the importance of the invisible was my encounter with one national coordinator of the anti-Balaka: Maxime Mokom. If the anti-Balaka is not a movement defending Christian values or even animist values, Maxime Mokom claims that, for him, it is a “spiritual movement,” and he presented himself as “the historical leader such as Nelson Mandela” (Interview

Mokom, Bangui, August 16, 2017). Maxime Mokom is a former security officer and a pastor.¹⁶⁰ He is considered a hardliner of the anti-Balaka and was nominated as a member of President Touadéra's government in March 2019. For instance, in August 2017, Mokom Maxime, called for the UN to “chase foreign mercenaries out of the national territory,” otherwise the anti-Balaka “risk taking their responsibilities a second time, as was the case on December 5, 2013” (Radio Ndeke Luka 2017). As I was still conducting fieldwork, I discussed this message with him, and he found it completely normal, claiming it was a dissuasive strategy. With this hardliner discourse, Maxime Mokom manages to hold legitimacy over some of the anti-Balaka in both Bangui and Yaloké because some of the anti-Balaka do not want the group to be transformed into a political party. Hence, Mokom's discourse makes sure that the objective of anti-Balaka remains. As Mokom is, at the time of writing, in Government, the future of the anti-Balaka remains to be seen.

But a close look at Mokom's narration, as well as other anti-Balaka, reveals a connection with an invisible world that is always lurking in the background. That connection, in Mokom's case, clearly overlaps with his activities as a pastor and the fact that he is well aware that his fighters rely on powders and concoctions for power. For instance, Mokom has a modest house with a big compound where he managed to build a chapel. He holds masses and long nights of prayers with various followers. I tried to have informal discussions with him several times, but he would be too tired after his night of prayers. At times, he even forgot that we had set up an appointment for a meeting. But he proudly asserts that “I am a man of God and I do what he tells me to do” (Interview Mokom, Bangui, August 16, 2017). So, the invisible world has an ambivalent place in the anti-Balaka's narrative and should not be conflated with

¹⁶⁰ This fact nuances the observation of the religious platform leaders that there is no religious leader at the head of armed groups. Also, one has to leave the binary public/private to see how Mokom's life as a pastor could influence his life as an anti-Balaka leader. Following this, it seems that the particular career of rebel leaders (this former police officer for example) is shaped by the engagement with the international community. At times, the international partners are the one who creates warlords' careers by giving life to these groups via the media and by making them partners in their own right. For instance, to ask for anti-Balaka claims is a sort of giving life to the group. Lombard (2016) noticed similar dynamic in the north-east with her research and termed it the conventionalization of rebellion.

religion or Christianity. Mokom's involvement with the anti-Balaka movement is not trivial, as he recounts in the following words:

The 10th of January 2013, I had a dream. In the dream, Bozizé would lose power and that I was the leader of a group. I have shared the dream with my brothers. The first resistance act was at Boy-Rabe. On the 25th of March or 26th, we crossed the Oubangui, I myself crossed around the 30th. I stayed in Zongo [a town in the DRC that is situated across the river from Bangui] in order to pray. Others joined us over there. We have started by distributing tracts but also started the "pan movement" [*mouvement de cassorole*] in order to oppose the Séléka. Us, we cannot support Séléka (Interview, Mokom, Bangui, August 16, 2017).¹⁶¹

Mokom claims that his involvement with the anti-Balaka was a process that started before Bozizé's fall. What matters here is the relationship with a parallel, invisible world through which Mokom claims his revelation, much like other anti-Balaka leaders. Mokom made references to the invisible world but in spiritual terms and at the same time presented himself as the "man of God." Spirituality is ambiguous enough to accommodate African epistemologies and western religion together.

Anti-Balaka religiosity lies somewhere in between African epistemologies and western conceptions of religion. Indeed, regarding Gbaya people, "Traditional religion consists, in the absence of any other religion, in a cult of ancestors that remains very present" (Roulon-Doko 2017, 1).¹⁶² What these interviews show is that the cult of ancestors co-exists with other (western) religion. The anti-Balaka's religiosity is different from the religion that came on the continent through colonization, although this is also present.

Using the term spirituality rather than religion might be more accurate given the previous discussion about the invisible world inhabited by spirits which have influence over the visible world. Those who focus on religion miss the target, by focusing on dogmatic differences between Christians and Muslims,

¹⁶¹ One former Minister confirmed the pan movement against the Séléka in our meeting and a book manuscript he was writing and shared with me (Interview IOAM, Bangui, July 4, 2017). This pan movement seems to hold a wider social significance in relation to the invisible world. Bozizé (2008a) asserted that "The pan concert calls for ghosts, bad ghosts. Those are the ghosts that killed Boganda. The pan concert is a kind of curse [...] You did the same thing in the days of Patassé. It was as a result of that pan concert that the Bayamunlegues came with the Devil."

¹⁶² It seems that the term "traditional religion" is itself to be taken with caution. In other parts of Africa, Adebisi (2019) argues that Religion and Tradition were indistinguishable prior to colonizers' arrival on the continent.

on myths associated with each religion or even formal theologies of the sacred. For instance, in the interviews I conducted, there was no apparent discourse of clerics denouncing Islam as evil or vice versa as one could see elsewhere like in Nigeria for instance (Ojo 2007). However, anti-Balaka interviewees both in Yaloké and Bangui were consistent in stating that “those who went into the bush had a *dream* and the *ancestors* made revelations” (Interviews anti-Balaka, Yaloké and Bangui, August 2017) and it is only then that people started organizing. One Bossangoa anti-Balaka leader explains the invisible during our interview. For him, “When you are anti-Balaka, you *inherit a courage* that allows to say no. It is the whole village that decides whether or not young people would participate” (Interview XXVV, Bangui, September 29, 2017). The anti-Balaka were grounding their courage and the inception of the movement in an invisible world with which they had contact only through a dream. For the Bossangoa leader, the fighters “inherit[ed] courage,” something from the past, or of a higher nature, with which they can “say no,” to the Séléka and their human rights violations. The fighter might inherit a historical courage, but a question remains, do they inherit a Muslim aversion? The ambivalence of historical mobilization in anti-Balaka discourse does not allow a clear answer to the question but it remains the case that this discourse needs to be addressed. This discourse regarding the invisible gives meaning to autochthony capital by demonstrating what ancestors have done for the country. Doing something for the country “corresponds to the principles that determine” the value of autochthony capital (Hilgers 2011, 150).

The discontent of ancestors links the past, the Gbaya resistance pride, and the invisible realm to the anti-Balaka. These three elements are part of the anti-Balaka imaginaries. The anti-Balaka mobilize the place their ancestors hold in the history of the development of the country to claim their autochthonous status and, ultimately, resources. But they do this in an indirect fashion. For the anti-Balaka to connect with their historic heroism, they invoke the Gbaya ethnic group. Bossangoa is a city in north-west CAR inhabited mostly by Gbaya, who are Bozizé’s co-ethnics. The Gbaya ethnic group is associated with a history of resistance to French colonizers as demonstrated in the Kongo-Wara war (1928-1931)

(Nzabakomada-Yakoma 1986; O’Toole 1984). This serves as a heroic reference for the anti-Balaka. For instance, a CAR citizen who worked for the IOM explained the origins of the anti-Balaka in the following words: “It is the *discontent* of our ancestors in each region that has encouraged young people to take arms” (Interview GTBN, Bangui, 10 May 2017). This echoes the story of a Bossangoa anti-Balaka leader I interviewed in Bangui. Basically, the Gbaya ancestors were supposedly angry and disappointed with a situation where the Séléka was in power and committing human rights violations. They revealed themselves to fighters in dreams, gave instructions, and helped organize the resistance (Interview XXVV, Bangui, September 29, 2017). Hence, the link with the historical mobilization against colonizers serves to demonstrate that anti-Balaka and non-Muslims have defended the country in the past and will do it again. That the anti-Balaka represents the *vrai Centrafricain* illustrates the autochthony capital that non-Muslims historically gained in defending the country.

As the anti-Balaka leader above makes it clear, both the dreams and organization are linked. The anti-Balaka have “no over-arching organization” (Lombard 2016, 178), but this does not mean that it is a disorganized movement. Organizational structure and tactics also define the anti-Balaka. Anti-Balaka fighters learned organizational tactics building through their encounters with armed banditry at the level of villages. Yes, the FACA were involved with the anti-Balaka, but the movement is to be understood from the various localities in which it arose.¹⁶³ For example, an the anti-Balaka leader from Bossangoa that I interviewed in Bangui (2017) recounts that several corporals (low-level army rank) went to Bossangoa. Corporals like Feïkoumon Rodrigue, Touangaï Eric, Kéma Florent – who is currently a member of parliament – and Bama Clément decided on the formation and training of militias in a small

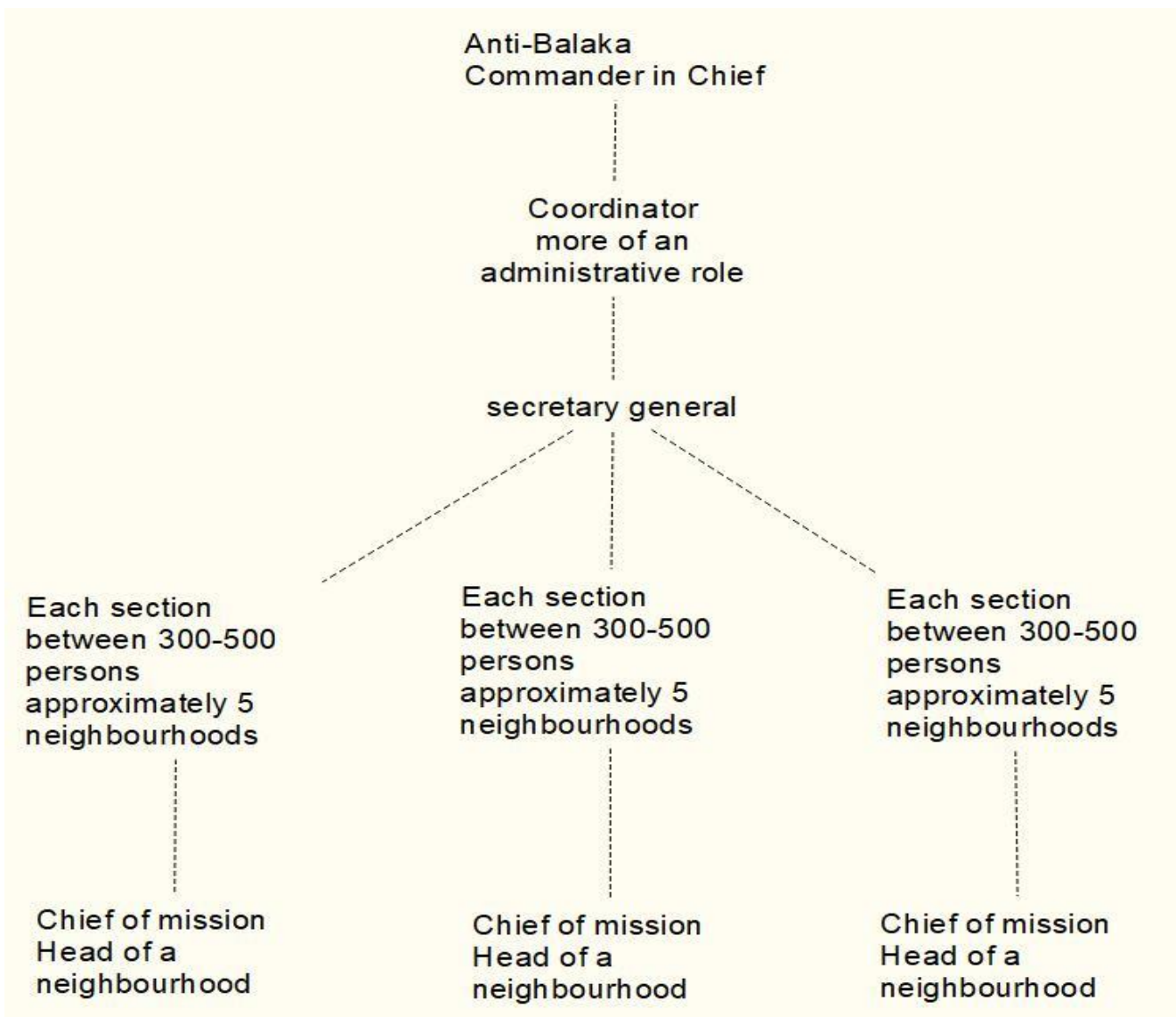
¹⁶³ The anti-Balaka is largely formed by the peasants from rural areas who were dissatisfied with Séléka’s rule. There were also military men involved at the inception of the movement, but they did not form the bulk of the fighters. In Bangui, the dismantled national army took opportunity from the movement and joined them to retaliate against the Séléka. When I was in the rural area of Yaloké, there were no FACA to be seen. The fighters whom I met disagreed that FACA made up their movement, at least locally. This indicates that the local conditions that made the movements remain to be understood. In a different prefecture, far from Yaloké, “All anti-Balaka commanders there came from FACA” (GlobalSecurity.org 2017, par.4). Hence, the stark depiction between FACA and peasants or rural and urban areas is fictitious and fluid. The dynamic on the ground rapidly changed.

village between Bossangoa and Benzambé, near Ouham River. The first to have enrolled were sons of the village Bomaye as well as 16 other FACA. They declared the creation of the movement on August 7, 2013 (XXVV, interview in Bangui, 29 September 2017). Bozizé lost power in March 2013, and the movement was created approximately five months later. At the same time, in Bangui, partly organized young people in various neighbourhoods rose separately from anti-Balaka fighters coming from rural areas. Fighters advanced and they drew experience from previous involvement with the village's self-defence involvement (for instance anti-Zaraguina). They also learned from their involvement with evangelical movements prior to the crisis. This gives insights into the links of the anti-Balaka with religious circles, but not in terms of doctrinal differences with Islam. The fighters I met in Yaloké learnt how to organise people from their implication in evangelical movements.¹⁶⁴

Since the organizational structure of the anti-Balaka is a defining feature, the distinction between the young people's independent organization in urban areas and fighters from rural areas becomes important. Another reason this is important is that armed groups in the CAR have further fragmented to include more than 14 armed groups (Dukhan 2017), but they are not of the same nature. Practically, in Yaloké, the anti-Balaka described their organization in my illustration below (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Tentative illustration of anti-Balaka command chain in Yaloké

¹⁶⁴ For instance, the *Chef quartier* I met in Yaloké depicted that he drew his experiences from *Jeunesse Évangélique d'Afrique* (JEA). In Bangui, it is common to see these groups marching along the road for miles with music and chanting. I was puzzled by their military-like character. I have met people involved in the movement who explained how they walked for 22 km almost every weekend to go for boot camps in order to gain various ranks and so. The participants might not have money, but they were doing it for Jesus. At times in Bangui neighbourhoods, it was usual for such groups to display the names of watch guards, "*patrouilles x or y.*"



Source: Author's illustration.

This illustration is based on my discussions with the anti-Balaka leaders of Yaloké. I was unable to confirm this information with their counterpart of Bangui who were more secretive in disclosing their tactics. Hence, I cannot claim that this represents the overall anti-Balaka organization in the CAR, nor can I claim that this illustration remained unchanged throughout the battles. Figure 2 might represent more of the latest stage of the anti-Balaka organization than their initial organization.

Figure 2 illustrates that the chain of command of the anti-Balaka is simple and reflects a village-level type of organization, but it is also effective to keep control over the members. The anti-Balaka's

organization closely follows the structure of the rural area with various neighbourhoods. The head of a neighbourhood (*chef de quartier*) works for and is accountable to the secretary general and the coordination. As a vigilante group, the anti-Balaka had inferior firepower compared to Séléka rebels. They relied on guerilla tactics by avoiding direct confrontation when possible. The anti-Balaka combat skills also vary according to the region. For instance, the landscape in western CAR is more of a savannah-type while in the south-east, the landscape is a denser, forest-type. From the analysis above, it seems that the organization and origins of the anti-Balaka reveal that the vigilante group is both old and recent. The anti-Balaka leaders linked their history of vigilantism to Kolingba's rule (1981-1993). As leaders claimed in Yaloké, "when Kolingba was in power, he pushed young people to do self-defence. We then collaborated with the Fulani to fight Chadian and Sudanese."¹⁶⁵ They continued, "we learned how to organize under Kolingba with the fight against robbers, and later in the fight against Zaraguina [in the 1990s]. Even prior to the arrival of the white people, there was the traditional organization" (Group Interview, Yaloké, August 9, 2017). I address Zaraguina in the following section, but it is important to notice that these are the main historical and practical reference fighters used for their movement. It was certainly not Christianity. Next, I spend more time analyzing how the "*anti*" connects the anti-Balaka and the Zaraguina.

6.3 The Fulani and the Zaraguina: Background of the "Anti" Symbol

Both Séléka fighters and the anti-Balaka gained fighting experience from the "painful absence" of the state (Smith 2015b, 115). The absence of an effective government in rural areas allowed various armed actors to prey on the people. The disinterest of the government to be effectively present outside Bangui usually resulted in people taking their personal security and that of the village into their own hands and relying on various *anti* power in the defence of their villages. Lombard (2015) pointed out that

¹⁶⁵ Fulani is a pastoral ethnic group which practises Islam. The group spans from West Africa in Guinea Bissau to Central African Republic.

Séléka fighters gained experience in anti-poaching activities. The anti-Balaka reportedly gained experiences in fighting road robbers, the Zaraguina.¹⁶⁶ In Yaloké, fighters reported that they were previously involved with the *anti-Zaraguina*. Anti-Zaraguina represents – much like anti-Balaka – the name of a specific vigilante groups that fought road bandits and it also represents the invisible power the vigilante members relied on. To understand the anti-Balaka, in other words, requires a consideration of the anti-Zaraguina. Basically, state absence has pushed people to take care of their own security. As such, villagers engaged with supernatural powers. This is where the plot thickens. The anti-Zaraguina’s establishment is linked to some of the problems and (re)composition the CAR Fulani communities witnessed. The Fulani, who are Muslims, the anti-Zaraguina, and the anti-Balaka are connected. But, beside cooperation, interviewees did not recognize Muslims participation in vigilante activities. This illustrates how possessing the autochthony capital feels natural. The anti-Balaka cannot be entirely separated from their cooperation with Muslims. It is to make this explicit that I probe the “anti” symbol of both vigilante activities. Again, the non-Muslims sidelined Muslims role in the history of realization of the country and highlight their role as protectors. The symbolic role of protector gives autochthony capital to non-Muslims.

In Bangui and Yaloké, the interviewees explicitly referred to the use of an “anti” power. The Zaraguina involved Fulani, another Muslim group who are denied belonging. The *Zaraguinas* are also known as *coupeurs de route*, or road cutters. Their operating mode is generally to ambush drivers on the road and extorting money from them. The phenomenon started in the CAR in the 1980s (Ankogui-Mpoko et al. 2010). It is a complex system of banditry that developed in northern CAR, as well as Cameroon. The phenomenon grew in the 1990s (ICG 2007, 11) and bandits were regularly dispossessing travellers on the road. In 2003, they changed their mode of operation; the Zaraguina bandits started taking hostages.

¹⁶⁶ Also written *Zargina*, the word seems to come from Haoussa dictionary where it has come to signify “masked bandit and road cutter because the face of these [bandits] was generally hidden by a turban, or covered with blue makeup” (Seignobos 2011a, fn 5, 40). A similar word also comes from Chadian Arab word *zarâg*.

They specially targeted the kids of Fulani leaders who could generate large sums of money. They aimed to generate more revenue from road cutting (Saïbou 2006). There are multiple actors involved in road cutting because it is an effective way of generating revenue (Lombard 2012b, 224). Hence, there is robbing (road cutting) as an activity where bandits extort money and there are other bandits who kidnap Fulanis' children.

In fact, not all road cutters are Zaraguina, and the Fulani suffered from the actions of these Zaraguina because they dispossessed Fulani and stole their cattle. Seignobos (2011a, 45) identified five main active actors in Zaraguina groups: Soldiers on vacation from their cantonments; Garrison deserters from southern Chad; Demobilized soldiers; Soldiers struck off for indiscipline and theft; and the Fulani of the *Uuda'en/Oudda* group. This means that there were well-armed Chadian soldiers involved with the Zaraguina. Moreover, some members of the Zaraguina are of Fulani origin but the Zaraguina also kidnap the kids of Fulani leaders. The activities of the Zaraguina are largely focused on extorting the Fulani. In that sense, Fulani are both perpetrators and victims of road cutting (Seignobos 2011a, 37).¹⁶⁷

There are two main reasons why Fulani are involved in the Zaraguina. First, the Oudda, who come from Chad, Nigeria, and Niger are “placed at the bottom of the scale of the herders [and] have for a long time maintained a kind of complex of the sheepman vis-à-vis” the other herders of bovine cattle (Seignobos 2011a, 46). Their involvement in Zaraguina builds on this complex of inferiority. Secondly, Seignobos (2011a, 43) identified a deeper internal crisis to one Fulani group, the Mbororo community.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁷ The Fulani are composed of many families and lineages called *Legnol*, and they are organized around a leader called *Ardo* (Tennebaye 2015, 25). The literature identifies several Fulani families such as the Aku, the Bokolo (Seignobos 2011a, Fn1, 38). They remain the same ethnic group but there are many subgroups (at least 23 in CAR (Tennebaye 2015, 3)). Specifically, in the CAR, there are four *Legnols* that come from different countries. The Jaafun/Djafoune who were the first arrived in CAR from Cameroun in the 1920s. They settled in the west and form 50% of the Fulani community in CAR (Tennebaye 2015, 25). There are also the Woodabe/Wodabé/Wodaa'be. These two *Legnols* are from Cameroun. Two other *Legnols* originate from Chad, Nigeria, and Niger (Tennebaye 2015, 25-26). These are the /Oudda/Ouda/Uuda'en, and the Danadji. Most of these Fulani herd cattle of the bovine type.

