Conflict untangled:
the political, social and economic factors
behind the Central African Republic ethno-religious conflict

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<td>APRD</td>
<td>Armée Populaire pour la Restauration de la Démocratie (People’s Army for the Restoration of Democracy)</td>
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<td>A2R</td>
<td>Alliance pour la Renaissance et la Recondition (Alliance for Revival and Rebuilding)</td>
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<td>CAR</td>
<td>Central African Republic</td>
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<tr>
<td>CEN-SAD</td>
<td>Community of Sahel-Saharan States</td>
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<td>CIA</td>
<td>Central Intelligence Agency</td>
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<td>CPJP</td>
<td>Convention des Patriotes pour la Justice et la Paix (Convention of Patriots for Justice and Peace)</td>
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<td>CPSK</td>
<td>Convention Patriotique du Salut du Kodro (Patriotic Convention for Saving the Country)</td>
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<td>DDR</td>
<td>Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration programme</td>
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<td>DRC</td>
<td>Democratic Republic of Congo</td>
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<tr>
<td>ECCAS</td>
<td>Economic Community of Central African States</td>
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<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<td>FDPC</td>
<td>Front Démocratique du Peuple Centrafricain (Democratic Front of the Central African People)</td>
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<tr>
<td>FIDH</td>
<td>Federation Internationale des ligues des Droits de l’Homme (Worldwide Movement for Human Rights)</td>
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<td>ICG</td>
<td>International Crisis Group</td>
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<td>IPD</td>
<td>Inclusive Political Dialogue</td>
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<td>KPCS</td>
<td>Kimberly Process Certification Scheme</td>
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<tr>
<td>MLCJ</td>
<td>Movement des Libérateurs Centrafricains pour la Justice (Movement of Central African Liberators for Justice)</td>
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<tr>
<td>UFDR</td>
<td>Union des Forces Démocratiques pour le Rassemblement (Union of Democratic Forces for Unity)</td>
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<tr>
<td>UFR</td>
<td>Union des Forces Républicaines (Union of Republican Forces)</td>
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<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<td>VPA</td>
<td>Voluntary Partnership Agreement</td>
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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to identify the underlying factors of the conflict between Christians and Muslims in the Central African Republic (CAR) that started in 2013. It is argued that political factors played an important role in the coup d’état that ousted President Francois Bozize - the event that marked the start of the civil war. Social factors were mainly responsible for how the civil war turned into sectarian violence. Furthermore, it is argued that a number of economic factors did not directly cause the sectarian violence, but instead contributed to the length of the conflict. The way broader factors contributed to the conflict (the CAR’s weakened state and lawlessness for instance) are also discussed.
PART 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 - Introduction

The Central African Republic (CAR) is a landlocked country situated in a region of political turmoil. It shares its northern border with Chad, eastern border with Sudan and South Sudan, southern border with Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Republic of Congo, and western border with Cameroon. Majority of Central Africans are Christians, although both Animism and Islam are represented among the population.

The country’s history of coup d’état, brutal regimes and poverty has left the country and its population in a fragile state. The country had not yet recovered from the four year long unrest that took place between 2004 and 2008, when another civil war started in 2013. The civil war quickly turned into sectarian violence between two main groups; the mainly Christian group called Anti-Balaka and the mainly Muslim group Seleka. Due to the distinctive religion-based membership of the two parties, the conflict was quickly portrayed as a religious conflict.

This paper attempts to outline the underlying factors behind the religious conflict that rapidly escalated after the mainly Muslim member Seleka rebel coalition took power in 2013 and caused the Christian-dominated Anti-Balaka movement to form. Through analysis of a broad spectrum of literature on the national and international political and economic interests in the CAR, and its national social situation, I will explain how political and economic interests, social issues, and fragments still left after Central African Bush War, caused the outbreak of a civil war and the violent tensions between Central African Muslims and Christians.

As will be seen throughout the paper, the political, social and economic factors are closely linked; however, I will argue that these factors influenced the conflict at different stages. National and regional politics played a crucial role in the creation of Seleka, its coup d’état and the civil war that followed. Social issues caused the civil war to develop into sectarian violence. The economic factors play a secondary role in the causes of the religious conflict, but had an important role in the continuation of the conflict.