¹⁶⁸ The Woodabe form a subgroup of the Mbororo (Botte, Boutrais and Schmitz 1999). At the same time, other Mbororo in CAR are different from the Woodabe (Boutrais 1990, 69). The Foulbé seems to be sedentary and the Mbororo are more nomadic (Botte, Boutrais and Schmitz 1999, 38). Cattle breeding does not entirely define the Fulani. The sedentary might not be shepherds and own cattle when the Mbororo might be guarding cattle that he does not own. Some of the herders, after losing their cattle, might have become farmers or they might own cattle and a farm and alternate between both for their activities (Botte, Boutrais and Schmitz 1999).

The Mbororo suffer an intergenerational crisis that is expressed around cattle inheritance issues. In fact, young Mbororo reject the Mbororo community organization and the elders that they find too oppressive. The young Mbororo leave pasture areas for urban areas and then, failing to adapt, they become gang members. It could be said that Fulani's involvement with the Zaraguina mirror a distant activity that was tolerated within Fulani communities in the past: cattle razzia. Seignobos shows that, in the past, a Fulani herder who lost his cattle for various reasons could be allowed to steal the cattle of others in order to reconstitute his own cattle and this was deemed a temporary activity (Seignobos 2011a, 44; Saïbou 2006, 131). Hence, in the Zaraguina, one could find Fulani of the Oudda lineage and young Mbororo who disagreed with elders and failed to adapt to the urban life.

As some Fulani (Ouda and young Mbororo) were involved in targeting the children of *Ardo*, other Fulani communities organized to fight back against the Zaraguina. The Fulani who mobilized were mainly the Mbororo Wodaa'be and Jaafun (Seignobos 2011a, 40; 2011b, 16). They were the anti-Zaraguina. The anti-Zaraguina are Fulani who mobilized to fight the Zaraguina. The Fulani formed vigilante groups to protect themselves, but also to liberate the kidnapped kids and possibly recover some of the stolen cattle. In brief, two things are important: First, the crisis of pastoral communities and the involvement of Ouda Fulani in Zaraguina is notable. Second, the Zaraguina fought other Fulani to counter their rapacious banditry activities.¹⁶⁹

In fact, the anti-Zaraguina were not composed of Fulani alone, and this is where one can start to make sense of the anti of the "*anti*" in anti-Balaka. There were also non-Fulani villagers, farmers, and hunters who were tired of insecurity in their communities. This insecurity was linked to the absence of the state. Chauvin and Seignobos (2013, 126) already highlighted that the Zaraguina, as well as anti-Zaraguina, relied on the use of various powders and concoctions to which they attribute powers. Fulani

¹⁶⁹ Beyond violently engaging the Zaraguina, Mbororo also used less violent means such as truth and reconciliation committees to bring home those involved in Zaraguina. Mbororo of Cameroon mainly used this technique that they called *hungiya* (Seignobos 2011b, 14). In these reconciliation sessions, the Mbororo would confess his sins and renounce his banditry activity (Ibid).

anti-Zaraguina and other villagers in rural CAR cooperated and fought the Zaraguina by relying on powders to which they attribute supernatural powers. Moreover, the anti-Zaraguina worked with the government to fight the road cutters. For instance, the anti-Zaraguina received support from CAR President Ange-Félix Patassé (Seignobos 2011, 40; 2008).¹⁷⁰ It is in this complex mix that the anti-Balaka claim to have obtained their powers.

Several anti-Balaka and some civil society members made an explicit link to the anti-Zaraguina powers, hence proving cooperation between both groups. For instance, the anti-Balaka leader from Bossangoa puts it bluntly: “The anti-Balaka was made possible with the help of the anti-Zaraguina remedies” (Interviews XXVV, Bangui, September 29, 2017; CCKR, Bangui, June 6, 2017). The anti-Balaka movement thus builds on a longer history of resistance and Gbaya pride, as well as village-level organization. This recent history and the use of invisible power with concrete manifestation in the visible world is also a key lineage for anti-Balaka. An evangelical pastor also claimed during my research time in Yaloké that, “Anti-Zaraguina is almost the same thing as anti-Balaka but Anti-Balaka is stronger” (Interview WADP, Yaloké, August 9, 2017). Of course, it remains unclear how such strength could be measured, but it is sufficient notice that the common ground in Yaloké was the belief in the invisible power which builds on cooperation between villagers and Fulani.

The anti-Balaka movement history reveals the complex relationships villagers had with Fulani, and therefore the Muslims, but only the anti-Balaka get recognition for their protection role of the country. In the early days of the movement, the anti-Balaka was applauded and later the population withdrew support because the fighters preyed on them. The anti-Balaka deployed an exclusionary *vrai Centrafricain* discourse, but my analysis shows that non-Muslims and Muslims faced the same security issues in rural areas and cooperated to defend and protect themselves. The use of the “anti” presupposes a power – drawn from powder and concoctions – that allows the user to resist and fight with an invisible

¹⁷⁰ This follows Pratten’s explanation that vigilantism is not just “popular response to the vacuum left by state collapse” (Pratten 2008, 8) because there is clear cooperation between state apparatus and these groups.

power. The anti-Zaraguina and other villagers used it in their fight against the Zaraguina and now the anti-Balaka are also using the same concoctions with supernatural powers in their fight against the Séléka bullets.

In Yaloké, the villagers I interviewed also explained that the Christians and Fulani cooperated previously to fight the Zaraguina. Various Fulani marabou concocted remedies that villagers used to engage in fighting the Zaraguina and it is on those remedies that the anti-Balaka built their invisible power. For instance, Marabou Lendi, from Bossembélé has financed the Balaka and helped the anti-Balaka with the charms (Interview Mokom, Bangui, October 3, 2017). He sold charms to various individuals and collected the money which they used for food and ammunition. Although the marabou who gave the remedies were Fulani, Fulani have been chased by anti-Balaka and their supporters during this armed conflict. From what interviewees recounted in Yaloké, it seems that the remedies had other types of visible effects during the war. For instance, villagers in Yaloké complained that “they [Séléka] killed the animals, goats, chicken, even pigs. They kill them but they do not eat. They only eat goats” (Group Interview with villagers, Yaloké, August 8, 2017). I advance that these Séléka actions can have at least two interpretations, one that corresponds to Western religion and the another to the struggle over supernatural power. In the first interpretation, the Séléka pig killing is seen in religious terms and this reinforces the support that the anti-Balaka received. Discriminately killing pigs might be associated with the fact that Islam forbids eating pigs. Hence, villagers perceive this as imposing Islamic rules on them. The second interpretation is that Séléka did so because the pig is the animal that “neutralizes” the charms of the Séléka, and this was part of an escalating dynamic in an economy of the invisible. For instance, Séléka targeting of Churches and threatening followers was under the logic that “people in churches were praying in order to support Balaka against their regime” (Group interview with villagers, Yaloké, August 8, 2017). Villagers claim to know the invisible power the Fulani rely on and also claim that they knew how to counter the Fulani’s invisible power. This, in turn, suggests that the Fulani relied on the anti-

Zaraguina power when they joined the Séléka movement. In other words, the anti-Balaka are relying on Muslim (Fulani) powers to chase the same Fulani people out of their villages.

The brief depiction of the Fulani and their cooperation with villagers was necessary, since it is the protection of the community that the anti-Balaka mobilize to determine another structure of autochthony capital: the role of one group in the history of development of the country. Muslims' contribution in these histories are unrecognized. I explore in further detail below the discourses that anti-Balaka deployed to enact their role as protector and give meaning to autochthony capital.

6.4 Anti-Balaka as a (Social) Movement¹⁷¹

The anti-Balaka received support from the population and most of the non-Muslim interviewees depicted the anti-Balaka as a movement rather than a vigilante group. There seems to be no precise definition of vigilantism (Kantor and Persson 2010, 11; Fourchard 2008, 16). However, definitions of vigilantism point to certain characteristics such as a group or a social movement's use of violence, policing law, order, and justice outside the state and for the protection of person and property (Abrahams 1998; Pratten 2008; Fourchard 2018). In this particular case, the qualifier of a social movement is significant because the anti-Balaka is not a group based on ethnicity or lineage in a certain area or a village. There are several decentralized leaders and the national coordination of the movement cannot account always for what the anti-Balaka are doing at the village-level. Vigilantism can, at times, lead to a more localized type of defence, but the anti-Balaka was larger. Some of the Muslim interviewees used "uprising" (*soulèvement*) to characterize the anti-Balaka, and interviewees frequently used terms such as "resistance" movement or "popular" movement. This seems to convey that anti-Balaka were not just for the defence of a "local" community. The anti-Balaka is the violent manifestation of a broader discourse, one that discriminates against Muslims in the CAR. To some extent, autochthony accommodates the idea that, as a true Central African, one must be the sole owner of the political and

¹⁷¹The anti-Balaka comprised women fighters, at least in Bangui, but I was not able to meet any.

the economic space. Hence, in order to police the boundaries of that political community, some non-Muslims engaged in violence. This exclusionist discourse gave internal coherence to the anti-Balaka movement across localities and this is linked with non-Muslims deep discursive and other everyday practices.

First, the anti-Balaka are characterized by the massive involvement of young people in and out of the movement. At the dawn of Bozizé's regime, young people already felt emboldened after one of Bozizé speeches and Bozizé's supporters were organizing militias (COCORA and COAC) prior to the coup. In Bangui, when the population heard that the anti-Balaka were coming to topple Séléka, young people started organizing themselves and were emboldened by the news of the anti-Balaka coming. For one civil society leader and the director of a prestigious national school in Bangui, the anti-Balaka "catalyzed people's anger, it gave a boost to everyone!" (Interview NALAI, Bangui, June 16, 2017). The anti-Balaka are conceived as the vessel that carries "everyone" anger. Here, a bottom-up emotive action different from fear played a role in autochthony mobilization. Hence, the movement is the symptom of a shared negative conception of Muslims and Séléka. The anti-Balaka leaders I met in Bangui and Yaloké equated the anti-Balaka to the population as did the leader from Bossangoa.¹⁷² This specific leader claimed that the movement gathered, around 56,000 men at its peak, even though there was no definitive figure. Of course, it does not mean that the entire population fought, but at least in two ways this approximation might be accurate. Villagers supported the movement with food provisions when necessary and the movement's discourse reflected that of the civil society on a broader scale.

The anti-Balaka received strong support from the population. Their discourse about being true Central African cannot be said to be purely their imagination because the discourse echoed that of civil society members that I interviewed and reveals how being *vrai Centrafricain* feels natural on various scales of the political and economic spaces. Moreover, in Yaloké, anti-Balaka leaders depicted the

¹⁷² Leaders from Yaloké too; Interview with Mokom.

movement in similar ways, “The anti-Balaka movement is a popular movement,” others claimed it is “popular revolution,” or even a true Pacific revolution (Group Interview, anti-Balaka leaders in Yaloké, August 9, 2017). In Gaga, a small mining village next to Yaloké, the village chief referred to the anti-Balaka as a “little uprising.” Importantly, there is always a positive qualifier for the anti-Balaka, while Séléka is represented as an “invader.”

Second, if Séléka is the invader, the solution is that the anti-Balaka be portrayed as a resistance movement. This serves at the same time to excuse the human rights violations they committed. As one ex-minister of the Catherine Samba-Panza regime argued, the anti-Balaka “represent the true Central African population. It is a resistance movement even if in the passion of anger there have been abuses” (Interview MTNL, Bangui, June 7, 2017). There is clearly an emotive excuse and a validation for the anti-Balaka. The “abuses” here are normalized. Chasing Muslims is normalized. Similarly, one university professor presented “anti-Balaka people [as] Central Africans to the core.” As he continued, “They gathered to fight the invaders” (Interview EJIU, Bangui, June 9, 2017). Non-Muslim interviewees did not integrate into their discourse that Séléka fighters were also composed of ethnic groups from the north-east even if they knew that as a fact. The anti-Balaka generally just saw itself as resisting invaders.

This shows that the anti-Balaka is part of a broader exclusionist dynamic in the CAR. They have expressed and spread the autochthony narrative, but they did not create it as the national imagination excludes Muslims from various political and economic spaces. This means that there was an internal logic or an internal idea that kept and gave momentum to the movement. Indeed, President Bozizé, who had hateful speeches against Muslims at the dawn of his power, did not stay long enough to publicly mount resistance. Séléka toppled him and the anti-Balaka reached the peak of its violent targeting of Muslims when Bozizé was not in power.

In the CAR, a long-standing discourse and practice of exclusion is helpful to understand the violence that the anti-Balaka deployed in the absence of a leader that could permanently have access to

public platforms to sustain and organize the movement. In previous chapters, I have shown how the independent media portrayed Muslims as “threats” or problematized their presence in the mining sector. These discourses and practices have shaped the current outcomes. The anti-Balaka vigilantism fits with this broader understanding of Muslims as a category that does not belong to the CAR. The anti-Balaka becomes the violent manifestation of the state discourse and practice that excludes Muslims, and Muslim armed group interviewees expressed it as *Balakanism* while anti-Balaka interviewees understood that violence in terms of a positive idea of resistance and defence.

The anti-Balaka are not only claiming autochthony status, they are enacting it with violence. They deployed this violence to keep the political space in the hands of non-Muslims. Non-Muslim discourses revealed that they conceived the political space as belonging to them when they portrayed Muslims as guests and kept non-Muslim issues at the centre. To perpetuate this dominant position in the political space, fighters mobilized violence. This is different from Bøås and Dunn (2013) who linked autochthony violent modes of expressions to globalization. But as my work takes discourses seriously, I show the similarity between the anti-Balaka discourses and non-governmental elites, hence the connection between different levels of mobilization of the autochthony discourse. There must have been a consistent and similar understanding of Muslims as foreigners for the anti-Balaka to think about attacking them.

In order to reveal the self-naturalizing discourse of autochthony, I contrast how the anti-Balaka violence was interpreted as this informs us of the localized experience of those who are excluded. When discussing autochthony and violence, some authors focus on the claims of the group committing violence (Verweijen 2015). This is, of course, very important, but to understand how competing visions of belonging conflict, one must probe into the experience advanced by those who are excluded groups. One FPRC cadre, who has been appointed a minister at the time of fieldwork but after our interview, used the term *Balakanism* to explain what the Muslim community has experienced. For him, Balakanism is the “strategy, the ideology that Christians have put in place to fight Muslims, in administration, at school, in

hospitals, everywhere” and, that ideology is “based on religion as the basis of cultural identity” (Interview CEND2, Bangui, August 27, 2017). Muslims in the current situation have come to understand their place in the CAR society through that prism. Another Séléka oriented Minister argued that “there is a hatred of Christians against us and it manifests itself in the highest level of the state” (Interview DEBH, Bangui, September 4, 2017). As these Séléka interviewees narrated their victimhood in this situation, it was clear that they spoke specifically of noneconomic spaces. That is, they depicted their struggle to access public government institutions, or the political sphere. It is within discursive constructions that one can point to the self and other divide, but also to how violence is legitimized against that other. The autochthony discourses produce meaning and condition forms of violence. These rebels’ interviews show that they do not conceive of the violence Muslims experienced as separated from their exclusion of the political space. In that sense, the violence that erupted during the war was an intensification of an ongoing competition prior to the war.

If, for Séléka rebels the anti-Balaka violence was *Balakanism*, for Mokom, it reflected a form of capital by which claiming it allowed the movement to chase Muslims from power, present the group as the protector of the country, hence keeping the political resource. On August 16, 2017, I sat down with Mokom in the compound of the house I was residing in. He was casually dressed and agreed to grant me an interview after being convinced by a pastor in his neighbourhood. It is during that first encounter that Mokom got carried away by his explanations of the anti-Balaka and depicted it as an ideology. In Mokom’s words, “When we started [anti-Balaka], it [was] an ideology on the whole territory.” Actually, Mokom is constructing legitimacy and carving out a political space for the movement through the language of ideology. He was pointing out the wide support the anti-Balaka received both materially and through discourse. Due to the fragmented nature of the anti-Balaka, what can hold the movement together and give it an internal coherence is that exclusionist autochthony discourse, which is an understanding that Muslims do not belong in the CAR. A former prime Minister, whom I interviewed, argued that the

anti-Balaka are ideologically responsible for the various self-defence groups that are set up at the village-level (Interview BLZM, Bangui, August 28, 2017). However, as I sought to understand what the ideology rested on, none of the non-Muslim respondents, let alone the anti-Balaka respondents, were ready to explain. As Mokom felt proud and claimed the ideology, Muslims on the other side recognized its deleterious effect on their lives.

The anti-Balaka uprising relied on the strategy of eradicating Muslims and the movement should be understood in the broader context of Muslims' marginal position in the CAR. The anti-Balaka discourse resonates with larger non-Muslims social practices. Hence, the anti-Balaka killings cannot be separated from the broader discursive context in which Muslims are represented as non-Central African. From my perspective, it is important not to read anti-Balaka killings as a central plan that unfolded with State support.¹⁷³ The initiative to attack Muslims also came from below, in neighbourhoods and in villages. For instance, in the word of a Fulani ex-Minister, the anti-Balaka clearly announced, well before they reached Bangui, that they “were not going to distinguish between Séléka and Muslims. They will not distinguish between the lizard and the wood” (Interview RREU, Bangui, June 26, 2017). For another interviewee, a Central African working with the IOM, the anti-Balaka attacked populations to provoke the departure of the Séléka (Interview GTBN, Bangui, May 10, 2017). So, it was a deliberate move to attack Muslims in the absence of Bozizé's government or, more precisely, under Djotodia's rule with Séléka. Muslims had been dehumanized as has been seen in other cases of mass atrocities; they had been equated to an animal that bore a strong cultural reference. Lizards in the countryside are chased and eaten. The ex-Minister continued and exposed the sense of the metaphor: “in the hinterland generally there is a type of lizard that is eaten. In the hunt of that lizard there, we use a boomerang. It does not matter if you have to skin the tree to get the lizard, as long as you get the lizard” (Interview RREU, Bangui, June 26, 2017). From this metaphor, it seems that the Séléka was the objective, but Muslims had to pay for it in

¹⁷³ In other cases, that leaders had access to power and public platforms were necessary for violence to unfold. For instance, Scott Straus (2015) analyzed the genocide in Rwanda with reference to state ideology.

the sense that the anti-Balaka attacked the Muslim population to reach the Séléka. For him, the anti-Balaka did not only react to something, it was also linked to the fact that Bozizé was toppled.

The anti-Balaka cannot be solely understood from the perspective of fighters. In specific ways, they were supported discursively. I noticed how some CAR intellectuals, albeit non-Muslim, are less critical of the anti-Balaka killings and human rights violations of the movement. This links back to the popular support the anti-Balaka received and the fact that non-Muslims were the “host” who wanted Muslims, the “guests,” to abide by their rule. For instance, the director of the prestigious national school advanced that the anti-Balaka “is a force to counterbalance, the dominating presence of Séléka. They [Séléka] came, they invaded us, they spread all over the areas, not only in the neighbourhoods, even in the hinterland. They settled down” (Interview NALAI, June 16, 2017). Some political elites, intellectuals, and civil society leaders supported what the movement represented and looked for several types of justification for the movement. As the national school director continued, “It was really out of frustration because the degree of bestiality they [Séléka] displayed was such as to get people to react and show them that here they do not have the monopoly of violence” (Interview NALAI, June 16, 2017). It is important to highlight the intellectuals’ support of the movement and how they conceived of the political space as belonging to non-Muslims. It shows that autochthony operated independently from the elite manipulation on various levels and required a commitment of non-governmental elites as this is linked to daily practices of exclusion. In another example, a recent CAR PhD graduate, Yougboko (2017) analyzes the multiple crises in the CAR and does not engage the anti-Balaka. In the dissertation, the author strongly criticizes the Séléka, arguing that it is not a “simple rebellion,” it is an “aggression” (Yougboko 2017, 45). She even accused the Séléka of assassinating “hundreds of millions of people” (Yougboko 2017, 46). Of course, this cannot be true of a population that is less than 5 million. A former journalist turned politician refused to criticize the anti-Balaka in our discussion. As he advanced, “the anti-Balaka are the saviors, the balancing force. Without them, Muslims would have the whole country”; he insisted that,

after all, it is “them [Séléka] who started” the killing (Interview ESSB, Bangui, 24 July 2017). Hence, the anti-Balaka should be considered the manifestation of the political and social culture that seeks to exclude Muslims from the national imagination.

6.4.1 A Movement Between the Sovereignty for the Country and the Absence of the State: The Anti-Balaka as Patriots

I am concerned with the idea that Muslims are represented as invaders, originating from a foreign place. Indeed, it is through discourse and differentiation that one traces symbolic boundaries (Hall 2007). This links directly to the fact that Muslims are conceptualized as “immigrants” to the country, and it is a discursive practice that revealed autochthony capital in previous chapters. As a result, when it comes to violence, this discourse draws a boundary between anti-Balaka who saved the country and represents Muslims as invaders who attacked the country. As highlighted, the state plays a significant role through its policies, investments, and public sector jobs (Dorransoro and Grojean 2018, 9). This gives meaning to autochthony as it signals the group who contributed the most to the realization of the community. However, the role of the state in autochthony competition is not material only, it is also symbolic. The contribution to the community is also multiform. The idea of the state forms a permissive structure for the anti-Balaka. The anti-Balaka leaders I met couched their discourse as a protest of an ineffectual state and simultaneously a manifestation of the desire for the state, a desire that many people hold in the CAR (Lombard 2016). It follows that the anti-Balaka has developed a certain fluency in “languages of stateness” (Hansen and Stepputat 2001 quoted in Pratten 2008, 6). Ultimately, this language is to demonstrate empirically that the anti-Balaka stood up for the country as true Central African. Ancestors played a role for the country and they are following their steps by also playing the role of protectors.

The anti-Balaka as a movement clearly outlined to whom they felt the state must belong. The idea of the state is strong in their discourse, and strikingly, ethnic identity does not appear in the discourse. The state in the CAR is anything but a reality once one moves beyond Bangui. The state and its symbols are important and will have relevance for the future of the country. Mokom repeated several times that

“there was no state, it was total anarchy and it was external aggression. There was no state. We are seeking sovereignty and real independence” (Interview Mokom, Bangui, August 16, 2017). After explaining that the anti-Balaka was an ideology, Mokom’s next step was to continue justifying the anti-Balaka with an argument of a higher nature, one about the state. The “We” who are seeking independence is what the anti-Balaka stand for. Mokom did not say “I,” but spoke for the group and by extension what the group represents.

My intention here is not to delve into the nature of the CAR state. Lombard (2012b; 2016) does an excellent job deciphering it. For her, the CAR is not like a Weberian state, but, importantly, internationals as well as nationals hold on to the idea of constructing such a state.¹⁷⁴ The people desire for collective protection is legitimate and my intention is to make explicit to whom the state belongs to through the anti-Balaka discourse. First, the anti-Balaka make up the symbolic argument about the state by pointing out the state’s functional absence. They then justify their presence through the absence of the state. Regarding what the anti-Balaka stands for, they make explicit that they are protecting “Central Africans,” the “host,” against the “Muslim invader,” the “guests.” Secondly, and relatedly, to cement their presence, the anti-Balaka have developed a language of stateness.

The anti-Balaka carved a discourse around state absence and abandonment and attached issues of Séléka’s “perpetual exactions” and “conquest” to that discourse. As Mokom claimed, the “we” that are abandoned are the non-Muslims who could be said to have differently felt the presence of the state and

¹⁷⁴ That idea is what binds the “good intention crowd” (the international community) to various national political actors in CAR to the extent that other modes of organization are unthinkable (Lombard 2016, 2). In that sense, international actors have played a role in shaping armed violence in the CAR and in the current conflict (Lombard 2012a; 2016). For instance, one important implication of the international community has been the conventionalization of rebellion (Lombard 2016). She means that rebels have now adopted and adapted their discourses to the presence of international actors and know how to get their attention. For instance, activities that were supposed to establish a kind of normal state, such as Security Sector Reform (SSR) and DDR have only exacerbated people expectation and “reward” they can get from international presence. With more than a dozen peacekeeping operations in the country since 1996 (Olin 2015) and various problematic SSR (N’Diaye 2007; 2009; Ingerstad 2012; Bagayoko 2008; 2010), the country is in a situation of “fractured peacebuilding” (de Carvalho and Lucey 2016). This situation leaves a legacy and high expectation on the population side as well as armed men. It fuels the feeling that the international community is not there to help Central Africans, otherwise with all the missions, their various crises should have halted.

thus have a different experience from people of the North. Through that claim, Mokom does not recognize that it is the same presence of the State that Muslims are demanding.¹⁷⁵ This type of discourse bears similarities to the flat indistinctiveness of the state's absence that intellectuals argued to re-centre debate on non-Muslim issues. That is because every region of the CAR is neglected, the north has no right to rebel. But various regions felt the presence of the state differently and that is important. For instance, the anti-Balaka leader from Bossangoa went further in our discussion and added that they were abandoned after the fall of Bozizé. For him, the anti-Balaka was created “following the *huge abuses* of the Séléka on the population that was *abandoned* after the fall of President Bozizé in front of the Séléka.” They perpetrated “incessant exactions” and said that the Séléka “came to conquer, even the peasant in the depths of the bush, they pursued him” (Interview XXVV, Bangui, September 29, 2017). He does not lack strong words to condemn and justify anti-Balaka actions. He presupposes, and at the same time reveals that when Bozizé was in power, his hometown (Bossangoa) received different attention, to the point that his departure left a vacuum.

It is also through state abandonment that issues of sovereignty and anti-Balaka patriotism make sense. The symbolic mobilization of the state gives meaning to autochthony by signaling the higher value or role anti-Balaka is playing for the community. Mokom phrased his posture, state abandonment, against Chad. It is not unusual in the CAR for Muslim and Chadian to be equated (Marchal 2015a, 129). Mokom argued that “Deby [the President of Chad] wants to take control of the CAR as the 19th prefecture of Chad and form Republic of Logone.” Hence, Mokom sought to express disapproval over Chad's influence in Bangui politics. By the same token, he presented the anti-Balaka as the protector of the state even internationally. Chad had already supported Bozizé's rebellion in 2003 and Djotodia again in 2013. The Chadian president has some political opponents in the CAR that he seeks to keep under control with

¹⁷⁵ For Lombard (2015) people decry the absence of the state but as she noticed in northern CAR, this is also a permissive structure. The absence of the state allows people to pursue state-like activities. Were the state to be effective, their activities would stop. The anti-Balaka claiming to provide security is one of such state-like activity.

a CAR president that is favourable to him (Ceriana Mayneri 2014a, 182).

The anti-Balaka subsequently renamed itself, moving from anti-Balaka to *Patriots* anti-Balaka. There is no simple explanation, but from a discursive perspective, this change builds on a longer history of the country's "defenders." It serves to highlight and mobilize the place a group holds in the history of the development of the country to claim their autochthonous status. Back in 2003, Bozizé and his rebellion called themselves patriots. In independent newspapers, after Bozizé's coup in 2003, his men were called the "Liberators" (*Libérateurs*) and also "Patriots" (Placit 2003a; Mokambo 2003b), for one can only liberate what was imprisoned and display patriotic values in front of the state. Even Bozizé, in some of his speeches, identified himself as a patriot (see Chapter 3). That the anti-Balaka purposefully renamed themselves patriots bore references to the deceased regime and the fact that the movement rose to save the country in Bozizé's image.

The symbolic mobilization of the idea of the state also becomes important to make sense of some of the 17 demands that the group has. I obtained a copy of these demands, and I focus my attention here on two more points. The first point is that the anti-Balaka framed one of their demands in terms of "recognition of the heroism of the anti-Balaka Patriots as a resistance movement" (point 10). Another point relates to "The building of a monument to the memory of anti-Balaka patriots who fell on the fields of resistance" (point 14). Hence, the anti-Balaka are tapping into two contentious nationalist moments that have the potential to define the state and sediment the exclusion of Muslims. The anti-Balaka consider their move heroic, as opposed to the Muslims invaders, and seeks to materialize that moment in memory politics. A monument of such recognition will be a daily remembrance for Muslims that they do not belong in the country or at least that they have no right to rule it.

The anti-Balaka are seeking recognition as they feel they have proudly served the state and this is highly symbolic, but this further marginalize Muslim contributions to the realization of CAR. The anti-Balaka proudly claim to have freed the country, however, CAR Muslim refugees in neighbouring

countries wish that for reconciliation, the government establishes “a day of mourning for the Muslims killed” (Interview with a refugee in Picco 2018, 31). Another refugee interviewed asserts that

People who stayed could create a committee to rebuild the neighborhood or the mosque, and afterwards come here [the refugee camp] to ask us to return. The government should help them to do so and should show the importance of the people who left for the future development of the country (Interview with a refugee in Picco 2018, 31).

This presents fundamentally two conflicting worldviews; it manifests the autochthony competition and shows closure in the *vrai Centrafricain* discourse. The anti-Balaka need recognition for having chased Muslims out of the country, while Muslims need recognition for their important contribution to the country. The sovereignty that the anti-Balaka wants seems to conflict with the Muslim refugees’ narrative and illustrates a tension in the discourse. This means that the anti-Balaka conceive the state that they saved as representing non-Muslims. At the same time, it reflects the idea that denies Muslim contributions to the realization of the country and it is such recognition that helps build autochthony identity capital. The anti-Balaka could be said to have more autochthonous identity capital by the virtue of having saved the country, protected it against invaders, and re-established order. The Séléka and Muslims cannot claim such capital. Having such capital seems to have played a role in the elections that followed the conflict. This is because some anti-Balaka leaders, for instance Kéma Florent or Alfred Yékatom – have been elected into parliament. Hence, involvement with the anti-Balaka seems to have had effect in politics. There have been peace deals where both the Séléka and the anti-Balaka obtained ministerial positions, but legislative elections reveal local population support and the effects of autochthony capital. In Yaloké for instance, a youth leader claimed that he came second in parliamentary elections because his competitor was more involved in the anti-Balaka than him. He claimed that the population considered that this candidate had protected and done more for the village than him.

As patriots, building on symbols of the state, the anti-Balaka in Bangui sought to legitimize their actions by seeking an international legal justification. Mokom advances that “we have international treaties that served as a justification” of their actions. This is probably because one cadre of the anti-

Balaka in Bangui is a graduate from the law school at the University of Bangui. He helped the movement with those legal justifications. Indeed, as an annex to the 17 demands, the anti-Balaka refer to the following legal instruments:

- United Nations Resolution n°.3314 of 14 December 1974 which authorizes any nation to use force to free themselves from aggression;
- The Organization of African Unity Convention of 1977 on the elimination of mercenarism in Africa;
- United Nations Resolution n°.523 of 12 January 1952 recognizing the right of developing countries to freely dispose of their natural wealth;
- The right to resistance against oppression provided for in paragraph 3 of the preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 10 December 1948.

These are all official documents that exist. The anti-Balaka, through the choice of these documents, deploy their patriotic value; they raise concerns and care about the state. They pose a diagnosis of the crisis by asking questions about mercenaries, aggression/oppression, and natural resources. Yes, various reports (UN Panel of Experts) acknowledged that the Séléka relied on mercenaries in their group, but Bozizé also did so prior to them and this is consistent with central Africa's regional politics, where men in arms are available and can sell, and shift their loyalties between rebellion and government forces (Debos 2008; 2016). That mercenaries were involved in a rebellion in the region and in the CAR is not new. For the anti-Balaka, this is reinterpreted to imply that they have saved the country from the invaders and mercenaries, the Muslims. However, as one FPRC leader argued, "those who have taken up arms in this rebellion are not foreigners" (Interview KOSS, Bangui, August 25, 2017).¹⁷⁶ At the least, foreigners are not the majority since it is in Bangui that the numbers of enrolled people skyrocketed. Michel Djotodia complained about the armed men not following his orders. He considered that the Séléka comprised between 15,000 and 20,000 fighters who joined only more recently (*Jeune Afrique* 2013; *Radio Ndeke Luka* 2013). Djotodia insisted on the fact that rebellion started with 5,000 men in the North-East.

¹⁷⁶ He has been introduced to me as the Director of the Cabinet of Nourredine Adam (leader of the FPRC), but I am aware that this post can shift according to circumstances. That interviewee has been nominated minister during my fieldwork but after our interview. At the moment of this writing, he is no longer holding the Ministry position.

In their own discourse, the anti-Balaka recovered the sovereignty of the country through their patriotic acts of violence. As some leaders proudly explained in Yaloké and Gaga, “it is the anti-Balaka that has reinstated the authority of the state. When we arrived in Bangui, we provoked the departure of Djotodia” (Group interview with anti-Balaka, Yaloké, August 9 2017; Interview FFIL, Yaloké, August 10 2017). The anti-Balka have protected the state and provoked the departure of a government they disagreed with. Therefore, the anti-Balaka feel that they have saved the country from the Muslims. Even if it has been documented that Muslims have been complaining about their everyday harassment in the country (Kilembe 2015), various arguments of the anti-Balaka make no space for the Muslims in their national imagination and demonstrates closure in the identity discourse. Beyond the state discourse and proud heroic movement, the anti-Balaka othering practices represented Muslims as invaders of the CAR. In other words, they are guests who should abound by the rule of their “fathers.”

6.5 The Belonging Discourse of the Anti-Balaka Fighters and Villagers

The anti-Balaka politics of belonging champions a discourse that is not ethnic at its core. Although Bozizé’s co-ethnic Gbaya were involved in the movement, they were not the only ethnic members, and they did not champion a Gbaya nationalist discourse. At best, it is a discourse based on regionalism. The south, the south-west, the west, and the north-west of the CAR can find themselves in the anti-Balaka discourse, and one uniting characteristic is that those regions are majority non-Muslim. I have exposed the origins and symbolic repertoires of the patriotic anti-Balaka movement. I now focus on the arguments they advance against the Muslim-foreigners, which allow them to claim rights and refuse the central role others have played in the CAR by conceptualizing Muslims as guests.

The anti-Balaka autochthony discourses mobilized issues of the respect that they think they deserve as the entitled, as well as issues of economic grievances due to the material loss some of them suffered in the hands of Séléka. They also mobilize the absence of the state. The theme of respect was articulated in the metaphor of Muslims as guests who were welcomed in the country and could never really become

anything other than guests. By looking into these discourses, my objective is to examine the ways in which Muslims are intentionally or unintentionally discriminated against, for it is in discourses that there exists closure (Ricoeur 2000). Other scholars have found that memories of razzias of the Senoussi before (and to some extent during) colonization (see Introductory Chapter) played a role in the violence that the anti-Balaka used (Ceriana Mayneri 2014a). The interviewees seemed less concerned with that distant past. Incorporated within the guest metaphor is the unbearable victimization that the anti-Balaka and their supporters expressed through dignity, manhood, and economic grievances. Their discourses bear resemblance to those of non-governmental elites that I presented in Chapter 5. This is why, autochthony speaks to citizens who are not political elites. Both elites and non-elites can be using the same word for different purposes and speak to different realities. Hence, autochthony binds both leader and follower through varied experiences, this is a specificity of autochthony that differs from ethnicity and provides an understanding of this type of instrumentalization. Showing that these different groups' discourse overlaps demonstrates that non-governmental elites' and people's understanding connect but also that they operated differently from Bozizé's instrumentalization.

The anti-Balaka fighters with whom I spoke had various difficult encounters with Séléka on which they built their participation in the movement. Therefore, it is not just the killings that Séléka perpetrated that mattered. In Yaloké, fighters framed their issues with Séléka in terms of respect. The head of neighbourhood turned fighter in Yaloké told me that "Séléka does not respect authorities. When they arrived in my neighborhood, they burnt the house of the *chef de quartier*" (Interview QEOF, Yaloké, August 8, 2017). A similar discourse was present in the mining village of Gaga mentioning a pre-crisis dynamic. In Gaga, the village chief advanced that Séléka people *imposed* things on them. For the village chief, even prior to Séléka arrival, "they [Muslims] became Central African by force. Why do I say this? Some of them *do not listen to the voice of the village chief*. They take him as a servant because they have money" (Interview NIGE, Gaga, August 10, 2017). As he continued, he claimed that they had good

collaboration with Muslims but despite that “*they supported*” (their disrespect). He said that the population would do various kinds of work for the Muslims and, on top of that, they would not pay a fair price or not pay at all. From a benign situation, he quickly concluded that Muslims are *savages* as his story illustrates:

A woman can take a calabash and transport firewood or cassava flour, she is told to put that in the concession. When she gets there, the Arab [Muslim] woman, cannot even help her when she puts it [the calabash] down. She even insults her again and again. OK. She goes back to the store and is told to go and get the money from the boss. She goes to the boss; he insults her again. No, no, no, these people were savages.

The story recounts that when a non-Muslim woman had to transport her goods from a store to the house of a Muslim trader. As the village chief recounted the story in our interview, he represented Muslims as savages. Muslims in those encounters are accused of not respecting the non-Muslim woman. She should have been helped take down her calabash and not been offended. In general, they attribute negative traits to Muslims in linguistic form.¹⁷⁷ The chief also claims that Muslims “were not true Central Africans. They arrived through illicit trade in our country.” The mode of settlement as well as the category of activities both exclude Muslims from being conceived as in-group members. The presence of several ethnic groups who practise Islam has been detected in Yaloké and Gaga. These groups settled in the area for gold digging (Sole-Ngakoutou 1989, 4-6). Muslims are cast in the role of immigrants; they are people who arrived in the country even if the historical record shows otherwise (see Introductory Chapter). In this understanding, Muslims are understood as deviating from the expected behaviour of respect.

The guest metaphor is palatable when interlocutors use religion to show that Muslims are misbehaving. While I was speaking with the employee of a local NGO in Bangui, he did not hesitate to convey that, in his neighbourhood, they were “tolerating” the presence of Gbaya who were Muslims. Hence, converting from Christianity to Islam is not without risks because some of those Gbaya Muslims

¹⁷⁷ For instance, the anti-Balaka in Yaloké accused Séléka of being “robbers by nature” and that Christians are not like that (group interview with anti-Balaka, 9 August 2017). Positive in-group depiction and negative out-group description serve to reinforce the us-them separation and present what the anti-Balaka stands for as the desirable norm.

were also chased at the height of the conflict, even if the anti-Balaka claim that they only targeted Séléka. Religion served to differentiate who was in and out. Picco (2018, 19) has met some of those Gbaya Muslim refugees who considered themselves Central African and had to flee because of their religion, a situation they found unfair. They thought they would have been spared due to their ethnic affiliation, but it was not the case. This suggests that, through the metaphor of immigrants and guests, ethnicity and religion, depending on the context, excluded each other and, at other times, reinforced each other. A Gbaya Christian from the south would be more Central African than the same Gbaya who is Muslim. A Goula Muslim from the North would be more foreign than otherwise. However, a Goula Christian might be in a gray area.¹⁷⁸ Far from essentializing these ethnicities, the suggestions I make here require more research.

As Muslims already held desirable position from the rest of the inhabitants due to their economic capital, money is seen to have altered power relationships between first comers and latecomers. The authorities and chiefs who want respect here are non-Muslims who settled in the area prior to the arrival of Muslims, so they claim. They expect to hold the right to determine how Muslims should behave by respecting them and by listening to the voice of the chief, and by submitting to his authority. In other words, Muslims are stepping outside their place as guests.

Moreover, the language of stateness is mobilized to problematize the act of rebellion itself and to reinforce Muslims' position as guests or as people who do not see the country as theirs. Non-Muslims have "welcomed" Muslims. For Mokom, "If they [Séléka] were Central African, what is the point in

¹⁷⁸ I mean that on various scales, autochthony identifies a foreign other. Indeed, the same foreign category can move from a certain other to an alien (Kearney 2003). Following Kearney, I mean that in front of the self-naturalizing discourse of autochthony, one needs to differentiate "different kinds of otherness" (Kearney 2003, 67). When you live in the South of CAR (Bangui for instance), your otherness, foreignness depends on your ethnicity, geographical region or even religion (these categories can overlap and reinforce each other). A national from an ethnic group located in the north-east region and Muslim is a complete alien. A national from an ethnic group located in the south and Muslim might be less alien. For (Kearney 2003, 67) "other" and "alien" must be differentiated. For him "other" [...] refer to alterity worthy of reverence and hospitality." "Alien," by contrast, "refer to that experience of strangers associated with" discrimination suspicion and scapegoating (Kearney 2003, 67). From his perspective, the other is friendlier than the alien. Hence, one must distinguish the "other in the alien and the alien in the other" (Ibid.).

burning houses and pillaging people?” This is a tricky move. That is, a true Central African cannot rebel, which contradicts the CAR’s political history. The violence Mokom points out is not particularly attached to Séléka, as Bozizé’s rebellion was also violent. However, Mokom insisted that “if you are really autochthon, you cannot burn all these farms, houses.” This discourse, in turn, reinforces the foreignness of the Séléka because it follows that a national cannot conquer its already owned territory. A true central African cannot burn, let alone pillage.¹⁷⁹ If anything, this is concomitant to war, but Séléka uses of the practices serve only to reinforce its foreignness. Mokom continues claiming that some people of Muslim descent who were supposed to be Central African have taken arms against their *fathers* (Interview Mokom, 16 August 2017). The act of rebellion is being denied to Muslims. But it is unclear if Muslims could have maintained their Centrafricanity by not taking up arms. By taking up arms, they are against their fathers, understood as the non-Muslims who welcomed them. This observation echoes Jenkins’ (2012a, 584) similar observation in Kenya that “if the immigrant community is seen to be in political opposition to the native community, their conceptualization can be transformed from accepted guest to unwelcome occupier.” In the CAR, the Muslims’ political involvement has turned them into invaders and occupiers, but it is important that this is due to political opposition to non-Muslim rule. This discourse is similar to that of non-governmental elites that I presented in Chapter 5 (section 5.3) where interviewees made explicit that Muslims’ support of the Séléka rebellion against non-Muslims is a problem.

For the villagers and the anti-Balaka I spoke with, representing Muslims as foreigners, and thus guests, makes their actions unbearable. A heightened sense of victimhood and humiliation was used to justify the anti-Balaka’s actions. For other villagers, during group interviews, they complained that under

¹⁷⁹ A true Central African assertion of Mokom builds on the suspicion that Muslims face daily in the sense that citizens do not trust Muslims having their CAR administrative papers as being enough of a proof of belonging. As I was interviewing Mokom, I realized that this mistrust was deep. He claimed that he had proof that Séléka people were foreigners and showed me ID cards of some fighters that he said they got from the battlefield. On some of the cards there was a Chadian flag and on others, there was a CAR flag but a Muslim name. Mokom was categorical about the fact that the IDs with a CAR flag did not belong to a Central African. I asked him how he knows, and he replied it was a fake card without being able to prove it. In brief the Muslim name was a proof that was enough.

Séléka governance, “To get out of the bush, you have to *swear in front of Séléka* that you are not a thug” (Group Interview with villagers, Yaloké, August 8, 2017). In a sense, why do they have to swear in front of a foreigner in order to continue their usual lives? Similarly, they could not go about their usual businesses as “previously, we used our machete without problems. But with Séléka, even to go farming, when you have a machete, they say that you are Balaka. At the beginning, the Christians were *subordinated*, but after they said, ‘*merde*.’”¹⁸⁰ For them, there was an unbearable surveillance that they could no longer endure. Even at the “market, they put Séléka to watch over you until home” (Group Interview with villagers, Yaloké, August 8, 2017). This shift in power is automatically read for villagers in terms of subordination. It is a reversal of prior norms in their views.