Additionally, will be argued that the ‘religious conflict’ has little to do with religion. The political,
social and economic factors outlined are mostly caused by a weakened state, lawlessness, discrimination, as well as both internal and external power struggles.

**Literature review**

There has been some research made on the Central African Republic conflict, investigating the causes, development and outcome of the conflict. The existing literature treating the factors behind the conflict take a descriptive form and mainly focus on either the political, social or economic causes separately. For instance, Berg (2008) and Marchal (2009) focus on the conflict's political factor and explain how the instability in the border areas between the CAR, Chad and Sudan, affects the conflict. A FIDH (2014) report examines how the clashes developed, the international community’s response to the civil war, and the human rights abuses linked to the conflict. Some research offer a broader perspective of the conflict, for instance Weyns et al. (2014) bring together the political, social and economic factors by investigating Seleka and Anti-Balaka’s political and economic motivations, their social grievances, and the development of these factors throughout the conflict.

This paper will provide an analysis of the research findings of existing literature of the social, economic and political causes, and add new elements to the discussion. By using more theoretical literature focused on conflict studies, rebellion and civil war, I hope to provide a deeper and broader understanding of the causes for the civil war, the emergence of Seleka and Anti-Balaka, and the tensions between Muslims and Christians. I believe that this will contribute with a new perspective to the study of religious conflicts, and more specifically to the Central African Republic religious conflict.

**Purpose and methodology**

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the direct and indirect causes behind the ongoing violent clashes between Anti-Balaka and Seleka fighters in the Central African Republic. The conflict tends to be portrayed to as a ‘religious conflict’ due to Anti-Balaka’s almost exclusive Christian membership, and Seleka’s similarly exclusive Muslim membership.

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My hypothesis is, however, that non-religious factors caused the outbreak of conflict; namely political, economic and social factors as well as some more indirect factors such as the CAR’s lawlessness. These factors will be investigated thoroughly through literature carefully chosen from journal articles, government reports, non-governmental organisations and international organisations publications, books, and to a limited extent newspaper articles.

Research questions

- What are the political, social and economic factors behind the tensions between Muslims and Christians in the Central African Republic, and in what way did these factors affect the conflict?
- How do theories of conflicts and civil war contribute to a deeper understanding of the causes behind the conflict?
- To what extent is the Central African Republic religious conflict actually a religious conflict?

Limitations of the paper

There are some limitations to this paper that should be outlined. The Central African Republic is a developing country in a fragile state due to its continuing social, economic and political instability. Furthermore, the conflict studied in this paper started recent and is still to some extent ongoing. There is therefore a limited amount of information and statistics available and the information that exists is difficult to verify as there is sometimes only one publication addressing a particular issue. To minimise this problem as much as possible, I have carefully chosen the literature that I use for this paper.
1.2 - The Central African Republic conflict in brief

Seleka, a coup d’etat and Anti-Balaka

The Central African Republic (CAR) conflict’s early stages can be traced back to 2012, when rebel groups in the northeast of the country progressively came together as a united front against the then-sitting President Francois Bozize’s regime. These rebel groups, that shared aspirations for political and social changes in the country that suffers from poverty; political, economic and social instability; and a continuing lack of good governance, formed an umbrella coalition called Seleka.

With Michel Djotodia as its leader, the coalition was composed of the Convention des Patriotes pour la Justice et la Paix (CPJP), Union des Forces Démocratiques pour le Rassemblement (UFDR), Front Démocratique du Peuple Centrafricain (FDPC), Convention Patriotique du Salut du Kodro (CPSK), and some smaller rebel groups (Alliance pour la Renaissance et la Refondation (A2R) and Union des Forces Républicaines (UFR)) as well as road-bandits (Mayneri, 2014).