Of course, people will remember and represent Séléka differently, according to their experiences and encounters with the Séléka. However, there was a shared sense of humiliation that the population felt that, I think, is linked to broader issues of masculinity and manhood. A woman, senior public servant advanced that “Séléka said that there was no ‘man’ [in CAR]. They have humiliated ‘us’” (Interview STRG, Bangui, June 13, 2017; Yougboko 2017, 46). This resembles the discourse of a member of the Interfaith platform as I exposed in (section 5.6.1). Anti-Balaka leader Mokom similarly advanced that because of the Séléka, “The Central African *dignity* no longer existed” (Mokom 16 August 2017). In the same vein, the leader from Bossangoa reported Séléka’s actions in terms of “burning villages, taking female populations to make them sex slaves, kill them, or rape them.” The anti-Balaka represent themselves as protectors for women and the vulnerable. Even the mining village chief example above portrayed a non-Muslim female individual. The anti-Balaka and non-Muslim villagers link loss of dignity and loss of masculinity through the rape of women and abuses on women’s bodies. This loss of dignity seems to represent a loss of masculinity. That dignity, masculinity, and rape appear in their discourse reinforce Séléka’s foreignness. As Seifert shows, “Rape committed in war can be regarded as the ultimate

¹⁸⁰ This French word convey a meaning that is difficult to translate. It conveys a sense of exasperation and at the same time refers to a despicable person or thing.

symbolic humiliation of the male enemy” (1993, par.14). Similarly, rape revives the “myth of the male protector” (Ibid.). In the CAR, this communicated to anti-Balaka men that they are incapable of protecting “their” women, the symbol of the family, the culture, and the nation (Seifert 1996). This sense of humiliation is also why I have found it difficult to make the anti-Balaka address their own targeting of Muslims.

The sentiment of humiliation and loss of masculinity echo Yaloké’s villagers’ experiences. During a group interview in Yaloké, one old man told, “They killed 2 of my children. I have spent 3 months in the bush. We ate plants, plant roots, fruits and also wild yams. Even to look for firewood was problematic. When there is a little noise, Séléka come” (Group Interview with villagers, Yaloké, August 8, 2017). Another villager also commented that Séléka were saying to the villagers that, “we now have power, come out so that we can play. They have *insulted* Christians” (Group Interview with villagers, Yaloké August 8, 2017). So, villagers remember provocation and humiliation (see also section 5.3). These accounts at least reveal something stronger than a clear-cut narration of killings and human rights violations. These representations of victimhood show that the anti-Balaka was supported and still is, because when Séléka was in control, people searched for protection in the bushes. It was already a humiliating situation for them, especially when we bear in mind that Séléka is represented as an invader and a foreign force.

Another aspect of the true Central African discourse has been to mirror national debates over the dominance of Muslim-foreigners at a local level. Muslims’ economic dominance generates tension. In Yaloké, for example, villagers echoed the economic grievances that I had been confronted with in Bangui, these grievances moved beyond the natural resources sphere.¹⁸¹ In Yaloké, Muslims are accused of being *envouteurs*. The power they wield supposedly allows them to keep a dominant position in the local economy. People who are presumed to be of Muslim faith, Chadians, Sudanese, and Fulani, use marabou

¹⁸¹ More details in Chapter 7.

to get charms that they use to prosper more in their business than non-Muslims, who want to enter the business sector in the town. Through that, Muslims can apparently maintain their monopoly on the economy according to non-Muslims. In fact, villagers explain their status that scapegoat Muslims and link that to the invisible realm with real consequences. From the discourse, the argumentative strategy goes that if Muslims did not have that supposed link with the invisible, they would not be in their dominant economic position. Muslims use charms to thwart non-Muslims so that they do not evolve with them. They use charms so that people can buy goods from their shops, “they practise ‘*maraboutage*.’ They curse you and you become crazy.” Interviewees continue and claimed that “everything that is commerce, it is Muslims. In transportation business, they cast charms on your truck, and it will have so many problems that you will sell [the truck] to them” (Group Interview with villagers, Yaloké August 8, 2017). There is an idea of the non-Muslim villagers (re)claiming a certain superiority that they believe they have lost because of Muslims who have money and better access to the invisible world. Hence, the situation must change and the anti-Balaka represented an opportunity to engage in this reversal of power. Autochthony represents a discourse to consider issues of power, authority and entitlement beyond the Christian versus Muslims opposition as the conflict is represented. The grievances were also personal because people suffered dispossession under Séléka. In Gaga, one anti-Balaka leader who was a miner claimed that he personally lost CFA 7 million francs (approximately \$12,000) and that he was tortured and this is why he was involved in the armed group (Interview FFIL, Gaga, August 10, 2017). Another one in Yaloké, also a miner, claimed to have lost CFA 12 million francs (approximately \$20,000) (Group interview with anti-Balaka leaders, Yaloké, August 9, 2017).

To further demonstrate the importance of economic grievances, a high school history professor whom I interviewed in Yaloké stated that “it is after the events that the Gbanous¹⁸² have taken back the monopoly of the commerce.” In that sense, “if Muslims came back, that would be difficult. All the young

¹⁸² They are a Gbaya subgroup and the majority in Yaloké. They also consider themselves as the first comers who have settled in the area when fleeing war from neighbouring countries (Sole-Ngakoutou 1989).

Christians have now occupied their shops since they are now businessmen as well. Where would all these Muslims settle?” (Interview, HDPC, Yaloké, August 11, 2017). As he states, they have *taken back*; they took control of something that supposedly belonged to them. In fact, Muslims have settled in Yaloké area in the 20th century for various economic reasons such as the slave trade (Sole-Ngakoutou 1989, 6). If these discourses became more prominent at this point in time, it is because the coup of the Séléka skyrocketed Muslims in the public space in a way that has not been seen before. This made Muslim discrimination more visible. These types of discourses were present as my archival work with newspapers shows, but analysts did not pay attention previously because Muslims were not publicly and overtly involved in national politics.

Concluding Remarks

The state in CAR exists only in the form of an idea that many actors, both national and international, hold. The anti-Balaka are one actor in the current conflict that holds views of an ideal state that shall be sovereign and represent a specific segment of the population. This chapter focused on the analysis of the anti-Balaka because they were and are at the forefront of the true Central African narrative, alongside Bozizé’s Government. Their discourse is not so much about why the anti-Balaka belong. The discourse is about what “we” are entitled to as non-Muslims. While identity shapes the conflict in the CAR, I see that ethnicity is not the most relevant theme for my interviewees. Hence, it is useful to see what the group’s claims refer to when they claim to be true Central African.

The anti-Balaka are the latest expression of issues of identity and citizenship. They view themselves as the protector of “their” community at the village-level, but also at the national level. People marched from villages and towns upcountry to Bangui to provoke the departure of Séléka from power. The anti-Balaka present themselves as protectors and patriots, they are part of boundary making in the CAR. The boundary they are drawing is itself part of a politics of belonging where they see themselves as the first comers in the CAR polity and deserve respect and control over the economy. They do not need to mention

that they belong or that they are first occupants of the territory. This is overlooked and taken for granted in their discourses and reveals their natural conception of entitlement. The next chapter takes a micro-level approach and explores the usefulness of autochthony in a marketplace.

7. Autochthony, the Everyday and Local Dynamics in the Market

7.1 Introduction

I explore how autochthony is negotiated and produced from below in micro-spaces. Depending on the place, autochthony permeates everyday life, especially in the context where land issues are not prominent. In that sense, autochthony claims are spatially specific. This chapter argues that autochthony is embedded in daily practices and interactions and is influenced by spatial dynamics.¹⁸³ It shows how Muslims and non-Muslims interacted from the perspective of a very localized instance. I build on the pre-crisis situation showing that non-Muslims sought to occupy and chase Muslims from their market spots when possible. Hence, in a very local instance, autochthony is used independently from elite manipulation. This helps bridge elite manipulation with people's motivations with a discursive understanding of autochthony. I argue that autochthony is an expression of the desire to secure a better place in the market, either replacing Muslim-foreigners, keeping them in the periphery, or blocking their access to the market. If one is an autochthon, one has the right to the bestselling spots, and those who are not autochthon, Muslims, cannot have those spots. The discourse of autochthony is an inequitable device that non-Muslim people deploy to replace Muslims if necessary.

There are several markets that generate revenues to the Municipality of Bangui. The two major ones are the KM5 market(s) and the *marché central* (the central market that has been renamed the Market of Reconciliation) in KM0.¹⁸⁴ This chapter builds on interviews with market vendors and representatives of two out of three vendor associations that are present in almost every market in Bangui: The *Koli and Wali-gara* association, the *commerçant* association, and the *Boubanguéré* association. Vendors from of these associations compete for market spots. There is inter-association competition as well as intra-

¹⁸³ Hence, "The general phenomena observable at the level of 'mass society' are experienced uniquely from place to place" (Agnew 1987 quoted in Bernazzoli and Flint 2009, 395).

¹⁸⁴ This market is located right downtown Bangui at KM0.

association competition, which is influenced by religious identity. I supplement these interviews with newspaper excerpts that show the existence of a pre-crisis competition in markets well before the war started in 2013. The chapter brings to the fore, with a focus on a micro-space, how autochthony is constructed as part of daily activities and practices. Identity thus emerges as perspective on the world Brubaker (2002) that is deeply embedded in daily routines and ethnic ways of acting in several African countries (Jenkins 2012a).

The chapter begins by presenting the main Muslim neighbourhood and how it is tied to Bangui's life. It allows for a better understanding of the supposed Muslims' stranglehold on the economic sector. Next, I probe various vendor associations' competition over market spaces and illustrate, in the very local instance, how notions of true Central African vs. foreigners are useful in the competition over market spots. Finally, autochthony and the competition over resources allow us to see that the government has been actively trying to bypass or decrease Muslims' dominance in the micro-sector of the market. The discourses and practices of belonging focus on a market spot. The politics of inclusion and belonging of the Muslim community at the national level has a different connotation in such a micro-space. It is my contention that autochthony serves to unify both elites and their followers in the same discourse, even if it meant different things at different times in different places.

7.2 KM5, the Main Muslim Neighbourhood, and the Importance of Studying Markets

Statistically, the KM5 is the 3rd most populous district of Bangui, with 15.8% of Bangui's population (Boutene 2013, 14).¹⁸⁵ The three main districts, the 5th, the 4th, and the 3rd, host the major open markets of Bangui (Ibid.). This economic dynamism is part of the reason these areas draw people.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁵ The most populous district is the 5th district with 22% of Bangui's population (Boutene 2013, 14). That district was one of the most violent at the height of the crisis and is populated with ethnicities from the north-east CAR.

¹⁸⁶ At the same time, people often choose their place of residence according to religious or ethnic ties (Boutene 2013, 18). This may also be true outside Bangui as I noticed in Yaloké. In KM5 there are various neighbourhoods named after an ethnicity or a foreign nationality. For instance *quartier Camerounais*, *quartier Sénégalais*, *quartier Gbaya*, *quartier Foulbé*.

Boutene estimated that 108,000 people inhabited the 3rd district (2013, 15).

Historically, KM5 was not a mainly Muslim neighbourhood. French colonizers encouraged Muslims to settle in the country to establish a class of businessmen (Marchal 2015a, 130) and supply meat (Romier 1999). These migrants have generally made their wealth by responding to the demand for commercial products (Kilembe 2015, 80). As a perpetuation of this colonial policy, Muslims came to be present in the economy. One interviewee, a journalist, says he is Christian and previously lived in KM5. He left KM5 and established himself in another neighbourhood. As he claimed during our discussion, KM5 “was a neighbourhood of Christians before and as people are greedy and Muslims pay a lot, people sold their land to let the Muslims settle” (Interview ESSB, Bangui, June 22, 2017). From the 1960s to now, the neighbourhood has changed. A Fulani former minister, living in the neighbourhood recalled that there were Christians here, but they sold their land (Interviews RREU1, Bangui, June 27, 2017; DAZB, Bangui, June 16, 2017). Many refugees from Chad have established themselves in Bangui.¹⁸⁷ They built on established commercial networks to find jobs and become traders in KM5. In KM5, one finds electronics, cars, motorcycles parts, hardware, cigarettes, second-hand clothing, and many other products such as peanuts, cereals, garlic, dried fish. In brief, KM5 had populations of various origins and religious affiliations. Moreover, and throughout this chapter, it is important to keep in mind that the term Muslim conflates several nationalities. Previous chapters demonstrated this, and interviewees usually conflated Muslims, Arabs, Séléka and foreigners. As a result, I adopted the term Muslim-foreigners to capture such ambivalence. In KM5, the Muslims comprise various groups that have had a differentiated engagement in the economic sector and a different timing of settlements in the CAR, including the Fulani in the cattle sector or the Hausa and Nigerians in the auto-part sector.

Kilomètre 5 (KM5), PK5, 3^e arrondissement, or cinq (5) kilo are all names that designates the main

¹⁸⁷ Some have fled Chadian wars of the 1980s to CAR. However, some of that cohort of refugees returned to Chad with various HCR programs (Boutene 2013, 142). So, as non-Muslims blame Chadian communities it is relevant to notice that they are different cohorts of that community who established at different times.

Muslim neighbourhood in Bangui. The district is located five kilometres “to the west of the city centre (Pk0)” (Kilembe 2015, 76). These denominations are used interchangeably because they refer to the same area. As mentioned in previous chapters, the neighbourhood has been represented as a problematic area in popular perception, an area that needs to be tamed. Independent media has participated in that construction (section 5.4.1). Muslims were present in the CAR, at least in the north-east, since pre-colonial times but the first Muslim families arriving in Bangui in the 1900s were Haussa, Fula, and Fulbés (Kilembe 2015, 80; Interviews in KM5, Bangui, 27-28 June 2017). Some Muslim families came from west CAR through Cameroon, and there was also Chadian migration.¹⁸⁸ KM5 harbours Chadian communities, whom non-Muslims find troublesome, as I expose later.

The marketplace is usually open air, where people come and go, display, and buy and sell their various goods. The KM5 market is usually busy and like in several African markets, people bargain. The noise of the busy market can be mistaken for disorder, but the space is organized that way. Kilembe (2015, 82-87) engages in a vivid description of the various parts of the KM5 markets. It is a gathering of at least 10 other smaller markets in the neighbourhood.¹⁸⁹ The largest of those market, Mamadou M’baïki, was set up in 1914 under colonial administration (Kilembe 2015, 82). Indeed, there are several other nationalities inside the market, and they specialize in different products. For instance, several Nigerians have hardware stores. Vendors from Benin sell cosmetic products and dresses; there are people from Guinea Conakry, Senegal, and even Mali. From Kilembe’s description, the *Kokoro* market offered farm products; the *Magalé* sector offered wood; Béa Rex offered building materials; *Fodé* offered second-hand clothing; and the *Sambo* sector offered counterfeit medications (Kilembe 2015, 83-84). This organization of the market has implications because taxation inside the market varies according to the place and goods. In each of these markets, vendors are set up by areas/sectors. Those selling beef are

¹⁸⁸ Chadian migration to Bangui started already during the colonization period when both Chad and CAR formed the same territory (Marchal 2015a, 129).

¹⁸⁹ The Sudanese market, market Ngawi, market Mamadou M’baïki, Market KM5 centre, market Kokoro, market Sambo, market ABC.

separated from those selling vegetables, fruits, hardware, or auto parts. In places like the market, where a lot of informal activities are ongoing, large amount of money are exchanged and are not captured in the official economic figures of the country.

In 2013, at the time the anti-Balaka were in Bangui, KM5 became the refuge for most Muslims both coming from upcountry, as well as those coming from other Bangui's neighbourhood. An official of the 3rd district estimated the current population at 300,000 (Interview CRME, Bangui, June 28, 2017). PK5 was considered as an "enclave" because Muslims were trapped in that district (Picco 2018, 27; Kilembe 2015, 97). In 2014, Muslims could barely venture outside KM5, but it was easier for them at the time I was conducting research.

At the time of research, some Bangui citizens feared KM5, because of the presence of vigilante groups who operated in the markets. Since the Séléka left power in 2014, the government has not been able to collect taxes from the market operators. In recent years, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) has engaged in battles with the vigilante groups in order to allow the government to be back inside the market, but it has not been a success. However, the market is undoubtedly a vibrant economic centre from which the state has sought to extract revenues. One senior public servant I interviewed at the direction of the market services of the municipality of Bangui indicated, "there are around 22 markets in Bangui but currently, only 14 are operating. The KM5 market is not included even if it is the biggest financial contributor to the city hall budget" (Interview RRSF, Bangui, May 25, 2017). In fact, during various anti-Balaka assaults on KM5, several neighbourhood self-defence groups rose to protect the neighbourhood from falling into the hands of the anti-Balaka, and they are the one who prevent municipal officers from returning into the

areas.¹⁹⁰ They levy taxes in KM5 in the name of providing security.¹⁹¹ One municipal advisor to the KM5 mayor stated:

It is the self-defence of the KM5 that is collecting the various revenue. These are unemployed young Muslims who go from shop to shop in order to collect taxes. Chadians nurtured these young people by paying them for their protection. Now that they are tired of paying, these young people are the same who would destroy their shops and now Chadians are calling upon the mayor's office (Interview CRME, Bangui, June 28, 2017).

Hence, KM5 Muslim traders were themselves in favour of financing the self-defence groups at the height of the crisis. Muslim traders think that the self-defence groups taxes are high amidst diminishing return for protection.¹⁹²

The anti-Balaka attacks and the dynamics of war in Bangui have precipitated a reconfiguration of KM5 at the height of the crisis. In the period I was conducting fieldwork, there was a reconfiguration of the KM5 market as well as the *marché central*. What happened was that the non-Muslims inside KM5 were chased off or left. They moved to the *marché central*. At the same time, Muslim vendors in the *marché central* were chased off or left for KM5. In that sense, interviewees reported that in the *marché central*, there are no Muslim vendors remaining. There was no method for me to verify the assertion, but it is clear that the war shifted the market dynamics. One reason for this reconfiguration is related to the impossibility of being impartial during the crisis. It was simply not possible for non-Muslims in KM5 and Muslims in *marché central* to maintain a neutral position in their respective neighbourhoods. A second reason was increased suspicion towards Christians and religious leaders, making it difficult for Christians to remain in KM5. For example, an advisor to the KM5 Mayor advanced that “Christians were living here [KM5] and during the crisis, when a Christian leaves here to go see his family members and

¹⁹⁰ This is the case even in other markets within Bangui where “tax officials are said to be ‘too afraid of attacks’ to go to the markets of Combattant, Gobongo, Boy-Rabe and Miskine, strongholds of the anti-balaka during the crisis” (Tarif 2019, 23). This seems to have changed recently as the Government announced that it will resume tax levies in KM5 (Cosset 2020).

¹⁹¹ This is not a new situation. There is a similarity with a recent past. In 2003, vendors were complaining that illegal actors were collecting taxes (Sereze 2003a).

¹⁹² Within KM5, however, since the war has forced many of the Muslim traders of the market to flee to Chad, it is some of the members of the self-defence of the KM5 who themselves are occupying the market spots. What happened was that the self-defence in KM5 at times say that they have also lost their kiosk in the *marché central*. Now they have weapons and are unwilling to leave the occupied market spots in KM5.

friends in other neighbourhoods, he is accused of being a traitor or ‘accomplice’” (Interview CRME, Bangui, June 26, 2017).¹⁹³ This pushed several non-Muslims of KM5 to relocate to other neighbourhoods. Moreover, Muslims suspiciously interpreted non-Muslim behaviour in the KM5. As a cadre of the UPC rebellion suspiciously asked,

Why then is it that during the attacks [of anti-Balaka on KM5], the anti-Balaka, the Christians would put palm leaves in front of their houses? This is how you identify who is Muslim. Where do they get the information from? And why is it systematic? It is only in Churches that you could diffuse such a message so that people can prepare (Interview KSSC2, Bangui, September 25, 2017).

Similarly, the advisor to the KM5 Mayor said that

Prior to the attack in KM5, Christians have displayed palm branches in front of their houses to show that they are Christian so that their houses will not be attacked. They thought that anti-Balaka would be able to take hold of KM5 and that they would be spared. When the self-defence of KM5 realized that, they went and destroyed the houses of these Christians (Interview CRME, Bangui, June 26, 2017).

As a result, some non-Muslims left the KM5, and were chased away due to the armed conflict at the time. Within KM5, when people return and want their kiosks, they may find self-defence groups occupying it. Outside KM5, where young people took possession of Muslims’ shops, occupation of kiosks is still a difficult question to address and I alluded to this even in Yaloké.

From the description above, KM5 offers a wealth of products that make non-Muslims come to the market, and “Trade brings about intensive social interaction between various ethnic groupings” (Cohen 1969, 6). This makes the KM5 market almost unavoidable for most people in Bangui. In that sense, KM5 is more than a place where people come to buy, and exchange goods. It is a space produced through intense political and social interactions (Massey 2005, 9, 61, 93).¹⁹⁴ Therefore, the market’s importance is not only economic. The interactions and representations in and of the market opened up conflict, and hence, understanding the targeting of Muslims in 2013. For instance, in Bangui, as well as upcountry, various municipalities levy taxes on the right of taxi-motos to park inside the market. Even

¹⁹³ There is a similar dynamic in cities upcountry where Muslims have not been completely chased. In Kaga-Bandoro, one IOM officer I interviewed in 2017 reported that “anti-Balaka accuse the Christians who are living in the Muslim neighbourhood of being traitors” (Interview BMAM, Bangui, July 21, 2017).

¹⁹⁴ As Massey puts it, “The spatial is political” (Massey 2005, 9).

rickshaws are taxed. These market spaces are important, especially in the CAR where there are no dominant industries and few other commercial activities are prominent. Next, I extrapolate on the type of revenue one can generate from markets in order to show this importance.

7.2.1 The Market Actors

Before focusing on market revenues, I briefly present the various main actors in the market. Three market unions oversee taxation and market spots within the market: The union of *Boubanguéré*, the *Wali and Koli gara* union, and the *commerçant* union. These unions are organized in terms of the category of goods as well as social class. I met and discussed with the *Boubanguéré* and the *Wali and Koli gara*, but not the *commerçant* union because I had difficulty meeting with their representatives. The *commerçant* union primarily represents Muslim traders and is considered as the richest union. The *Wali and Koli gara* (literally, the union of women and men of the market) usually represent those who sell fruits and vegetables, and the *Boubanguérés* union represent a category of youth who sell almost anything. They can be mobile sellers or have a fixed spot.

The *Boubanguéré* is a class of young business retailers who are known for frequently slashing prices on many goods.¹⁹⁵ They sell several types of available consumption products. What is certain is that the high unemployment rate is a strong incentive for them to launch their businesses and set up impromptu kiosks. Many young CAR graduates are unemployed, and while the public administration is an attractive option for the youth, opportunities are limited and the default option is to open a small shop or a small business inside the market, or elsewhere.

The *Boubanguéré* is not a monolithic category, and there are at least three categories of *Boubanguéré* determined by wealth and mobility, not by the type of goods. The first category of *Boubanguéré* is the poorest and the most mobile.¹⁹⁶ They do not have a place in the market but carry

¹⁹⁵ *Boubanguéré* derives from Sango “buba na ngéré” meaning slashing prices (Tarif 2019, 13).

¹⁹⁶ Mobility which is also a form of strategy to avoid Muslims in some places. In Yaloké, a young non-Muslim leader, history

their goods with them and walk until they have finished selling them. The distance is not always limited to their city, and once they have exhausted their stock, they take a means of transportation and come back to their place of departure. The second category of *Boubanguéré* has more economic capital, and importantly, has a fixed place in the market. The third category of *Boubanguéré* has multiple shops and more capital. This category can overlap with the *commerçant*, who are Muslims, but they lack the same business network and have a preference for informality.

Boubanguéré is a fluid category usually composed of young non-Muslims. That said, it is the type of products for sale and the fact that vendors slash prices that determine their belonging to this category rather than religion.¹⁹⁷ A vendor can move from the *Boubanguéré* category to the more established one of *commerçant*, but even successful *Boubanguéré* hold that they are not *commerçant*, because they do not perceive themselves as successful as Muslim traders. After discussing with both the Secretary General of the *Boubanguéré* Union and its vice president, they both expressed how well they were doing as *Boubanguéré* and how they own several shops inside KM5 market. They refused to consider themselves as rich or as *commerçant*. Indeed, the *commerçant* are more involved in long-distance trade with various international networks that allows them to import goods in CAR (Tarif 2019).

7.2.2 Taxation and the Importance of Studying the Market

To understand markets, one must keep in mind two points: First, revenue-generating capacity of the market. Second, the direct relationship between tax and the competition for a good market spot. Only after presenting these general points for understanding the market do I show how Muslims' dominance in the commercial sector is problematized. My focus here does not target a specific product.¹⁹⁸ I mostly

professor in the city college and unfortunate MP candidate of the locality, explained that “The Boubanguéré avoid the Muslims because maybe if you settle, the Muslims would cast spell/use charm and you will be at disadvantage” (Interview HDPC, Yaloké, August 11, 2017).

¹⁹⁷ So, within *Boubanguéré*, wealth and mobility are important. Between vendors' associations, the type of product you sell is important. For instance, *Boubanguéré* rarely sell fruits and vegetables. *Wali and Koli gara* sell fruits and vegetables.

¹⁹⁸ See Cheng (2018) and how she follows specific products to demonstrate that trade makes the states rather than states make war. My point here is different. Some scholars have focused on dynamics of trade and markets during war (Ellis 1999, chap 4;

focus on products of daily usage and the actual space of economic exchange.

A focus on the market spots for economic exchange is in line with small commercial businesses rather than industries because Muslims are present in that commercial sector but not that much in industries. Commerce and industries are both economic activities but operating this difference allows understanding why Central Africans fear Muslims economic dominance as I expose later in the chapter. These commercial activities involve consumption goods and little to no transformation by CAR businesses. Since the CAR is a small non-industrialized economy (Chauvin 2015),¹⁹⁹ the result is that Muslims are portrayed as overrepresented. The 2009 data on the CAR economy from *Institut Centrafricain des Statistiques et des Études Économiques et Sociales* (ICASEES) is telling. This is a small data sample the institute collected in Bangui, its suburbs, and surroundings. Data from upcountry is more difficult to obtain and the bulk of measurable economic activities happen in Bangui.

Table 2: Productive Commercial Activities in the CAR (April-November 2009)

Businesses	Sales Turnover in % (Economic Performance)
General Retail Business	9.53
Automobile-Motorcycle Parts	4.22
Paper Mill	-14.92
Hardware Store	-20.31
Pharmacy	-22.30
Miscellaneous Retail Business	2.53
Catering and Hotel	0.10
Transport	-8.36
Services	-1.32
Bank and Insurances	4.36
Total Sector Growth	2.9

Speight 2015, chap 6) but have overlooked the micro-space of the marketplace where the transactions actually happen. It is in such places that I could also see actors understand events through an autochthony lens. At times, the focus is on natural resources, rents products. In CAR, consumption products are important. When authors have looked at consumption products, it has been through taxation at roadblocks and the revenue it brings to rebels who operate the roadblocks (Miklian and Schouten 2013; Schouten and Kalessopo 2017). Attention has been given to the big-men who operate and benefit from the business of taxation in war (Speight 2015).

¹⁹⁹ For instance, the much-acclaimed diamond production in the CAR is less than that produced in Angola or South Africa (300,000–600,000 karats in the CAR, and more than 7.5 million karats for SA or Angola). The logging industry production was around 700,000 cubic metre around the 2000s but still less than Gabon or Cameroun (Chauvin 2015, 483).

Source: ICASEES, Commercial business outlook, November 2009.

Several sectors that the table highlight are areas wherein which Muslims are present, such as general business retail and auto-moto parts. During that period, the overall economic performance was positive, with almost 3% growth, and the retail businesses did well. Several economic activities, where non-Muslims are present, did not perform well, except the Bank and Insurances. Otherwise, retail businesses seem to be an important economic driver in the CAR. In comparison, when it comes to industries, table 3 below shows that the sector did not grow that year. Importantly, these tables give only a partial view, but are indicative of the state of the economy and the ensuing perception of CAR citizens.

Table 3: Industrial Activities in the CAR (April-November 2009)

Businesses	Sales Turnover in % (Economic Performance)
Food Tobacco and Brewery	3.3
Water and Electricity	-1.0
Chemistry	-12.9
Total	-0.3

Source: ICASEES, Industrial business outlook, November 2009.

From ICASEES's perspective, industries are not driving the CAR economy. The commercial sector that does is to a significant extent dominated by Muslims. Similarly, as presented in Chapter 4, the mining sector, which is largely exploited in non-industrial way, is also dominated by Muslims. This explains, the need to understand spaces where non-Muslims and Muslims interact. The market allows for increased interaction between various groups. In small economies, taxing goods in the market is a good source of revenue for various municipalities, and in Bangui, as well as the upcountry, markets are one of the main sources of revenue for many municipalities. This is evident in Table 4, which demonstrates that markets are a major source of revenues for 16 municipalities in the country. These markets drive the lives of most towns by providing jobs and taxes. Nevertheless, market spaces and their politics have eluded the attention of political analysts, who tend to focus on long-distance trade or other ways to generate

revenues.

Table 4: Financial Contribution of Markets to the Budgets of 16 Municipalities

Municipality	Year	Markets/Tax Name	Annual Revenues (FCFA)	\$US equivalent \$1=XAF 592 (Central African CFA franc)
Bambari	2016	Right of place in peripheral markets	3,001,688	5,069
Bégoua	2016	Bégoua market	1,500,000	2,533
		Grilled meat market	500,000	844
		Batabyanga market	150,000	253
		PK22 market	100,000	170
		PK13 market	100,000	170
		Bouboui market	100,000	170
		Borossé market	100,000	170
		Small livestock tax	200,000	338
		Taxi-moto parking tax	600,000	1,013
		Rickshaw parking tax	350,000	591
		Firewood tax	1,500,000	2,533
		Right of place	4,000,000	6,756
		Coal tax	500,000	844
Bimbo	2016	Kokoro-Boeing market	1,550,000	2,618
		Bimbo Centre market	1,500,000	2,533
		PK9 market	3,600,000	6,080
		Mpoko-Bac market	2,000,000	3,378
		Guitangola market	1,850,000	3,124
		Landja market	400,000	675
		Lycée market	154,000	260
		Djongo market	100,000	170
		Table and kiosks taxes	4,500,000	7,600
		Municipality kiosk rent taxes	3,500,000	5,911
		Taxi and bus parking tax	4,700,000	7,938
		Firewood tax	4,700,000	7,938
Boda	2016	Right of place in the market	99,950	168
		Kiosks tax	803,000	1,356
Boganda	2015	Right of place in the market tax	168,000	284

		Tax on kiosks	270,000	456
Bouar	2015	Right of place in the market tax	922,435	1,558
		Tax on shops	144,000	243
		Tax on stores	35,000	59
		Tax on kiosks	127,000	214
		Tax on taxi moto parking	469,000	792
Bria	2016	Central market	1,080,000	1,824
		Gbakoudji market	150,000	253
		Tax on table and kiosks	3,500,000	5,911
		Tax on taxi-moto	900,000	1,520
Kaga-Bandoro	2016	Right of place in the market	6,500,000	10,978
		Tax on kiosks and tables	950,000	1,604
		Tax on rickshaw	150,000	253
Mbaïki	2015	Right of place in the market	424,200	716
		Tax on parking	582,000	983
		Tax on municipality kiosks rent	2,340,000	3,952
Nola	2015	Right of place in mambéré market	577,100	975
		Right of place in central market	60,000	101
		Right of place in Loppo market	40,000	67
		Store, kiosks ant tables	506,000	854
		Rent of municipality kiosks	237,500	401
Paoua	2016	Right of place	353,545	597
		Kiosks and tables	742,000	1,253
		Right to park vehicles	408,000	689
		Right to park taxi-moto	20,000	33
Senkpa-Mbaere	2015	Right of place in the market	215,400	364
		Tax on shops	235,500	398
		Tax on kiosks and tables	42,500	72

Sibut	2015	Right of place in the market	1,312,300	2,216
		Tax on parking vehicles	1,068,000	1,804
		Tax on kiosks and tavern	22,000	37

Source: Author’s compilation from various CAR Municipality budgets.

As the table shows, several CAR municipalities levy taxes on spaces inside markets. Bimbo and Bégoua are two municipalities bordering Bangui, to the west and east respectively. As can be seen, municipalities that have several markets are able to generate more revenue. This is the few ways they can address issues of their constituents in the context where the state has been absent. When reading table 4, it should be recalled that the CAR is a small country in terms of population size and is non-industrialized. In the example of Bimbo which has several markets, all the tax revenues amount CFA 60 million francs and the municipality revenue in 2016 was CFA 85.5 million francs.²⁰⁰ Taxing revenues equates approximately 70 % of the municipality revenues. In comparison, Bangui’s municipality budget in 2015 was CFA 7.5 billion francs, approximately (Mairie de Bangui 2016, 32) and Tarif (2019, 23) reported that prior to the armed conflict, “The tax centre of the 3e arrondissement alone made more than CFA 4 billion francs a year and accounted for nearly 70% of the revenue of the Directorate of Small Enterprises.” This means that taxes from markets are a significant contribution to the municipality budget. Figures are difficult to obtain but with the above figures, taxes from the market could have made 53% of the Bangui municipality budget. Actually, representatives of the vendors’ association I interviewed in KM5 asserted that the KM5 market generates between CFA 1 and 2 billion francs a day (Group interview with representatives of the Boubanguéré, Bangui, August 6, 2017), approximately USD 1.7 to USD 2.4 million. Probably that the interviewees meant CFA 1 to 2 billion francs a year as this figure is closer to Tarif’s (2019) assertion. It is possible that market taxes provide

²⁰⁰ This does not include the state subvention or the aid that the municipality receives directly from international partners.

similar percentages or more in other CAR municipalities.

The rules for taxing places in the market are not always clear. In the case of Bangui, the municipality manages the markets and levy taxes. A 2005 decree of the municipality organizes the different fees.²⁰¹ Article 2 of the decree establishes the various fees:

- Installation of a kiosk: 30,000 CFA
- Annual fee for renewing a kiosk place: 20,000 CFA
- Tables and display places: 10,000 CFA
- Annual fee for renewing a table and display place: 6,000 CFA

The decree further states that the municipal police are in charge of overseeing the application of the decree. Beyond this decree, there is a less codified taxation structure within the market. Representatives of vendors' associations oversee those forms of taxation. Despite the existence of a municipal decree fixing the prices, I have not observed the decree being put in practice. If anything, the prices that are practised, in KM5, do not correspond to that decree. Places inside the KM5 market cost around CFA 30,000 francs monthly. When a vending spot is close to the road, it costs CFA 50,000 francs or more (discussion with vendors in KM5, Bangui, August 6, 2017). Hence, the fee for the market spot is dependent on the type of spot (a simple display table or a kiosk) and its location (inside the market or next to the road). For instance, a Muslim businessman has built a multi-kiosk complex next to the road in KM5, on Koudoukou Avenue (the avenue that runs through part of the 3^e arrondissement), and prices there are around CFA 75,000 francs/month on average. But the taxation decree fees were annual. This means that the taxation rate that the municipality has set seems affordable to Muslim business owners; they are not overtaxed when one considers the decree.

The decree does not reveal everything because there seems to be a parallel taxation system. I will now point out one fieldwork episode where I could see how taxation could become a problem on a daily basis. I was able to observe the *Wali and Koli gara* association inside the *marché central*. Sellers inside

²⁰¹ Arrêté n° 024/MB/CAB/SG/05 Modifiant et complétant les dispositions de l'arrêté n° 62/87/MB/CM/SG/DSF fixant la taxe d'installation et de renouvellement de place, de kiosques et tables.

the market, depending on the products they sell, are required to pay a market ticket.²⁰² This is a daily tax that guarantees vendors' access to the market. Tickets vary according to the goods and their location inside the market. I could not observe whether the market tickets vary according to the origin of the merchant, but this remains a possibility as it has been reported elsewhere (Schouten and Kalessopo 2017, 21).

On May 25, 2017, in Bangui, I followed the vice president of *Koli and Wali gara* from the City Hall, at the market ticket retrieval, to the *marché central*.²⁰³ The market was indeed packed. One could easily get lost inside. As I followed the vice president through the meanderings of small paths that were not clearly defined and of which one never sees the end, we arrived in a small shack where there was a small office of the municipal police. There, several people were waiting for the representative. At first glance, I did not know who they were waiting for and nobody was paying attention to me. The representative greeted the people, and after a few minutes, she pulled out a chair (there was no table), and brought out a market ticket package, a notebook, and a pen. Then, she began giving bunches of tickets to different people and wrote it down in her notebook. She wrote the amount that she would have to collect from the person. It was like a chain of taxation from the city hall to the vendor. Once the middlemen finished distributing taxation tickets, they reported back to the lady later in the day. There were piles of tickets of CFA 100 francs and CFA 50 francs.

At the distribution phase, the taxation depends on your product and your market spot. For instance, the vegetable seller next to the road pays CFA 100 francs. At some point during the day, the municipal police come and verify your taxation tickets. If you do not have your ticket, they seize your merchandise and you pay a fine (double the amount of the ticket). In that chain of distribution, the only certain thing

²⁰² Schouten and Kalessopo (2017, 21) have noticed in other markets outside Bangui (in the prefecture of Ouham-Pendé) that vendors are also required to pay a market ticket.

²⁰³ This indicates that if the taxation is less codified, some revenues go to the municipality. Bangui's municipality prints the taxation tickets and I have seen other municipalities provide a budget line for market tickets printing. The representatives of the associations come and retrieve the tickets on a daily basis and distribute them in the market.

is that the City Hall is supposed to collect a certain amount of money. Apart from that, there is plenty of room for other people in the chain to increase the tax or to harass people. Hence, the organization of the taxation system in that small space provides the incentive for problems. For instance, the representatives of the various vendor associations were unanimous that markets suffer from a lack of places where traders can display and sell their goods. If market spaces are that contentious, it is because they represent an important asset for vendors. Depending on the nature of the spot, this is a place where the vendor can display or store their goods. Without it, the commercial transaction is unlikely to happen, and by extension, it threatens the whole livelihood of the economic actors. Moreover, this type of market does not heavily rely on modern institutions such as banking.²⁰⁴

In the markets, vendors like to have the best market spots, and one of the best spots is being next to the road. It is risky and more expensive to be close to the road, but the perception is that this is where you need to be. There are two reasons for this. Vendors claim that there are no spots inside the market and that the spots available are too expensive for them to buy.²⁰⁵ Indeed, there might have been places inside the market, but the perception is that the trader needs to be along the road for the clients to see and buy the goods.²⁰⁶ During my fieldwork, I came to witness the importance of selling spots next to the road. For instance, on August 15, 2017, as I arrived in KM5 for another meeting with the *Boubanguérés* representatives, I sat in a shop. It resembled a small warehouse. I had to wait before meeting the president. As I sat in that warehouse, I could see several Muslim sellers retrieve their goods to go and establish their

²⁰⁴ In CAR context Bank institutions are poorly developed even in Bangui the capital. On paydays, it is a common scene to have long queues in front of Banks for people to withdraw money. The system is unreliable. A client might have to wait days before a transaction. Even during my field work, Central African colleagues advised not to put my money in a bank even if I was staying several months.

²⁰⁵ Radio Ndeke Luka news, 7:00 p.m., September 8, 2017. A trader advanced that 1m² in the Combatant market is 15.000 FCFA. But because they do not have money, they stay on the edge of the road. But also, there is no place inside the market and that is also why we stay at the edge of the road. See also Danguia (2011a).

²⁰⁶ This is reminiscent of the colonial practice of French who, during colonization, built roads and relocated “scattered settlements along these roads” (Giles-Vernick 1996, 261). Conversely, this colonial practice has negatively influenced CAR rural inhabitant capacity to farm because relocation happened along areas in which lands were less fertile (Dufumier and Lallau 2015, 537).

display tables to sell right next to the road.²⁰⁷

7.3 Autochthony, Taxing the Market, and the Competition Over Markets Spots

So far, this section has argued that the market is an important source of revenue that is worth studying, and that taxation is dependent on a market spot. From my fieldwork, the taxation decree seemed to be disconnected to the actual market policies and the traders' conception of space, but the practice of autochthony in the market is shaped by competition over the access to market spots. In that sense, inside the market, two major problems mobilize issues of Central Africans versus foreigners: taxation and the best market spots. These informal rules pave the way for the controversy over market spots, which facilitated the emergence and utility of autochthony claims. Various public authorities compete over the legitimacy to levy tax rights in the market, but this, in turn, revolves around who has access to the best market spots. Hence, the examination of true Central African discourse over market spots demonstrates the importance of that identifier on a local instance and on a daily basis.

The KM5 market attracted attention because it is the area where most Muslims traders have set up their businesses. Conducting research in that market has been hampered by Muslims' increased suspicion of outsiders due to the various attacks they suffered during the war. As such, vendors are unwilling to talk to people they do not know when it is not for a commercial exchange. My data reveals three strategies that non-Muslim employ locally in the competition along autochthony lines: keeping (at least trying to keep) Muslims in the periphery of market spots and overtaxing them; using Muslims as an excuse not to cooperate with the Bangui Municipality, and, finally, blocking their access to the market.²⁰⁸ When enacting these strategies, non-Muslims do not necessarily invoke an autochthony argument. This is rather

²⁰⁷ Other vendors offered me jobs on the spot if I had accepted to carry their goods to their kiosks. I did not accept. At least it was an indication that vendors did provide jobs even precarious and that non-Muslims in CAR, due to the poor economic state, might have felt compelled to go to the KM5 for jobs.

²⁰⁸ That non-Muslims try does not mean that they succeed in controlling those spaces or that they succeed in the strategies they deploy. In fact, the war has increased the economic power of the *commerçant*, thus exacerbating the dependence of the smaller economic entrepreneurs on the *commerçant* (Tarif 2019). At the height of the fighting in Bangui (2013-2014), several Muslims had fled, but they returned when the situation became calmer.

silenced and reveal the self-naturalizing discourse and entitlement of autochthony. Non-Muslim competition along autochthony lines is a way to assert their capital. They assumed that the political space belonged to them and attempted to extend control over the economic space. Hence, even when non-Muslims do not hold a dominant position in the commercial sector, they act as autochthons and expect to shift the situation.

First, using newspaper archives, I will now show how non-Muslims have used the controversy over market spots and how non-Muslims have attempted to keep Muslims in the periphery. To illustrate this, I rely on a letter written by the Secretary General of a *commerçant* union in KM5 in 2005 and addressed to the Member of Parliament of the 3rd district (Maka-Gbossokoto 2005). My translation of the letter is approximate, as the French version itself was poorly written (see appendix 2). Essentially, the *commerçants* are raising three issues: (1) they are being illegally dispossessed; (2) the market taxes have been increasing incrementally; and (3) they are paying more fees for worse market spots.

The group of *commerçants* Of Sambo, ABC and
Da ti Yoro pharmacy markets in KM5
Bangui

To
Member of Parliament of 3rd District Bangui

Subject: Warning against the actions of the mayor of Bangui (*mise en garde*)

Excellence,

We, the market *commerçants* of Sambo, ABC and Pharmacie ti Kodro, have deep regret to report to you some cases that deeply affect us for the moment [...] To facilitate the content of our writing, we will give you an example: You bought a house where you are the owner, and this house is in the city centre, considering the decay and the location which is not correct, the Mayor wants to rebuild this house and to make you rent when it is your property. At the beginning of the work, you are not notified. They do not look for where you live and do not ask for your contribution. Suddenly, the work has started, and you become a tenant of your house. What will your reaction be?

We call this act “*l’opération j’arrache*” [the dispossession operation], which means that life belongs to the men who are well placed. Excellence, here is what they [the mayor and its office] said:

“*If you do not want to respect [...] what we did [rebuilding the kiosks without the consent of the owner], we tell you to leave the place and that is it.*”

We begin our complaint by explaining to you the problem that unfolds between the Mayor of Bangui and us traders of the markets mentioned above.

Excellence, in 1980, the market fee was set at 1,500 FCFA per year until the year 2000, after that,

the City Council decided to build kiosks and sell them to those who are in need.