At the end of 2012, Seleka started mobilising its fighters in the north of the CAR and progressively advanced towards the capital Bangui, located in the south. By promising financial compensation and social, political and economic changes, Seleka’s membership rapidly grew into a strong rebel-led opposition, that became an increasing threat to President Francois Bozize’s regime (Weyns et al. 2014). In an attempt to reduce this threat, a ceasefire agreement was signed between President Bozize and Seleka representatives in January 2013, where some of the conditions were as follows:

“President Francois Bozize would remain in power, a Prime Minister from the opposition would be appointed (...), a Government of national unity would be established, and legislative elections would be organised within 12 months.” (UN, 2013b)

However, the agreement was not fully implemented and on the 24th of March 2013, Seleka captured the capital Bangui and President Bozize fled the country.
Sectarian violence breaks out

Before and after Seleka’s capture of the capital, its fighters carried out violent attacks against civilians - including rape, killings and looting. In response to Seleka’s atrocities, the Anti-Balaka movement was formed and started carrying out revenge attacks against Seleka members in the capital Bangui and later in rural parts of the CAR. As attacks between the two groups intensified and the situation became more fragile, the CAR’s Christian community became increasingly associated with Anti-Balaka’s atrocities and the Muslim community became associated with Seleka’s equally atrocious aggressions.

In September 2013, Seleka’s leader Djotodia dissolved the coalition due to the increasing cruelty carried out by the coalition’s fighters, but intensive attacks by Seleka fighters continued. In December 2013, tensions between Central African Muslims and Christians reached a new level. During two days, on the 5th and 6th December, hundreds of Muslim civilians in Bangui were killed in organised attacks by Anti-Balaka militias. Convoys evacuating Muslims from the capital were targeted by Anti-Balaka fighters, "killing all those unable to flee" (FIDH, 2014:11). During the next three months, 1500 people were killed by Anti-Balaka in Bangui alone. These attacks sparked revenge operations by Seleka and civilian Muslims who had suffered immensely from Anti-Balaka’s attacks, and the killings between Christians and Muslim civilians escalated (FIDH, 2014). The city became divided into clear religious-based neighbourhoods of Muslim and Christian communities. Muslims in Bangui were forced to hide or flee in order to survive as Anti-Balaka militias carried out large-scale killings, specifically targeting Muslims.

International pressure forced Seleka leader Djotodia’s resignation on the 10th of January 2014 because of his failure to control Seleka fighters and to stop the violence that had emerged. On the 20th of January 2014, Catherine Samba-Panza was elected president in transition and in July 2014 the Brazzaville ceasefire agreement was signed between Seleka and Anti-Balaka representatives.

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2 Even though Seleka was officially disbanded in 2013, I will continue to refer to it as ‘Seleka’ because many of its members continued to carry out attacks, but without the former leadership.


However, the fighting continued between the two groups in Bangui and throughout the country during 2014. In January 2015, it was estimated that 75 000 Anti-Balaka militias were still active in the country (IRIN, 2015).

In February 2016, Faustin Archange Touadera received 63% of votes in the first organised election since Seleka’s coup, and became President of the CAR. However, Seleka and Anti-Balaka fighters still control much of the CAR as the national army is still unable to secure the country.
PART 2 : POLITICAL, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC FACTORS

2.1 - The conflict’s political factors

Since independence from France in 1960, the CAR has been faced with political instability and its population has witnessed a chain of troublesome events right up till this day; from the french-controlled leadership of Daniel Dacko; to the brutal military leadership of the self-proclaimed emperor Jean-Bedel Bokassa (1965 - 1979); to the first-ever free election in 1993 (in which Ange-Felix Patasse gained power); to the coup d’état in which Francois Bozize took power in 2003; to the four year long Central African Republic’s Bush War between 2004 and 2008.

The Central African Republic civil war that started in 2013 is highly political and I argue that the political causes are the main reasons why civil war broke out in the first place. Politics played an crucial role in the preparative stages of the conflict - it made the Seleka coup possible and sparked the civil war and the sectarian violence between Muslims and Christians. I also argue that the political actors behind the outbreak of the conflict are of two kinds; the internal actors (Seleka and Anti-Balaka) and the external actors (who strategically supported one of the two internal actors and essentially made their actions possible). The internal actors played an active front role, and the external actors had a background role in how the conflict developed into the escalating violence that peaked in 2013 and 2014.