The nationals are installed in front of the road and pay 15,000 Fcfa, while expatriates occupy the back side and pay 250,000 Fcfa. In 2002, the market fee was 3,500 CFA francs a year. From 2003 to 2005, the fee increased 4,000 Fcfa per year. In the same year 2005, the fee of place has reached 20,000 Fcfa per year and it is at this moment that there was a fire of some kiosks. After this fire, the Mayor of Bangui [started rebuilding the market.] He should have warned us and give us instructions, [...] he did not contact us.

In this new reconstruction, [...] some of us have lost their [market] place. Maybe others will suffer the same situation? We do not know. Excellence, a kiosk that [traders] have paid since 2001 and [...] when there is a reform, [traders] unconditionally lose [the kiosk] and [...] become a tenant? [traders] activities are suspended without showing [traders] another place to do [their] business [...]. On the one hand, [the mayor] told us that if we accept to become tenants of our own kiosks, we have the duty to pay 110,000 Fcfa and we must rent [the kiosk] at 18,000 Fcfa per month, or 600 Fcfa per day. [...] From now on, no more distinction of race. Foreigners must pay the same amount of money as nationals.

Excellence, we [cannot] solve this problem and we consider this act as a pretext for the Mayor to remove all nationals and leave the market to those who have the means. [...].

Excellence, we want that:

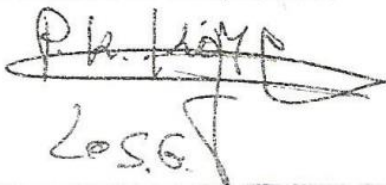
- The Mayor fixes us the costs of the reconstruction's repayment [...].
- The Mayor shows us a temporary place for us to continue our activities without interruptions.
- The Mayor reimburses us [the money we used to buy the kiosks] In case [the mayor] wants us to become tenants, [he must] refund us [to an equivalent in terms of value] before the destruction of the old kiosks.

Honourable, we beg you to ask the Mayor of the city of Bangui to change his mind so that it is not too late tomorrow. [...]

Bangui, 22/09/05

The group of *commerçants* of Sambo, ABC and TI YORO pharmacy/Bangui.

Le Groupe des Commerçants
des marchés SAMBO, ABC et
Pharmacie TI YORO/BANGUI.



A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to be 'P. L. L. L.' with a large flourish underneath. Below the signature, the date '20.09.05' is written in black ink.

The letter starts with a warning or a caution (*mise en garde*) addressed to the Mayor. As the events unfold in this document, the ownership of the market spot is contentious. Traders claim that they bought their spots, so they consider themselves the owners. It is unclear who sold the spot in the first place. After a fire, the municipality rebuilt the place and is selling the spots to the supposed owners. Both the municipality and the traders are now claiming ownership of the market spots. Moreover, the decree fixing market fees that I mentioned earlier was signed in February 2005 and the fees that the Mayor demands

in September 2005 do not correspond to those in the decree.

From this account, two major points stand out. First, the Mayor office's move to dispossess Muslim traders stands out. Second, the higher fees that Muslims pay for worse spots in the markets are notable. As the authors of the letter say, nationals obtain good places along the road at a low price when non-nationals obtain fewer good spots and pay more. This is an indication that, in the market, being a national has its advantages. We must keep in mind the conflation between foreigners and Muslims in the CAR (Chapters 3 and 4). Hence, when the author of the letter refers to non-nationals, he might be referring to Muslims in the market. That Muslims refer to themselves as non-nationals reveal deeper internalized alienation as well as closure in the true Central African discourse. Muslims self-designate as non-national and that symbolically "closes" their participation to the national community. As identity "proceed in interaction" (Burke and Stets 2009, 16) between the individual and its social environment, Muslims constant interactions with non-Muslims is a daily reminder that they do not belong. There is an indication that non-Muslims try to keep Muslims in the periphery, even if non-Muslims accuse them of being dominant. The writer of the letter reported that the Mayor suggested that they leave the place if traders disagreed with his policies of dispossession. On various occasions, the City Hall and traders' unions of KM5 disagreed and this 2005 event is not isolated (see for instance Sidiki 2006). Moreover, the author of the letter also mentions that, from 2003 to 2005, market space taxes dramatically increased. These years are those of Bozizé's presidency. This might have reflected Bozizé's administration's move to generate more revenue from the perceived wealthy *commerçant*.

My previous observations in the market and the letter demonstrate that, inside the market, there is a competition of various actors over taxation. The mayor's office, the various vendors' associations, as well as other illegitimate actors (self-defence groups) compete for taxation on the *commerçant*. In 2003, traders' union in KM5 was complaining that various vigils were scamming them (Mégnet-Ntonga 2003; Sereze 2003a). There were also gendarmes and police officers involved in rackets as well (Deigoto 2003).

What I am pointing at is that the state, which usually represents non-Muslims, attempts to extract more revenues from Muslims. This bears similarities to the mining sector (Chapter 4). It illustrates an operation by the state to broadcast its power and become the legitimate taxing actor.

The second strategy that illustrates the relevance of autochthony in the market and on a daily basis is the competition between the category of *Boubanguéré* and Muslim merchants. Indeed, in this specific space, daily trading reveal how autochthony practices are deeply ingrained bodily ways of acting, even unconsciously. In addition to various moves to keep Muslim traders in the periphery, some *Boubanguéré* want a differentiated treatment from their Muslim colleagues and to ultimately take over their market spots. Hence, it is not only the municipality that is in competition with Muslim traders. As presented, Christians versus Muslims does not determine whether someone is *Boubanguéré* or not, but non-Muslim *Boubanguéré* mobilize that difference to claim preferential treatment to legitimize their belonging.

At the micro-space of the market, being a non-Muslim holds value and the *Boubanguérés* want the state to support them at the disadvantage of Muslims. The *Boubanguéré* competition with Muslims over dominance in the economic sector started in the 1980s under President Kolingba. The *Boubanguéré* received government support to promote their activities with the objective of replacing Muslims in the economy. Under Kolingba's presidency "We did not pay taxes" (Group interview with *Boubanguéré* representatives, Bangui 6 August 2017). Similarly, the former Fulani Minister endorsed and explained this point when he told me that the government ordered customs officers not to disrupt *Boubanguéré* activities that would help them avoid tax and help them become a new economic class (Interview RREU2, Bangui, 2 July 2017).²⁰⁹ This has had a lasting influence on that category of vendor. As the ex-Minister explained during our exchange:

In discussions with them [*Boubanguéré*], if you approach the problem of taxes you will see, they will change face. Right away! They do not like it. On the other hand, the Muslim traders, they pay. They do not pay regularly, but they pay. The proof is that today the city hall complains of not having money. When you ask officials, they say 90% of our budget funds came from the KM5

²⁰⁹ This Minister has had a career in territorial administration prior to his nomination. Thus, he has dealt with issues of territory control and *Boubanguéré* when working.

market and since there was this thing [the war] nobody comes [to levy tax in KM5]. It is true.²¹⁰ But there are other markets! There is the *marché combatant* for example which is even bigger

Me: There is also *marché central*

Him: It does not work. There are Central Africans there, Christians.

Me: Don't they pay?

Him: I am at home; I do not pay. But if you do not pay at home, who will pay? (RREU2, Bangui, 2 July 2017)

The *Boubanguéré* demanded differentiated treatment regarding taxation. First, the interviewee equates *Boubanguéré* to Christians. Second, he makes it explicit that these Christians do not wish to contribute to the development of the country. This serves to identify Muslims as those who contribute the most to the development of the country through their activities in the commercial space. The place of this economic activity, the KM5, might not have existed if it were not because of Muslims. The colonists moved Muslims in different areas of Bangui before they settled in KM5, which was “an inhospitable place that required enormous sacrifice to become the lucrative zone it is today” (Interview Muslim elder quoted in Kilembe 2015, 78). These contributions demonstrate that Muslims also made the land “humanly viable” (Hilgers 2011, 146) and this is one of autochthony property. Muslims contributed in several ways to the realization of CAR, but the group’s participation status is unrecognized. This is so because in competition along autochthony lines, the relationship of a group with the state matters (Dorronsoro and Grojean 2018). Muslims lack that relationship, at least officially. When it comes to transnational networks and importing goods, the *commerçant*, Muslims, collude with state officials to avoid paying taxes (Tarif 2019, 21-22).

Boubanguéré accused Muslims of being the reason why they are not able to succeed economically.

Indeed, another way the *Boubanguéré* pushed against Muslims’ presence in the commercial sector is to

²¹⁰ However, as Muslims have suffered more harassment from law enforcement officers, it may have pushed them to consistently be in good standing in terms of taxation to avoid being harassed by state officials. In this sense, it is difficult to fully disentangle cause and consequence that Muslims willingly paid their taxes without fear of harassment, especially in a context where citizens avoid state authority.

accuse them of bewitching non-Muslims. One former minister of the transition government, whom I interviewed in 2017, exposed:

Some among this group of vendors have been able to improve their economic situation but are struggling to become established in the economic sector. So, these young people blame Muslims for their control of the economy. For example, when a young person opens his shop next to that of a Muslim, people sometimes tend to buy from that Muslim. It may be because it is cheaper or for other reasons. These young people resent competition from the Muslims. They say that Muslims are *envouteurs* because they prevent the emergence of the class of entrepreneurs they are (Interview DUNA, Bangui 21 June 2017).

This is consistent with accusations against Muslims in Yaloké and makes visible the role of the invisible in this economic competition. If Muslims draw power from the invisible world to counter the Christian economic class, one possible action could be to chase them and take up their dominant position. Just as this interviewee explained, Kilembe (2015, 82) documented that Christian and Muslim's shops operated side by side as a proof of the non-religious problems prior to the crisis, but the quote suggests that non-Muslim *Boubanguéré* felt that they did not benefit in the same sense as Muslim vendors.

Although there are multiple vendors' associations in the markets, the relationship between the *Boubanguérés*, the municipality and some Muslim traders can, at times, be conflictual. The *Boubanguérés* and Bangui's municipality have been involved in a struggle over the control of space in Bangui. Specifically, that *Boubanguéré*'s set up impromptu kiosks alongside the road is dangerous for traffic and the municipality disapproves such practices. There have been various attempts by the City Hall to clear the roads and bring *Boubanguérés* under control since at least 2003, but this has not been successful (Yanganda 2003b; Smith 2008a; Danguia 2011a). The *Boubanguéré* target Muslim-foreigners to justify their non-cooperative behaviour with the Municipality and leave the road sidewalks. For instance, Madimba-Nimba (2003d) reported the Mayor's attempt to relocate the *Boubanguérés* from road sidewalks inside the *marché central*, but they refused to follow the order. They did not want to lose their good market spots next to the road and go inside the market. The *Boubanguérés* advanced that it is under the instructions of Lebanese business owners that the municipal police are removing their installations

from the sidewalks.²¹¹ On the basis of that, they refuse to follow police orders. In another example, in 2007, *Boubanguérés* directly confronted police officers who were in charge of destroying their installations.²¹² *Boubanguérés* argued that they were being chased because the Mayor's office wanted to give their place to Muslims. Muslims, in turn, would rent those kiosks at their advantage (Poubalandji 2007). Indeed, as the former Fulani Minister explained, *Boubanguérés*, "prefer to settle where Muslims are because Muslims are foreigners and they [Muslim traders] have to clear the area for them to come" (Interview RREU2, Bangui July 2, 2017). In order to maintain a good market spot next to the road, the *Boubanguérés*' strategy is to scapegoat and accuse Muslims of crimes. They present themselves as victims of a dominant Muslim class, even if they are the ones who benefited from government support in the past. In the current environment where Muslims traders of the *marché central* relocated to KM5 and where the non-Muslims of KM5 moved to the *marché central*, *Boubanguéré* claim that Muslims chased them from the KM5. They use this as reasoning for why they are setting their own market spots along the roads in Bangui (Interview RREU2, Bangui 2 July 2017). In other words, *Boubanguérés* believe that Muslims want to put them at disadvantage through the Mayor office's orders. Hence, autochthony is not dormant. It is an embedded practice in which *Boubanguéré* make sense of their commercial activities, and illustrates that autochthony is operating independently from elite manipulation in the every day and at the local level.

The final strategy that reveals the importance of autochthony in non-Muslim competition with Muslims in the market was when interviewees in the *marché central* advanced the argument that "there

²¹¹ Lebanese and French are some of the most important economic operators, more than Muslims who are in distribution and transport (Marchal 2015a, 130). Lebanese and French businessmen own the supermarkets, grocery stores and fancy shops that are too expensive for many people in Bangui. Expats usually go to these shops. The KM5 is more accessible to most of Bangui inhabitants, hence the heightened feeling of being at the mercy of Muslims. Even if Muslims are not the most important economic actors, they are the closest to the less rich people of Bangui. Moreover, that some economic operators fled during the armed conflict created the opportunity for several Cameroonians businessmen to invest the commercial sector in Bangui (Tarif 2019, 11).

²¹² At times, the municipal police officers take advantage of vendors in these situations. Danguia (2011a) depicted the situation in KM5. During police operations when officers are supposed to confiscate the goods of non-compliant *Boubanguérés*, they seized the goods but later sold them back to other *commerçants*.

are no places left in the market.” In the *marché central*, the *Wali and Koli Gara* association complained about the unavailability of market spots and blamed it on Christians who came from KM5 and occupied Muslims’ places. The vice president and the secretary of the *Wali and Koli Gara* of the *marché central* claimed that there were no Muslims remaining inside that market, even though that market had been renamed the Reconciliation Market. The vice president of the *Wali and Koli Gara* association in the *marché central* states

there are places issues in the market. There is no place in the market. It is the sellers of the KM5 market who have left there and are now selling in the *marché central*. It is the municipality that attributes the places in the market. The Central Africans who were in the KM5 have been chased and they are the one who are here in Pk0 [*marché central*]. The Muslims have chased them from their shops, and they occupy the shops. In the KM5, there are no Central African vendors. You can go buy from there and come to sell here but you cannot stay there and sell. In the KM5 there are only Muslims vendor (Interview HFDE, Bangui, May 25, 2017).

This quote illustrates how Muslims and Central Africans do not belong to the same discursive universe. Importantly, she manages to blame Muslims for problems in the market. Basically, according to her, it is Muslims who have chased people away and are now occupying their spots. Hence, people know that they are not the owners of some spots and decide to ignore such a fact anyway. This builds on a subjective self-definition and self-understanding of the reality they face. From the quote above, Muslims are the culprits, and there is a clear blame the victim reasoning. At the same time, the interviewee was explicit about the fact that vendors are quite content that Muslims left and they do not want them back in that market.²¹³ In that sense, there is an explicit refusal or blocking strategy from non-Muslims to keep Muslim vendors out.

I have often been asked what would happen should Muslims arrive. Where would they settle? On top of previously trying to keep Muslims in the periphery, the post-war situation in Bangui allowed non-Muslim vendors to more or less block access to a specific market. They seized the opportunity to occupy

²¹³ Tarif (2019) analyzes recent commercial dynamics according to which Muslim traders were able to maintain a presence in the commercial sector of Bangui. This means that not all Muslims fled from the market at the time but there was a major reorganization of traders in these markets.

a space that they already believed belong to them as Central African. This is only in a small scale because the armed conflict has exacerbated the overall CAR economic dependence on foreigner businessmen dominance (Tarif 2019).

7.4 Business, Fear, and the Difficult Emergence of a Non-Muslim Business Class

7.4.1 “They can paralyze the country”: Fearing Muslim Dominance in the Commercial Sector

Investigating competition along autochthon lines allows me to probe the social dynamics of the claim of Muslim dominance. As highlighted, non-Muslims claim autochthony in micro-spaces to have access, or establish access, to good market spots or claim preferential treatment. Going to the market, at least in Bangui, is a daily activity. The situation in the marketplace is reminiscent dynamics in the mining sector (see Chapter 4). However, commercial activities engage more people than mining because it is essential to go to the market for consumption activities of selling other goods. In the marketplace, Muslim traders regularly protested government malpractice and harassment. This, in turn, reinforces non-Muslims’ views that traders are illegitimate owners of that space. Hence, the host-guest metaphor is present in these local level actors as they expect Muslims to “abide by certain rules of hospitality, namely conforming to the political [and economic] wishes of the host community” (Jenkins 2012b, 577). If the “immigrant” community cannot abide by the rules, a result for non-Muslim is to occupy the commercial space in order to decrease their dependence on Muslims.

The autochthon-foreigner dynamic is anchored in local competition that connects elite and people in times of crisis. Muslims are constructed as posing a danger to the nation when they strike. This section then points to the banal forms of daily fear and anger construction. A business operator, a woman, operating a travel agency in downtown Bangui, advanced this analysis of the KM5:

There are sectors, for example the commercial sector [...], all the shops, the shops in KM5 you see it is the economic heart of the Central African Republic, KM5, it is a big neighbourhood, there are a lot of people there, everything is held by the Muslims, all commercial activities, shops and

everything, it is the Muslims. The Central Africans who manage to emerge there are the vegetable vendors, little things like that but the trade in general is held by the Muslims and they are more numerous at KM5 there, they are more numerous at KM5 (Interview KNFD, Bangui, June 16, 2017).

This quote captures a widespread perception among non-Muslims of Muslims, namely that Muslims are dominant, they “hold” everything, and they are “numerous.” In that sense, KM5 and markets dynamics highlight challenges that many Muslim traders face in the CAR. Similarly, a senior member of a political party claimed in our interview that “at any moment they [Muslims] can paralyze the country” (Interview NABP, Bangui 26 July 2017). Muslims’ dominance in the commercial sector creates a certain discomfort. These quotes demonstrate the widespread belief that Muslims hold the country in their hands and that they threaten the country’s activities.

The centrality of market life to the capital’s life is palpable. The KM5 as well as other markets are involved in the meat business in Bangui.²¹⁴ The meat business brings a lot of money, and rebels such as the UPC are taking advantage of that business.²¹⁵ Fulani and their cattle are the main provider of meat to the capital, and the CAR would probably have not developed livestock without the presence of the Fulani on its territory. Up to 2012, before the armed conflict, the CAR had approximately 3 million livestock and was exporting meat to its neighbouring countries (Ministère de l’Élevage et de la Santé Animale nd, sec. 1.4.2.1; FAO, DRC and CRS 2015, 14). In 2017, a senior civil servant in the Ministry of Livestock advanced that the current estimate of cattle in the country is around 1.5 million (Interview LLGR, Bangui, September 6, 2017).²¹⁶ The war impacted this commercial sector severely. Even prior to the 2013 war, violent confrontations between different actors in the meat business or in markets led, at times, to traders’

²¹⁴ The national estimate for the consumption of beef is 17 kg/hbt/year (Ministère de l’Élevage et de la Santé Animale nd, sec. 1.4.3). The overall consumption of meat is 96 kg/hbt/year (Ministère de l’Élevage et de la Santé Animale nd, sec. 1.5.2).

²¹⁵ Ali Darass, the leader of that rebellion manages the transport, protection and taxation over livestock and present his rebellion as protecting Peuhls when taxing them. Prior to the war, the price for cattle varied between 100.000 and 150.000 Fcfa or less. Now, prices have almost tripled, around 450.000 Fcfa to buy cattle (Interviews, LLGR, Bangui, September 6, 2017; PLDF Yaloké, August 9, 2017). Schouten and Kalessopo (2017, 27) provide a different estimate. In North CAR a cattle cost 50.000 Fcfa and after rebels’ taxation until the cattle reach Bangui, it costs 600.000 Fcfa (Schouten and Kalessopo 2017, 27).

²¹⁶ See also FAO, DRC, and CRS (2015, 14).

strikes and protests.²¹⁷ Muslim actors in the market use strikes because they know the importance of the market to Bangui's life. For instance, during their strike, Bangui's population cannot have their daily meat. During a strike, another part of the population cannot work: the butchers.²¹⁸

On the other hand, strikes fuel the perception that Muslims have halted the life of the city. Indeed, during my field research, it happened that the KM5 had to close its doors and it was very palpable that Bangui's vibrant life changed those days. The flourishing taxi business does not function properly during strikes periods because part of their work is to move goods to and from the markets. However, this also affects other citizens, simply because fewer taxi drivers choose to operate as they know that it will not be a good day for business. So, imagine that you wake up one morning only to realize that you cannot find a taxi to go to work because of the Muslims' strikes. During my fieldwork, one KM5 market strike had rendered my movement within Bangui quite difficult. Muslims are aware of the centrality of their activities for Bangui and use strikes to make their voices heard, but the act, in itself, is what non-Muslims find problematic.²¹⁹ For instance, in 2005, an independent newspaper titled "An inquiry into the employment situation of foreigners at the expense of Central Africans is urgent!" The journalist attacked the idea that foreigners owned the commercial and small businesses and that they do not employ Central Africans (*Le Citoyen* 2005). The journalist called on the state to apply laws that would not allow businesses to employ foreigners without the proof that a Central African could do the same job. In a similar questioning of Muslim-foreigner dominance, Ding-Kpi (2007) argued that the strike of Muslims was unacceptable. But Muslims in the newspaper's report went on strike because state officers had killed four of them. In another instance, Essango (2007d) discussed a strike of traders in KM5 in an article titled

²¹⁷ Previously, there have been disagreements between herders and butchers (Essango 2007a) as well as between herders and other intermediaries in the meat provision chain (Mokambo 2004a; Yaka-Maïdé and Poubalandji 2009). These disagreements can be very violent, armed and produce several casualties. This is where it reinforces that Muslims are seen as violent and always fighting.

²¹⁸ One official at the Ministry of Livestock considers that it is Central Africans who are the butchers (Interview LLGR, Bangui, September 6, 2017). This category of worker is more mixed (there are butchers from Niger), but the main point at least is that it is not those considered as Central African who are herders and thus providers of meat.

²¹⁹ On the contrary, when teachers, public servants and other state officials strike to demand their salaries, they receive support.