External political actors

This section will discuss how foreign states, mainly France and Chad, played crucial roles in the development of the conflict. While France has a general interest in the central african region, Chad has a more specific interest in the CAR’s Vakaga region situated along the Chadian and Sudanese border. The political aspect of the conflict concerns both the events leading up to the conflict and the way the conflict developed into violent tensions between Muslims and Christians.

The roots of the civil war can be traced back to African and European political interests. Marchal (2009:11) suggests that Bozize’s coup in 2003 was a “regional coup d’état”, supported by the CAR’s regional neighbours. The same regional strategy was adopted when Seleka came to power in 2013. Djotodia’s coalition Seleka which had support from France, neighbouring countries Sudan
and Chad, as well as the rest of the regional Economic Community of the Central African States (ECCAS)\(^5\).

**France and the ECCAS**

Although the Central African Republic gained independence from France over 50 years ago, France has continued to pursue control in the country’s political leadership by strategically supporting particular presidents and intervening militarily to protect French interests in the region. Such intervention goes under the Defence Accords between France and its former African colonies, including the CAR. France has a political interest in maintaining power and control in Africa, not only for commercial reasons, but also to promote the French language and culture, as it symbolically makes France a world power. (Vasset, 1997)

France continuously seeks to guarantee its influence over the African continent, by “choosing” presidents in its former colonies, who in return will ensure to protects France’s interests. An example of such “choosing” of presidents is the CAR’s first president after independence - Daniel Dacko. Dacko was a good option for France as it considered Dacko to be “more easily manipulated than others” (O’Toole, 1982:138). As Dacko’s health deteriorated in 1965, he handed in his resignation but it was refused by France. France preferred to “stage a coup”, and the country was consequently taken over by Colonel Jean-Bedel Bokassa in 1965 (O’Toole, 1982:139). Bokassa’s brutal regime put much pressure on France to abandon its support for Bokassa and when Bokassa approached Libya (France’s longtime rival for power in the region) for support, France reinstalled Dacko as president in 1979, in order to keep control of the country. Thereby “the French had re-established what they supposed to be a more acceptable and dependable regime in Central Africa” (O’Toole, 1982:143). France’s influence over the CAR’s political elite has continued until this day. Through its close cooperation with the ECCAS, France played an indirect role in the early stages of the civil war and the religious conflict that broke out in 2013.

Libya has historically been France’s longtime rival for influence throughout the african continent. When Libya’s president Mohammed Gaddafi created the Community of the Sahel and Sahara States (CEN-SAD) in 1998, the Central African Republic joined the regional organisation (Huliaras, 2001). Patasse, who ruled the CAR at the time, had Libya’s support. France and the regional EC-\(^5\) ECCAS’ 10 member states include the Central African Republic, Chad, Cameroon, Gabon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Angola, Burundi, Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, and Sao Tome & Principe (ECCAS, 2014).
CAS considered Patasse to be an unreliable neighbour in the region and preferred an ally loyal to the ECCAS and France, rather than someone obtaining Libyan support. When Bozize came to power through a coup, in 2003, he had support from France and the rest of the ECCAS states, which was a crucial aspect of Bozize’s gain of power. (Berg, 2008)

France role in the coup d’état that ousted Bozize can be traced through its close relationship with the ECCAS, of which the Central African Republic is a member state. France provides trainings and political support (Awoumou, 2008) for the ECCAS in order to promote stability, peace and security in the region (ECCAS, 2014). Another member of the ECCAS is Chad, who played the most politically important role in Bozize’s fall to Seleka, which marked the beginning of the civil war and the sectarian violence. Although France and most ECCAS members did not play a direct role in the ousting of President Bozize and the outbreak of the civil war, its close ties with Chad indirectly had some influence over the situation.

Chad was a key actor in Bozize’s coup d’état against Patasse in 2003 as it provided Bozize with Chadian elite soldiers to assist in the coup (Berg, 2008). But why did Chad have an interest in bringing Bozize to power in 2003? And why did it later start supporting Seleka (whose motives were to remove Bozize from power)? These questions will be answered in the next section of this paper.

Chad, Sudan, and the CAR’s border areas with neighbouring countries

In order to understand Chad’s real interest in the CAR’s leadership, we need to have a look at a border region between CAR, Chad and Sudan. The Vakaga region in the northeast of the CAR is of utter importance in the factors behind the emergence of Seleka, both in political and social terms. The political aspect of the region will be discussed in this section, while the social importance of the Vakaga region in the ethno-religious conflict will be discussed in section 2.2.

Chad supported Bozize and brought him to power in 2003, in a strategic move to create stability in the Vakaga region; a lawless area where Chadian armed opposition groups operate freely. After Bozize gained power in 2003, the promise of financial compensation for Chadian soldiers that had helped him to power were not respected, and left combatants feeling abandoned by Bozize and his regime. In response to Bozize’s abandonment, former Bozize loyalists formed the UFDR rebel
group. The UFDR was led by Michael Djotodia, who later became the leader of the Seleka alliance. (Weyns et al., 2014).

With growing insecurity and tensions in the northeast of the CAR, Bozize failed to restore stability in the important Vakaga region. This made Chadian president Idriss Deby withdraw his support for Bozize in September 2012, and instead approached Seleka leaders, with the hope that Seleka could restore stability to avoid a continued safe haven for Chadian rebel groups, who were a threat to the Chadian president. Furthermore, when Bozize strategically attempted to gain support from Libya and South Africa in order to reduce his dependence on France and Chad, it resulted in the fall of Bozize’s regime as Chad became even more motivated to withdraw its support for Bozize (Berg, 2008). In the beginning of 2013, Chad provided Seleka with military assistance. It can be argued that Chad’s shift in support from Bozize to Seleka made Seleka’s coup d’etat successful (Weyns et al., 2014).

Chad’s direct contributions to the conflict by supporting rebel coalition Seleka, is explained in the stability issues in the border areas between the CAR, Chad and Sudan, and as mentioned above, it is an unstable area where armed rebel groups move freely and unrest easily spill-over the borders. The borders’ instability is also caused by crossing herders, traders and pastoralists that competition of resources like pasture and water, and causes tensions between herders and agriculturalists, which further increases tensions in the region (International Crisis Group, 2014b).

Similarly to Chad’s interest in stability in the northeastern part of the CAR, Sudan feared a growing refuge in northeastern CAR for Sudanese armed opposition groups. Sudan therefore supported the Seleka movement, by providing medical assistance, trainings and arms to the umbrella group (Weyns et al., 2014). The Darfur conflict that started in 2003 has resulted in increased sudanese refugees in Chad and CAR, and both Sudanese and Chadian rebels cross the borders into CAR to find refuge, which destabilised the region. (Giroux et al. 2009). Furthermore, a majority and arms military equipment used by Seleka were made in Sudan, or made in Iran and China but imported from Sudan (Conflict Armament Research, 2015), which further suggests that Sudan supported Seleka.
Internal political actors

As discussed above, the international actors (mainly France, ECCAS, and Sudan) supported the Seleka coalition as it provided a political change in an area of interest in which instability is continuous. Additionally, the two national rival parties of the conflict (Seleka and Anti-Balaka) had their own political motivations that contributed to the outbreak of the conflict. As will be discussed, Seleka’s emergence was highly political, while Anti-Balaka’s emergence was in response to social issues. For this reason, Seleka’s creation will be discussed in this section that focuses on the political factors, while Anti-Balaka’s creation will be discussed in the social factors, in section 3.1 “Lawlessness and the creation of Anti-Balaka”.