“Marché KM5: Grève des commerçants tchadiens.” In the article, the journalist problematized the “‘foreigners’ monopoly of commerce.” The newspaper linked their strike with their dominant position in commerce. Several newspapers exemplified concerns over the occupancy of the economic space and even accused foreigners of “assassinating” the economy because they hoard money (Madimba-Nimba 2003b). That Muslims are accused of holding the country in their hands is similarly perceived when they caution the Mayor in the letter I have previously presented. In various ways, non-Muslims signal to Muslims that they do not belong and that they are not abiding by rules of the “host” community. In a way, it can explain the internalized manner by which Muslims refer to themselves as non-nationals. This perpetuates their symbolic exclusion from the imagined community (Anderson 1983) down to the micro level.

Chadian communities are involved in the commercial sector, and newspapers frequently targeted their presence too, and linked their presence with regional politics.²²⁰ Indeed, Chad was involved in helping rebellions in CAR (Marchal 2015c). In one independent newspaper article, the journalist advanced that Chadians became arrogant since their military helped Bozizé seize power. From the journalist’s perspective, this equates a “misplaced arrogance” (Ding-Kpi 2007). In a clear and direct way, Chadians, which often refers to Muslims (Marchal 2015a), are considered as “arrogant,” signaling that they are not abiding by the “host” rules. This perpetuates the amalgamation between Muslims and foreigners. On top of the involvement of Chadian armed men in Bangui’s violent power takeover, various peacekeepers deployed in Bangui were of Chadian origin and developed a reputation of violence and impunity (Kilembe 2015, 89). This increased anti-Chadian and anti-Muslim sentiment among non-Muslims (Ibid.).

Another instance where Muslim dominance is felt is regarding their cooperation with *Boubaiguérés*. The *Boubaiguérés* feel subjugated because they store their goods in Muslims’

²²⁰ Several ex-military men who fled Chad have found refuge in CAR and they converted into business and own various shops (Boutene 2013).

warehouses, which is another type of market spot. This can suggest that Muslims literally “own” their goods and decide whether they can sell their goods or not, especially when there are strikes. One former minister I interviewed explained that,

These people [*Boubanguéré*] store their goods in Muslims warehouses. In the morning they come to take their goods to sell, and in the evening, they come to store them. These are young people who desire to possess their warehouses to do their business like Muslims (Interview DUNA1, Bangui August 21, 2017).

This quotation shows that there is a perception that if Muslims keep their dominant position, the youth cannot succeed. I discussed this with the representative of the *Boubanguéré* union. He recognized that storage in warehouses is one of the contentious issues they have with Muslims traders, the *commerçant*. As the President of the *Boubanguéré* union explains:

We also have issues of theft [inside KM5 market]. Most of the time, people take other people merchandise and claim that there was confusion [inside the warehouse]. This happens because several people can stock up their merchandise in the same store.

This quote demonstrates the feeling of some non-Muslim *Boubanguéré* of being at the mercy of Muslims. As a result, *Boubanguérés* might end up not trusting Muslims traders because the goods they store in their warehouses are not protected from theft, irrespective of the identity of the thief. The category of *commerçant* is the richest and have more money and a stronger trading network. They are among those who travel to foreign countries and bring goods.²²¹ This brings to light a second implication of *Boubanguéré* dependence. Some *Boubanguéré* entrust their money to *commerçant* so that they can bring back their goods when they travel. The SG presented the trust issue in these terms:

I [impersonating a *commerçant*] can go to Douala and order that you also buy goods for someone else. I go but I come back with my goods only and not yours. I start making excuses for the goods that did not come. In fact, I have used your money to buy more of my stock and when I come back, I quickly sell the surplus to make more money and then I will pay you back. During the process, I have gained everywhere but you, you only have your money back and no merchandise (Interview SBEG1, Bangui, 15 August 2017).

²²¹ Mobility has a strong connotation in CAR. As Lombard suggested, it is considered as power (2016, Chap 3). In this example of the markets, it means that Muslims are more powerful because they are mobile. They travel out of the country when non-Muslims, although mobile, do not have the same access to international networks. This is one of the reasons why non-Muslims were not able to fill the void that the Muslim *commerçant* created when they left the country because of the war.

Collaboration between *Boubanguéré* and *commerçants* inside the market is not devoid of problems even if both categories of traders frequently collaborate. The interviewee presented a situation in which a *commerçant* could take advantage of a non-Muslim trader. This fuels the anger and the fear that Muslims “hold” the economy and can “paralyze” the country. This is how non-Muslims come to understand Muslim-foreigners as controlling the economy. In turn, the various interactions between traders reveal the importance of autochthony down to the micro-level. In these spaces, non-Muslims try but are not able to dominate Muslims as they managed to do in the political space and the mining sector. Despite Muslim dominance, the government has been involved in the competition between group of traders and has tended to support non-Muslim traders. This shows that in competition along autochthony lines, the relationship that non-Muslims developed with the state plays down in the micro-spaces, a fact to which I turn next.

7.4.2 Difficult Emancipation of Non-Muslim Business Entrepreneurs

The autochthony-foreigner dynamic competition at the level of markets is not only about pointing to the effect of Muslim dominance, but also how non-Muslims have been trying to decrease their dependence on those business actors. The first example is that of the *Boubanguéré* as exposed previously. They have received state support in order to form another class of business operator and compete with Muslims. This reveals that there is a competition at the micro level and a struggle to take back the economic space from Muslims. Similar to the support the *Boubanguéré* received in the 1980s under Kolingba, the government has been active in promoting a new class of business entrepreneurs since 2013, the moment where the conflict started. Moreover, and similarly to the diamond sector, the government has been trying to support and nurture a class of non-Muslim business entrepreneurs.

The government, after Bozizé’s departure, has been increasingly involved in promoting a new class of entrepreneurs, as well as small and middle businesses as table 5 shows below. The *Agence Centrafricaine pour la Formation Professionnelle et l’Emploi* (ACFPE) is behind several activities to

support these entrepreneurs.

Table 5: Promoting Business Activities Among Central Africans

Planned Activities	Realizations			
	2015	2016	2017 (January-April)	Total
Project Ideas Research Workshop				
- Number of workshops	7	6	5	18
- Number of participants	355	490	98	943
- Women participants	111	101	35	247
Individual coaching, project building				
- Coaching sessions	147	485	79	711
- Women coaching sessions	54	96	24	174
- Number of businesses created	-	28	-	28
Information awareness sessions				
- Number of sessions	1	9	3	13
- Number of participants	95	1,284	250	1,629
- Women participants	53	270	95	418

Source: ACFPE.

At least two observations follow from this table. First, the government is investing much of effort in creating a new business, conducting workshops, helping participants build their business project, or simply informing the population about how to become an entrepreneur. These actions might have been in the context where Muslims fled during the armed conflict and that created a void. Several consumption products were unavailable in 2013-2014. Secondly, the government's involvement seems not to be paying off. In 2016 alone, there have been 485 personalized coaching sessions with a result of only 28 new businesses. This is roughly a 17% success rate, though we do not know the sustainability or continued support for these businesses. Further, it is possible that the created businesses might be only those who did the paperwork and might have not had effective existence.

The ACFPE data alone does not reveal the extent to which people create businesses in Bangui. Beyond the government's support, individuals have been actively opening businesses.²²² The information

²²² The crisis has particularly affected the meat business as Fulani were chased. Those Muslims fled CAR has represented an opportunity for young people to replace them. For instance, young people organized canoe expedition on the river to go to Basse-Kotto to bring meat (Interview LLGR, Bangui 6 September 2017). The whole 2014 year, there was no livestock market. Moreover, this represented an opportunity for the Lebanese entrepreneurs to invest more in the frozen meat business.

from the Ministry of Commerce shows how individual businesses are booming in Bangui, with shops opening everywhere, especially since 2013 (see table 6 below).

Table 6: Figures of Individual Businesses in Bangui

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Total	%
Individual Business	245	680	619	439	472	308	340	506	689	4298	71,40
Non-Profit Institution	11	9	41	47	40	24	48	68	57	345	4,73
Economic Interest Group	3	10	15	5	9	4	6	9	25	86	1,43
Partnership Business	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	0,03
Simplified Cooperative Business	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0,02
Simplified Joint Stock Company	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	3	0,05
Unipersonal Limited Liability Company	11	15	25	26	25	20	24	41	99	288	4,78
Limited Liability Company	41	59	93	92	138	53	64	97	152	789	13,11
Anonymous Business	6	11	21	15	24	12	13	13	19	134	2,23
Unipersonal Anonymous Business	2	2	4	5	8	4	1	0	5	31	0,51
Real Estate Company	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	5	7	0,12
Public Office	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	3	0,05
Business Branch	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	5	25	33	0,55
Total	319	788	818	629	716	429	499	741	1081	6020	100

Source: Ministry of Commerce, CAR Government.

Owning small shops, being involved in retail activities, or multi-function kiosks are all considered individual enterprises. It requires little capital and can be set up inside a market, as well as outside a

market, in neighbourhoods, or next to the road. These have been the kind of activities in which non-Muslims have been involved, in order to replace Muslims' dominance in the economic sector. As table 6 shows, 2013 was a turning point in these types of businesses. The numbers were fast growing until 2012. They dropped (probably because of the war) and have been increasing since then. These tables reveal that the government is pushing for non-Muslim ownership of the commercial sector. This is not a far-fetched hypothesis considering autochthony and the non-Muslims' fear and resentment of Muslim dominance in the commercial sector, both at the macro-level, such as in diamond business, and in micro-spaces, like the consumption product markets.

Moreover, the fact that many Muslim fled during the war represented an important opportunity to occupy their economic space. Keeping in mind the fact that Muslims and Central Africans do not belong to the same discursive realm, one interviewee, the head of the markets department at the City Hall, proudly claimed that in the post-conflict context in Bangui, Muslims no longer hold the economy. It might have been the case previously, but currently, "60 to 70% of traders are Central Africans" (Interview RRSF, Bangui, 25 May 2017). This corroborates Marchal argument's (2015a, 130) that several shops around Bangui, its various neighbourhoods and its markets have been appropriated by young anti-Balaka who sought to take back, what they claim belonged to them.²²³ With the extent to which Muslims were chased, the occupation of Muslims' shops is not limited to Bangui. For instance, in documents from the Ministry of Territorial Administration, I could read that in Bouar,²²⁴ "the trade that was monopolized by the Muslim Community is now the business of the Christian community that 'woke up' after the departure of Muslim traders in exile" (Préfecture de la Nana-Mambéré 2016, 4). The fact that Christians "woke

²²³ But this occupation does not overturn non-Muslim dependence on the *commerçant*. This is because these young entrepreneurs do not have the same resources as the *commerçant* to sustain their presence in trade. As Tarif (2019, 15) argued, "Almost all traders who today import goods from Nigeria, Chad or Sudan are in PK5, while family and ethnic affinities ensure their integration into the sub-region's trade networks. These trading networks, based on interpersonal knowledge and trust, are essential resources for conducting business. They are mainly centred around the ethnic community and the family, but also the 'extended' family, as evidenced by the use of the terms 'brothers' and 'cousins' to refer to long-time partners or friends who are part of these 'circles'."

²²⁴ A city at 452 km north-west of Bangui.

up” only after the Muslims’ departure is also indicative of the kind of blame the victim reasoning in that government apparatus. It suggests that Muslims were the one’s keeping non-Muslims asleep rather than letting them participate in the economy.

Muslims’ vending spots have been occupied inside KM5 by non-Muslim self-defence groups, and outside KM5 by some anti-Balaka and other young people. However, there was an embryonic class of economic entrepreneurs in the CAR, as my focus on markets and their associations show. Even if individual enterprises were on the rise prior to 2013, why were non-Muslims unsuccessful in nurturing a class of successful entrepreneurs? This question would merit further research, but my interviewees offered some suggestions. *Boubanguérés* are the ones who have received state support since Kolingba’s time. From their perspective, if they are unable to succeed, it is because they do not receive sufficient state support. *Boubanguéré* representatives argue that

the state does not support us. For instance, the condition to access loans are difficult. For instance, at the CBCA [Commercial Bank Centrafrique]: there are funds available to help business operators, but they ask for 50 million as a guarantee before giving you the money. But it is true that with such guarantee, you can borrow up to 250 million and more (Interview SBEG1, Bangui, August 15, 2017).

That the *Boubanguérés* point out the CBCA is not trivial. The CBCA is an offshoot of the government, which holds 71% of the bank’s capital (RJDH Centrafrique 2017). For *Boubanguérés* who have received state support since the 1980s, they claimed that the state was not on their side because they wanted more support.

Other interviewees, rather than blaming the state, pointed out the attitude of non-Muslim entrepreneurs towards money. Similar unproductive attitudes were present in the mining sector (Chapter 4). During fieldwork, I participated in several civil society meetings that sought to discuss and bring solutions to the crisis. In one of the meetings in June 2017, a panellist discussing youth problems argued that young people are interested in money and are envious of Muslims’ success. As a result, they embraced the business career by imitation (Civil Society Meeting, Bangui, 2-3 June 2017). This can help

explain the boom in the creation of individual enterprises both prior to 2013, as well as after. Similarly, the *Boubanguéré* representatives explained in our interview that “when Central Africans manage to access the funds [micro credits, banks or state support], they disappear or they change their identity papers” (Interview SBEG1, Bangui, August 15, 2017) This is also the observation of another interviewee, the Director of Commerce at the Ministry of Commerce. She states that, in her work, she noticed, “Small entrepreneurs contract credits at the Bank, they travel with it, or organize their marriages” (Interview STRG, Bangui, June 13, 2017). So, as vendors blame the state for lack of support, it seems that they also waste the funds that they receive from the government. Due to the lack of capacity of the government, it cannot always track and force repayment from those who did not respect their loans.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter has focused on the competition which involves several vendors’ associations in markets. Some of the vendors have been explicitly supported by the government but they did not succeed in their businesses, in turn blaming Muslims for their failure. It is in spaces like the market, small shops, and grilled meat places that people interact and get to feel that the sector is full of Muslims who are also perceived as foreigners. It reinforces non-Muslims’ perceptions that Muslims own the whole economy and there is nothing left to them. Hence, Muslims are a minority whose dominance of the commercial section is disputed.

Autochthony is embedded in daily routines and practices that pervades activities such as trading. It is constructed daily in micro-spaces such as the market. This shows that people are not just waiting for elites to instrumentalize their identity. The various increased interactions that non-Muslims have with Muslims have increased their sense of being at the mercy of Muslims. Understanding violence between communities should be attuned to small or rather petty histories which are inflated in times of crisis. In that sense, the chapter has argued that autochthony has been useful to non-Muslims in the pre-crisis period and operated independently from the elite manipulation during the armed conflict. With the focus

on the market, I complete this argument demonstrating that autochthony as a capital served to unify both elites and their followers even if it meant different things at different times in different places. Autochthony is broad enough for several actors to claim belonging simultaneously, yet also precise enough in terms of rights-based claims.

8. Conclusion

The conflict that began in 2012-2013 was, and still is, political. It emerged out of a coup and involved elite struggles for power. What has been a puzzle is the shift in the narrative towards a sectarian conflict that is neither ethnic nor religious, but autochthonous. In order to better understand this shift, I have focused on a longer history of non-violent conflicts between the contending groups. Even at this concluding stage, I must reiterate that this dissertation is not explaining violence but looking into the dynamics surrounding the extreme dimension of the manifestation of autochthony.

This work began with noticing the fact that the anti-Balaka had popularized the *vrai Centrafricain* narrative in the latest war, claiming to belong more than another group of Central Africans, namely the Muslims. To understand this, I turned to the multiple meanings of *vrai Centrafricain* on several levels ranging from the macro to the micro. The war manifested along sectarian lines and pitted loosely organized vigilante groups claiming to represent true Central Africans against the Séléka rebels claiming to represent the Muslims. In a country that has known continuous political instability since independence in 1960 and the instrumentalization of ethnic identity for political gains and armed confrontations in the 2000s, the 2013 coup and armed violence could be seen simply as an unsurprising continuation of that history. However, the extent to which armed violence spread and armed groups fragmented in 2013 was unprecedented and the sectarian turn of the conflict, its autochthonous expression, and non-ethnic portrayal were all surprising. To date, most explanations of this new articulation of violence in the country have focused on the macro-level. For instance, authors have raised issues of governance (Glawion and de Vries 2018; de Vries and Mehler 2019; Wohlers 2015; Smith 2015b), the weak state (Gomina-Pampali 2017), a longer history of violent mode of power acquisition (Carayannis and Lombard 2015), or the role of international actors in recent violence (Lombard 2012a; 2016). There have been few micro-level studies trying to understand violence except from Lombard's excellent anthropology of the state (Lombard 2016). Moreover, while the meaning and mobilization of the true

Central African claim has received some attention (Ceriana Mayneri 2014a), this thesis is the first in-depth study of the autochthony discourse and practice in the CAR. The dissertation has shown how the mobilization of autochthony is tied to longer legitimacy-seeking strategies of the elite, and that autochthony is a symbolic myth that can be mobilized at various levels. In places where autochthony has involved violent armed conflict, authors have largely neglected insights from the civil war literature and remained at the elite level of explanation focusing on neopatrimonialism and the breakdown of patronage networks (Bøås and Dunn 2013). In the CAR, neopatrimonialism informed us on why the Séléka rebelled in the sense that Muslim-majority rebels claimed exclusion from the governing apparatus. However, it is the countermobilization to the rebellion that has spearheaded violence and popularized the *vrai Centrafricain* narrative, in a context where the armed violence happened after the Séléka rebels toppled Bozizé.

Autochthony manifested violently in the country and took shapes of sectarian armed violence. This work mobilized the civil war literature to complement insights of autochthony. The civil war literature has termed autochthony conflict as SoS conflicts. These are separatist wars that are particularly difficult to resolve because those who claim an autochthonous right to the land are in fact a minority (Fearon and Laitin 2011). This is the exact opposite of the situation in which the CAR finds itself. But, with the current state of the literature on armed conflict, there is no single theory that can account for all the complexity of a civil war, and the civil war literature and ethnic wars must pay more attention to autochthony beyond the Sons of the Soil (SoS) type of conflicts that are more prominent in Asia. Actually, a lot of the civil war literature has been interested in factors that increase the risk of a rebellion and a civil war (Buhaug, Cederman and Rød 2008). In that sense, one of the most recent reviews of the civil war literature gives a passing mention to autochthony as the authors considered SoS “a special case of ethnopolitical exclusion” (Cederman and Vogt 2017, 2002). However, as this dissertation has shown, the Muslims are not migrants in the CAR. The Muslims are a broad category that entails different

nationalities with different period of settlement. Still, one group claimed to belong more than another one even if the history of the settlement of many groups is controversial. What is even different from the cases in Asia is that non-Muslims are a majority in CAR. These points render necessarily a focus on discourses, ideas, and practices. Accordingly, as this dissertation sought to make clear, autochthon conflicts are not necessarily or exclusively about ethnicity or migration, but can instead encapsulate political and economic competition between different social groups, which can in turn be defined by ethnicity, religion, or other latent and salient identities such as traders. Moreover, the quantitative literature on civil war and ethnicity has neglected the role that autochthony can play as an idea by focusing on material factors like land ownership or land pressures alone. This literature has also made dichotomies that make qualifying autochthony-related conflict difficult. For instance, Mason, Mitchell and Prorok (2016) distinguish between ethnic and ideological wars, but it is unclear how autochthony fits in. However, ethnicity matters in daily life in the CAR but has not been explicitly mobilized. At the same time, autochthony dynamics resemble ethnicity but is different from it. Therefore, autochthony conflict, civil war literature, social movements literature, as well as authoritarianism literature must all learn from and complement each other for future research.

This dissertation advances a better understanding of the conditions in which autochthony narratives are mobilized, its connection with armed violence, and whether or not its instrumentalization resonates with elite supporters. This is in line with recent studies of autochthony where some authors advocate that autochthony conflicts “exhibit unique features that require more careful conceptualization” (Côté and Mitchell 2017, 337). Indeed, the CAR situation, for instance, corresponds to other African conflicts where autochthony narratives were on display, but the multi-level analysis has not received attention as well as the everyday practices. Therefore, the dissertation contributes to broader debates around ideas, discourses, and their role in armed conflicts by pointing out the closure in discourses and identities.

The theoretical framework guiding this work highlights the multi-vocality and multiple meanings of

autochthony and does not solely focus on political elite strategies but also civil society (non-governmental elites) actors and non-elites (traders, market vendors) in micro-spaces of increased social interactions. The thesis focused on the various levels of mobilization and understanding of autochthony arguing that the pre-war situation reveals the social practices that autochthony entails both in the political and the economic spaces. At these other levels, the dissertation has demonstrated that the political elites' instrumentalization of autochthony differed from that of their supporters. In that sense, an important part of my research is precisely to say that autochthony is not a masternarrative that means the same everywhere, across time and space, but that it is instead always specific in its empirical context and therefore requires detailed contextual investigation. In the remaining pages, I highlight the key contributions and implications of my approach. At the same time, there are some puzzles that this work did not set out to resolve, and there are many unanswered questions.

8.1 Research Findings and Contributions

The dissertation's main theoretical contribution is to challenge the tendency to consider elites and supporters as belonging and subscribing to different discursive realm. If political elites mobilize autochthony as a political strategy, then we must understand why they succeed and if they do so. Political elites in Côte d'Ivoire or even the DRC have mobilized issues of citizenship and autochthony in their bid to keep power in a context of political liberalization and democratization. In fact, autochthony, many argue, is a political strategy that elites deploy when their regime is threatened (Bøås and Dunn 2013). This argument gives much power to "rational" elites who know what to manipulate and "emotional" followers from below. This dichotomy is unhelpful. Indeed, why would political elites not be emotional or followers rational? This is why, in this study, I have considered that autochthony links leaders and their followers in a type of pre-given conception that no longer needs explanation. This contributes to considering elites and their supporters as tied by the same discursive realm, but the concrete meaning of the discourse is different across multiple levels. To probe this self-evident nature, the dissertation

considered autochthony as a form of capital that gets its meaning through people's discourses and other practices. As a form of capital, many individuals enact autochthony daily to have access to political and economic resources or try to displace the "ungrateful" users of these resources.