Seleka’s creation and its political aspirations

As already mentioned in section 1.2, Seleka is an umbrella coalition of rebel groups active in the northeast of the CAR, who came together in 2012 as a united front to confront President Bozize’s failure to implement the conditions of ceasefire agreements signed by rebel groups active in northern CAR and the government, at the end of the Central African Republican Bush War (2004 - 2008). Between 2007 and 2008, two main peace agreements were signed between the government (led by Bozize) and rebel groups active in the Vakaga region i northeastern CAR; the 2007 Birao agreement\(^6\) and the Inclusive Political Dialogue\(^7\).

The meeting that resulted in the Inclusive Political Dialogue (IPD) in December 2008 was attended by approximately 200 participants from four rebel groups (APRD, UFDR, MLCJ and UFR), civil society, civil services, opposition parties and the presidential majority in the national assembly, and it was agreed that rebel representatives would be integrated into the CAR’s political representation, rebel group members into CAR’s national army, as well as a disarmament programme of rebel groups and a security sector reform would be implemented (ICG, 2010:1). The reoccurring problem of rebel group fighters active in the country needed to be addressed. The United Nation’s peacekeeping programme ”Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration” (DDR) was chosen as a strategy to restore peace in the fragile areas of the CAR. The disarmament aimed to collect arms and control those circulating in the country; demobilisation would assist rebels to leave rebel

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\(^6\) Signed in 2007 by the government and two rebel groups; UFDR and FDPC (ICG, 2008)  
\(^7\) Signed in Libreville, Gabon, in 2008 (ICG, 2008)
groups; and the reintegration would ensure a transition from rebel to civilian and make an alternative way of living (UN, 2016a).

However, the implementation of the DDR programme failed due to a number of reasons. Firstly, the DDR programme was challenged by internal conflicts within the rebel groups (for instance the representative for MLCJ changed and the withdrawal from the agreement by FDPC made it difficult to implement). Secondly, the agreement lacked detailed reintegration strategies for armed militias. Thirdly, as part of the programme, rebel fighters would receive a payment destined to encourage them to hand in their arms and abandon the group. However, the continuation of other active armed groups left rebels less reluctant to hand in their arms, for safety reasons due to the lack of national security throughout the country. (ICG, 2010) The failure of the DDR programme certainly had an impact on the years that followed, and contributed to the unrest in the northern regions of CAR, the civil war, and the sectarian violence that followed.

The failed DDR programme and the large amount of arms circulating in the CAR and across its borders to Chad and Sudan was a national threat that the regime could not control; as Berman and Lombard argue ”the state’s ability to regulate weapons among civilians is essentially non-existent” (2008:103). Additionally, some of the arms used in the conflict is of European origin, originally destined for national armed forces under Bozize’s rule. The limited amount of national security, in combination with the chaos that followed after outbreak of the conflict, they fell in the hands of both Seleka and Anti-Balaka militias (Conflict Armament Research, 2015).

However, Bozize did not respect the conditions of the agreement and reports suggest that ”at no time has he [Bozize] ever shown a sincere willingness to take into consideration the complaints made against his regime” (ICG, 2008: 3). For instance, the representatives of the rebel groups that were ”integrated” into civilian political life received little political power - APRD ’s leader was appointed environment and ecology minister, and UFDR’s leader was appointed housing minister.

Overall Bozize’s government did little to take into consideration the grievances of rebel groups, and refused to implement the conditions of peace agreements. As mentioned above, part of the Inclusive Political Dialogue peace agreement included power sharing. Tull and Mehler (2005:388) argue that

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8 The DDR programme offered each fighter 130 dollars worth of food and non-food items as part of the demobilisation process (ICG, 2010)
power sharing agreements generally "entails a major adjustment in the domestic balance of power, since external actors level the political playing-field in favour of insurgents at the expense of state leaders". Bozize’s reason for refusing the power sharing agreement was his fear of being overthrown by rebel group, as its implementation would mean changes for Bozize’s regime (ICG, 2008:4). Furthermore, Mehler’s study of recent peace agreements 9 (signed between 1999-2008) throughout the African continent suggests that "power sharing was a prominent aspect of most recent African peace settlements", but few of them qualified as successful (2009:456). The Inclusive Political Dialogue’s unsuccessful strategy to integrate rebel group leaders into CAR’s political elite confirms Mehler’s idea that few power-sharing agreements are successful. The lack of implementation of these peace agreements would later be one of the main motivations for Seleka to oust Bozize, which sparked the beginning of the civil war and the religious conflict.

*Anti-Balaka’s political aspirations*

Anti-Balaka was originally a loose organisation of self-defence groups. As already mentioned, these self-defence groups’ involvement in the religious conflict was not originally political, but rather social, as will be discussed in section 3.1. However, over time, the self-defence groups/Anti-Balaka movement changed motivations and eventually adopted political aspirations.

When Bozize lost power to Djotodia in 2013, many Bozize-loyalist, former members of the national armed forces and Bozize’s Presidential guard, joined the local Anti-Balaka self-defence groups as a way to fight back against Seleka’s attacks on civilians. It can be argued that Anti-Balaka was created the moment Bozize-loyalists joined the local self-defence groups. Anti-Balaka rapidly became a more organised movement with experienced members of the national army and presidential guard. The local self-defence groups rapidly became a real opponent to the organised and heavily armed Seleka with international support. And instead of staying a self-defence group against Seleka attacks, the fact that Bozize loyalists joined the movement added a more political aspect to its aspirations; that of wanting to see Bozize reinstalled in power. (Weyns et al., 2014).

But why did members of the national army and Bozize’s Presidential Guard join Anti-Balaka? After Djotodia took power in 2013, Bozize fled to Cameroon but he still exercised influence from abroad. The Anti-Balaka movement and its activities were supported by Bozize (Bodansky, 2014). Some

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sources even suggest that Bozize created the Anti-Balaka movement and assured provision of material and financial support after the coup (United Nations, 2014). In May 2014 (over a year after he fled from the CAR), the Security Council Committee of the United Nations listed Bozize as “engaging in or providing support for acts that undermine the peace, stability and security of CAR” (United Nations, 2014). Throughout 2014, Anti-Balaka’s motives changed from self-defence and attacking Muslim minorities, to aspiring a formal political representation (Weyns et al., 2014). This suggests that the power struggle between Bozize and Seleka was one of the political factors behind the conflict.

2.2 - Social, ethnic and religious factors

As argued in the previous section, political factors enabled and motivated Seleka to advance towards Bangui, oust President Bozize, and sparked the civil war. However, in this section I argue that social issues within the CAR is the main reason that the political conflict could developed into a religious one that rapidly escalated to involve increasing numbers of Christian and Muslim civilians. There are two main components of the social factors that contributed to the religious conflict, namely ethnic favouritism within national politics and marginalisation against Central African Muslims.

Ethnic and religious favouritism

The Central African Republic has 82 ethnic groups (Joshua Project, 2016). The largest ethnic groups are the Baya (33%), the Banda (27%) and the Mandjia (13%) (CIA, 2016), and members of all three groups are Christians (Joshua Project, 2016). About 50% of the population are Christians while only 15% of Central Africans are Muslims10. This section will discuss how CAR’s ethnic and religious diversity caused social division between Central Africans, and how this division was one of the causes that led to the religious conflict.

The importance of ethnicity and religion in Central African politics

Since independence in 1960 and up till the 1980s, there was no evidence of ethnicity playing a major role in Central Africans lives or in national politics. However, in 1981 when Andre Kolingba gained power, the CAR political environment changed and ethnicity started to gain more impor-