This theoretical contribution delineates in three main conclusions. The first relates to the macro-level and the influence of political elites. In many other countries, authors have pointed to the importance of the rise of autochthony discourses as they have been linked with democratization and the political liberalization in some African contexts (Geschiere and Jackson 2006; Geschiere and Nyamnjoh 2000; 1998; Whitaker 2005). This has prompted Bøås and Dunn (2013) to treat autochthony as a political strategy that elites strategically mobilize to remain in power when their regime is faltering. My study makes a similar finding in the sense that Bozizé deployed autochthony as a strategy when his regime was faltering, much like in other African cases. Crucially, this strategy-oriented finding assumes that the mobilization automatically resonates with their followers. My study goes one step further to show that Bozizé's regime was also concerned with legitimacy and development. With this focus, my research noticed that Bozizé's regime was more accommodating and did not deploy an antagonistic narrative of othering to which people acquiesced. The long-term existence of the autochthony discourse allows it to change and morph at times of heightened crisis. It does not emerge overnight, but it has a longer genealogy that must be understood in context. In that sense, in Bozizé's speeches, various themes opposed "foreigners" – a category which overlaps with Muslims in CAR and that I sought to capture with the term Muslim-foreigners throughout the dissertation – to Central Africans' unity and development in a subtle and sustained construction. But, scapegoating the Muslim-foreigner spikes in speeches when the regime was threatened, and this is in line with the political strategy argument of Bøås and Dunn (2013). Hence, in the CAR, the mobilization of autochthony and instrumentalization of identity are strategies that are to be understood in a more long-term perspective including the manner in which leaders seek legitimacy. That is, to understand autochthony, how it is constructed, and contingent upon

a situation, one must remain attuned to leaders longer strategies of persuasion and discourses (Desrosiers 2014; Schatz 2009).

At the macro-level of political elites, recent studies in civil and ethnic wars continue to emphasize the “strategic calculations” (McCauley 2017, 6) or “strategic choice” (Roessler 2016, 19) of leaders, leaving them in a rational and all-knowing world. It is also possible to read a mechanistic understanding of mobilization even when authors focus on context and its complexity. For instance, McCauley (2017, 6) argues that “political entrepreneurs [...] mobilize supporters in terms of the identities that have the most useful behavioural consequences, vis-à-vis the leader’s own strategic goals.” This emphasis fails to recognize the importance of certain ideas that come to be historically relevant and continue to be active in daily habits and practices. In the CAR, this work has addressed the negative construction of Muslim-foreigners and their exclusion from the polity. At the same time, different actors on various levels of analysis seem to share a similar commitment to the same ideas about the *vrai Centrafricain* without this being linked directly to the top leadership. As I showed, some peacebuilding activities in the CAR invoke an “imagined community” (Anderson 1983) that does not recognize Muslims and their multiform contributions in the economic space for improving CAR. That contribution to the realization of CAR is not only economic (Moukadas 2015). Recognizing someone’s contribution is different from acknowledging their presence. This means highlighting, every time it is possible, that Muslims participated in the realization of CAR and not only presenting that different Islamic communities had settled in the country.

In the CAR, some authors have linked Bozizé’s 2011-2012 speeches to the killing of Muslims in 2013. At this macro-level, the dissertation’s perspective calls for a better understanding of how “autocrats engage with domestic audiences” (Desrosiers 2014, 200). My findings show that elite manipulation is far from automatic and mechanistic. Even in the case of authors who argue that elites manipulate myths and symbols that are emotionally potent to the masses (Kaufman 2001; 2015), my study shows that actors

at various levels have a certain understanding and commitment to the myth, here, the *vrai Centrafricain*. This is not just about instrumentalism and an elite who sits outside and knows what to manipulate. Moreover, I move beyond noticing the presence of hostile myths (Kaufman 2001) to present practices and interactions between contending groups. This focus on social practices is a contribution towards understanding why certain themes resonate when they are mobilized.²²⁵ We need to understand how fighting groups interacted prior to the conflict, and it is in the habitual, mundane practices and microaggressions that one can see the construction of certain boundaries. For instance, that independent newspapers popularize negative stereotyping reflect how boundaries of the *vrai Centrafricain* are constructed and contingent upon various issues such as theft in the market, strikes, protests, or secularism.

Few studies have linked authoritarian legitimacy strategies to instrumentalization of identity and, at the same time, tried to branch out to bottom-up level processes. The results of this study are thus significant for two reasons. First, the economic and political dimension of the claims around autochthony needs better attention from scholars, and this is not just about political liberalization or elections. It is also about a politics of entitlement, recognition, belonging, and the nature of the state. I claim that if autochthony is not always or exclusively about land alone, it has symbolic and non-land material aspects too. Of course, the autochthony conflict does not always transform into a full-blown civil war. But when they do, the dynamics of civil war can be useful.

The second conclusion relates to the meso-level use of autochthony and the influence of non-governmental elites. Although the blame has been on President Bozizé, as well as the anti-Balaka leaders for scapegoating Muslims and claiming *vrai Centrafricain*, this dissertation has argued that it is necessary to move beyond the top-down level to understand the meaning-making logic of autochthony as a way to connect elite and people understanding of the same discursive realm. The objective was to demonstrate

²²⁵ Similar concerns have been raised in framing theory: “Where scholars have sought to identify influential aspects of the environment in which framing takes place, they have concentrated more on political factors than on cultural ones” and as a result, “We do not know enough about why activists choose the frames they do, what aspects of the environment shape frames” effectiveness, and what impacts frames have on institutions outside the movement’ (Polletta and Kai Ho 2006, 188).

that claiming to belong more than another group was not a strategy of political leadership alone, instead, claiming to belong represented a capital that non-elites mobilized in a political and economic competition that goes on in the everyday and that predates the actual armed confrontation. At the same time, I simultaneously contrasted Muslim discourses of belonging to that of non-Muslims in order to expose the symbols of belonging and the closure in the discourse. This demonstrates the social practices of autochthony and its resonance with people rather than assuming that the top-down instrumentalization resonates with supporters. From this thesis perspective, ideas and discourses are constitutive of the violence that erupts during armed conflicts. Moreover, as Muslims in the latest crisis have been equated to foreigners, it is useful to trace, from a recent past, how foreignness has been mobilized in public discourses. Lombard (2016) addressed how the Muslim/Central African separation is a replication of colonial policy, but the point is how they demonstrate their belonging. If anything, we cannot assume a linear reproduction of that division from the colonial period. The analysis in chapter 5 has brought to light how Muslims legitimize their belonging to the CAR. It exposed the contentious narratives that autochthony as an identity capital implies.

The thesis also evidenced (especially in chapters 5 and 6) that land issues were not prominent in the autochthony discourses in CAR. The interviewees simply did not raise that issue. Hence, a group claiming to belong more than any other social group needs not to entail issues about access to land alone. But this claim entails which group belongs or contributed to the development of the community (Higers 2011). A case in point is regarding the exclusion of members of the Aka group from the political and economic competition as they are considered to have contributed little to the development of the country because they have developed a symbiotic relationship with the forest. Other social groups signal various types of contributions to the realization of the country such as defending the country during colonial times, bringing independence, or being the educated group that can lead the country. In that sense, such signalling happens through discourse. Therefore, the thesis argued that enacting autochthony

capital was parasitic upon two daily discursive strategies: the host-guest metaphor and the centre-stage (probably unconscious) tactic. Through these discursive strategies, the non-Muslims could frame Muslim as immigrants and guests in the country while making sure that non-Muslims highlight their contributions to the country and further sidelining Muslim grievances.

The thesis demonstrates the manner in which discourses produce meaning and condition forms of mobilization. At the same time, exposing the presence of the narrative on such multiple levels expose that there is more at stake than an instrumentalist vision. For instance, that the anti-Balaka popularized an extreme version of the *vrai Centrafricain* also served to give internal coherence to the movement and a programmatic vision which was to eradicate Muslims, just like an ideology (Sanín and Wood 2014). Hence, exposing narratives reveals that other actors are normatively and emotionally committed to Muslims not holding any position of power in the CAR. In that sense, framing Muslims as “guests” and sidelining their grievances allow non-Muslims to build the autochthonous identity capital and not recognize Muslim economic contributions to the polity.

The third conclusion regarding autochthony mobilization relates to the micro-space of the marketplace. The argument here is that in such micro-spaces, non-Muslim traders have used different tactics building on a self-evident conception of autochthony to try and displace Muslims’ dominance in the commercial sector. In such micro-spaces, autochthony is maintained and reinforced through everyday enactments of deeply ingrained practices when it comes to physically access the market and the market spots. Associations of vendors in the marketplace were in competition for better market spots and control of the space, and in this competition, being a *vrai Centrafricain* became a powerful form of capital to block access to specific markets or not comply with Bangui’s municipality orders. Looking forward, it remains to be seen if non-Muslims will be able to effectively decrease their dependence on Muslims in the commercial sector because recent research suggests the contrary (Tarif 2019). This gives us a sense of the various realities Bozizé’s speeches were reifying when he mobilized foreigners, thus connecting

elite and non-elite understanding of autochthony.

Instrumentalizing autochthony lies at the interplay of all these dynamics. In this work, autochthony is vague enough to connect leaders to followers and, at the same time, precise enough for listeners to make sense of the term by connecting it to their daily experience of it. As I conceive identity as produced by discourse and autochthony as an identity, autochthony is then produced through discourse in its localized expression and experience. The broader point about instrumentalist elites is that studies must investigate various levels to see who the receivers of the message are, whether or not that message resonates, and for what advantage or cost. Several levels of analysis might show people supporting or rejecting a certain discourse and with various effects. And not all these actors bear the same cost for mobilizing or adopting a certain discourse. In Table 7, I summarize how the various understanding of autochthony across scales is different.

Table 7: How different are the autochthony usages across levels?

Levels	Macro level	Meso level	Micro level
Actors			
Political space			
Government / elites speeches	<p>Bozizé linked foreignness with devastation, looting, pillaging, robbers, killers, rapists, and lawlessness</p> <p>The rebellion is caused by foreigners who make trouble (<i>font la merde</i>) in the country.</p> <p>Being a foreigner or non-Central African meant that the person is against the development of the country. According to the speeches, rebels were the source of the country's underdevelopment, and rebels are foreigners</p>		
Civil society		Actors understand	

		<p>the public space and the government as belonging to the “<i>vrai Centrafricain</i>”</p> <p>Non-Muslims use autochthony to suggest that Muslims abuse the generosity that they claim to have shown</p> <p>with the centre-stage device, non-Muslims ignore grievances</p>	
Anti-Balaka		<p>Anti-Balaka claim autochthony, as patriots and defender of the State</p> <p>The respect they deserve is important</p>	
Séléka		<p>Reject belonging based on the primacy of the settlement, language, and religion</p> <p>Muslims considered their various activities to be at the benefit of the country</p>	
Economic space			
Government policies	<p>The government move is to bypass intermediaries in the diamond sector through laws and the use of security forces</p> <p>Modify the mining code to render collectors less important</p>		
Market vendors associations			<p>Non-Muslims vendors deploy autochthony to block access to specific markets or not</p>

			<p>comply with Bangui's municipality orders</p> <p>They use autochthony expecting to benefit from lower levels of taxation</p>
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With these three main conclusions and the summary in table 7, I specify that even if land rights were to be fixed or improved, autochthony claims are likely to continue to be powerfully used for example in competition for the best market places or importantly through the syllogism of language and religion. If you do not speak Sango, you are not Central African. Or if you are Muslim, your belonging becomes doubtful. There is one central clarification to make: it is not that land is unimportant, but that autochthony conflicts are not reducible to land alone. They are more multifaceted, and more place specific, interacting with the social, political, and economic context.

8.2 Ways Forward on Autochthony and for Peace in the CAR

There is more work to be done to understand autochthony-related conflicts (Côté and Mitchell 2017, Verweijen 2015) in the CAR in Africa and elsewhere. Côté and Mitchell (2017) advocate for more studies to tease out the particularities of autochthony, while Verweijen (2015, 158) argues for the need to disaggregate the “approach to the study of violent practices that are framed in the language of autochthony.” Verweijen (2015, 173-175) has found that some of the violence that vigilante groups commit in the DRC is not against a clearly defined “other.” She rather finds that Mai-Mai vigilante groups in Fizi mobilize autochthony violence to generate revenue or maintain control over a certain community (Verweijen 2015, 173).

This dissertation focused on the various levels of understanding and meaning-making practices of autochthony and how this has affected the conflict in the CAR. It cannot therefore help us understand the specific types of violence in which the anti-Balaka engaged in the name of autochthony, although that

would be an interesting area for further research. What was clear in this conflict was that Muslims were chased away and this, in itself, is a specific type of violence. But both the anti-Balaka and the Séléka also engaged in crimes that fall under International Humanitarian laws, and it would be worth understanding if fighters committed such crimes based on autochthony discourses. My research did not follow anti-Balaka fighters closely, but nevertheless sought to better understand their own perception of being Central African. Moreover, anti-Balaka vigilantism, i.e. “Balakanism,” is recent even if vigilantism has a much longer and grounded history in the CAR. This means that it is uncertain whether the anti-Balaka will remain an effective social force as a group much like the Mai-Mai in the DRC. Even if the anti-Balaka disappears, it is a reality that they reflect the violent enactment of an autochthony discourse present well before the armed conflict and that has implications for post-conflict CAR. In fact, the logic of the *vrai Centrafricain* has shown closure in its understanding of the Muslims’ contribution to the nation. Hence, it is not about claiming that Muslims have been present in the CAR for centuries, it is also about highlighting their contributions to the nation during these years.

Indeed, it seems that addressing Muslims discrimination would be politically difficult because non-elites have also used strategies to keep Muslims in a marginal position. Since Muslims have usually complained about discrimination in CAR, it remains to be seen which political leader will address their marginal position. Since his election, President Touadera has consistently expressed his will for unity and peace, but he could do more in that direction. For instance, the president and his government failed to condemn hate-filled narrative in local newspapers (Picco 2017). Similarly, Touadera sent a mixed signal with the nomination of the prefects in 2017. During fieldwork, in September 2017, the decree nominating 73 prefects in the country sparked outrage because several nominations were not public officers or employees of the ministry. The decree did not consider the Ministry’s recommendations and Muslims were not represented in the nomination list. At the time, I had tried double checking with journalists and a retired senior prefect whether one could guess if Muslims were represented as names

were poor indicators of such representations. I could not get any confirmation but what matters was that the decree was perceived as the continuation of “politics as usual” as if an armed conflict was not ongoing. In protest, the Ministry of Territorial Administration civil servants went on strike. These events are to be taken seriously since it could imply that politics or business will just continue as usual with complete disregard to Muslims. Deep patterns of bad governance are still present (Glawion and de Vries 2018) and the international community is seeking to build a state without considering what a state looks like for all Central Africans (Lombard 2016).

As the international community is keen on making peace stick, they would have to strike a delicate balance between supporting a president for peace and finding inclusion for all in the CAR. Unless one tackles the exclusionary discourse head on, it seems that latent grievances might remain and could reignite tensions and conflict. This dissertation has shown that some international community actors in the CAR have been socialized into perpetuating the mundane division between Central Africans and Muslims. This brings to the centre the power and effect of discourses as international actors might need to look inward to their difficult position beyond effectiveness of peacekeeping and life-saving operations.

As I am completing this thesis, the CAR and the international community have managed to make the latest peace accord hold but with great challenges. Armed groups are still fighting and there are commitment and uncertainty problems. From the perspective of this work, one of the challenges ahead would be to address the various spaces where competition and conflict happen as well as the mundane discursive separation between Central Africans and Muslims. In 2018, the government published a National plan for the prevention of incitement to hatred and violence (*Plan National pour la Prévention de l’Incitation à la Haine et à la Violence*). The document addressed some of the stereotypes that Central Africans use, and which can create confusion during war time. This is a first step, but more needs to be done. For instance, the document does not advance alternatives to the stereotyping languages that they identified. If anything, as I have been trying to show following Ricoeur (2000), there are forms of closure

in discourses. Taking this point seriously, the expression “Central African” and “Muslims” must find alternatives, and it is up to Central Africans to recognize, discuss, and find alternatives. This is a long-term project that might need to start in classrooms, school curriculums, but also outside formal educational sites where radio shows and neighbourhood meetings might be targeted. In a similar vein, as the analysis of mining codes revealed, improving laws and injecting money in practices of a system of thought designed to exclude a certain group of people will not improve much. Therefore, there needs to be a serious reflection on ideas and biases that Central Africans portray when they design laws.

This conflict and the dynamics this work highlighted raise at least two questions for further research on autochthony conflicts. Future studies might compare the CAR to other SoS conflicts in order to better understand the main features of such conflicts. For instance, the SoS stream of civil war research does not simply argue that wars start because some people claim an autochthonous right to the land, it argues that separatist wars are particularly difficult to resolve because those who claim an autochthonous right to the land are in fact a minority and this is the exact opposite of the situation in which the CAR finds itself. Further research might probe into this dynamic. A second area of investigation is the role of ideology in autochthony conflicts. Being from the soil is a myth (Loraux 2000), but that idea is persistent no matter how much one tries to debunk the myth. One way the literature has tried to debunk the myth is by getting facts right. That is identifying which groups settled where at what time. But social and political life is about migration hence, no one or no group can be really born of the soil. Further research must delve deeper in the meaning of autochthony in comparative research. For now, one recent survey of autochthony conflicts has neglected such multiple meaning across various levels of investigation. For instance, Côté and Mitchell (2017, 334-335) identified four factors in the outbreak of autochthony conflicts around the world: “(1) increased economic competition and decline; (2) insecure and unenforceable property rights regimes; (3) political liberalization and competitive elections; and (4) horizontal inequalities (HIs).” It is unclear how various actors at various levels influence such conflicts,

yet as this study shows, the various meanings assigned to autochthony are central to the forms of politics and violence that it inspires and justifies.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: List of Interviews

1. CAR national working for the International Organization for Migration (IOM), male, Bangui, May 10, 2017
2. CAR national working for the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian affairs (OCHA), male, Bangui, May 10, 2017
3. International NGO country representative, male, Bangui, May 18, 2017
4. Coordinator of the Interfaith Religious Platform, male, Bangui, May 23, 2017
5. Market vendor, Vice president of the *Wali and Koli Gara* association, female, Bangui, May 25, 2017
6. Senior public servant at the market services of the municipality of Bangui, male, Bangui, May 25, 2017
7. Journalist, male, Bangui May 27, 2017
8. Séléka rebel leader, male, Bangui, May 27, 2017
9. Former Minister, male, Bangui, May 28, 2017
10. Member of the interfaith religious platform, male, Bangui, June 3, 2017
11. Civil Society leader, male, Bangui, June 6, 2017
12. Former Minister of Defence, male, Bangui, June 7, 2017
13. University professor, male, Bangui, June 9, 2017
14. Member of the interfaith religious platform, male, Bangui, June 9, 2017
15. Former Minister of Commerce, male, Bangui, June 12, 2017
16. Senior civil servant, Ministry of Commerce, female, Bangui, June 13, 2017
17. Director of an International NGO, male, June 13, 2017
18. Business operator, female, Bangui, June 16, 2017
19. Director of a prestigious national school, male, Bangui, June 16, 2017
20. University professor, male, Bangui, June 16, 2017
21. King of Bangassou, Bangui, June 20, 2017
22. Former Minister, male, Bangui, June 21, 2017
23. Former Minister, male, Bangui, June 26, 2017; June 27, 2017; July 2, 2017,
24. Municipal counselor, 3^e arrondissement, male, Bangui, June 28, 2017,
25. CAR NGO director, male, Group Interview, Bangui, June 29, 2017,
26. Political advisor to the King of Bangassou, male, Bangui, June 30, 2017,
27. Former Minister of Territorial Administration, male, Bangui, July 4 and 11; August 2, 2017
28. Member of parliament, Independent, female, Bangui, July 12, 2017
29. Former Minister, male, Bangui, July 14, 2017
30. Evangelical pastor, male, Bangui July 19, 2017
31. Kaga-Bandoro IOM officer, male, Bangui, July 21, 2017
32. Retired journalist, male, Bangui, June 22; July 24, 2017,
33. Senior member of a political party, UDRP, male, Bangui, July 26, 2017
34. Market vendors, President and Secretary General of the FNBC, males, Bangui, 6 August and 15 August 2017
35. *Chef de quartier* and anti-Balaka leader, male, Yaloké, August 8, 2017
36. Group Interview with villagers, males, Yaloké, August 8, 2017
37. Leader, Fulani community, male, Yaloké, August 9, 2017
38. Evangelical pastor, male, Yaloké, August 9, 2017
39. Group Interview, anti-Balaka leaders, males, Yaloké, August 9, 2017

40. Group Interview with villagers, males, Yaloké, August 9, 2017
41. Chief of mining village, Gaga, male, August 10, 2017
42. Anti-Balaka leader, male, Gaga, August 10, 2017
43. Youth leader and history professor, male, Yaloké, August 11, 2017
44. Maxime Mokom, anti-Balaka national Coordinator, male, Bangui, August 16, 21, 28; October 3, 2017,
45. Senior civil servant, Ministry of Mines, Energy and Hydroelectric, male, Bangui, August 21, 2017,
46. Local authority in arrondissement Miskine, female, Bangui, August 23, 2017
47. FPRC cadre, male, Bangui, August 25, 2017
48. FPRC cadre, male, Bangui, August 26, 27, 2017
49. Former prime Minister, male, Bangui, August 22 and 28, 2017
50. Retired Prefect, male, Bangui, August 29, 2017
51. National coordinator ITIE-RCA, male, Bangui, August 31, 2017
52. Former prime Minister, male, Bangui, August 31, 2017
53. Séléka cadre, male, Bangui, September 3, 2017
54. Senior civil servant, BECDOR, male, Bangui, September 4, 2017
55. RPRC cadre, male, September 4, 2017
56. Senior civil servant in the Ministry of Livestock, male, Bangui, September 6, 2017
57. UPC cadre, Fulani, male, Bangui, September 23, 24, 25, 2017
58. Bossangoa anti-Balaka leader, male, Bangui, September 29, 2017