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10 CAR’s population consists of 35% animists, 25% protestants, 25% Roman Catholics and 15% Muslims (CIA, 2016)
tance for the country’s political elite. Belonging to the Yakoma ethnic group, Kolingba strongly favored members of his own ethnicity and appointed them to key posts, especially to important positions within the national army. Kolingba had thereby established “for the first time ethnic identity as the crucial factor in the political culture of the CAR” (Berg: 2008:20). When Kolingba lost power to Patasse 12 years later, 70% of the country’s army were members of the Yakoma ethnicity (Berg, 2008). Kolingba’s strategy set the tone for the upcoming presidents, who adopted Kolingba’s strategy and surrounded themselves with close family and ethnicity members. Even when Patasse came to power in 1993, through the country’s first relatively free election, ethnic favouritism continued (Berg, 2008). Patasse continued to organise his regime along the same lines as Koningba, and recruited members of his ethnic group, the Kaba, in key positions, including the entire presidential guard. Patasse took the ethnic favouritism a step further by making clear salary and equipment differences between the presidential guard and army, which resulted in the army protesting violently on three occasions between April and November 1996 (Berg, 2008). Ethnic importance in politics continued as Bozize took power in 2003. Nepotism and ethnic favoritism was further deepened during Bozize’s regime as he appointed close kin of the Gbaya ethnicity, to key posts (Berg, 2008).

I argue that the ethnic importance that emerged in national politics in the 1980s created social divisions between Central Africans of different ethnicities. Not only did it determine social status, but also influenced the socio-economic opportunities. As Franck and Rainer’s study (2012) confirms, the ethnicity of the leader in the CAR plays an essential role in government’s education and health policies, causing health and educational opportunities to be based on one’s ethnicity. The political elite’s ethnic favouritism had an impact on Central African society and ethnicity became a social divider that caused discrimination and violence, especially against ethnic minorities (World Bank, 2012:49).

Central African ethnic groups are generally characterised by a particular religion - either Christianity, Islam or Animism. Out of the CAR’s 82 ethnic groups, 53 of these are Christian, 19 are Animist and 10 are Muslim (Joshua Project, 2016). Because of the ethnic groups’ strong attachment to one particular religion, the ethnic favouritism discussed above indirectly translates into religious discrimination. The next section of this paper will explain how the religious discrimination against Central African Muslims was one of the main social factors that motivated Seleka to remove Bozize from power.
Central African Muslim ethnic groups mainly come from the north and northeastern parts of the CAR, where the Vakaga region is located. As will be explained in this section, the Vakaga region played an important role in the causes for the civil war outbreak and the inter-religious tensions that followed. The way the Vakaga region also contributed to the political factor behind the religious conflict was discussed in section 2.1.

The Vakaga region is located in the Central African Republic, but its population is culturally, socially and linguistically closer to Chad, Sudan and South Sudan. Sango, the CAR’s official language, is rarely spoken in the region that is dominated by Muslim ethnic groups. (ICG, 2007) This social division between the north and the rest of the CAR caused the country’s Christian majority to view people from the north as foreigners from Chad and Sudan (Weyns et al., 2014) The region also suffers from neglect by the state. Geographically it is difficult to access due to bad roads and for half the year the area is inaccessible and isolated from the rest of CAR. Furthermore, Vakaga’s population have limited access to education and healthcare (ICG, 2007).

When the Inclusive Political Dialogue was signed between Bozize and rebel group in 2008, it was agreed that the continuing discrimination against Muslims and northerners needed to be addressed. However, as noted above, Bozize refused to implement the agreement and Muslims and northerners were still treated differently from Christians. For instance, Central African public holidays do not reflect the Islamic holidays and administrative tasks like achieving national identity cards proved to be more complicated for Muslims than Christians (ICG, 2010). These political and social discriminations were Seleka’s main social motivation to remove Bozize from power.

The fact that many Central Africans considered Muslims and northerners to be foreigners, is of high importance in the discussion of the causes behind the religious conflict. Because Seleka’s fighters were almost exclusively Muslims, including its leader Djotodia, it made many to consider it as a foreign rebel group from Chad (a belief that was strengthened because of Seleka’s support from Chad). And when Seleka captured Bangui, the country had a Muslim leader for the first time since independence11.

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The marginalisation of Muslims in the CAR still continues today. The government’s inability to control the country results in strong violations of Human Rights; especially religious rights. In the areas of the country where Anti-Balaka are in control, some Muslims have forcibly converted to Christianity; those who refuse are “banned from praying (except secretly); they cannot wear traditional Muslim clothing (…), and they cannot rebuild their mosques”; and are forced to speak Sango (the national language) or Gbaya\(^\text{12}\), instead of their ethnic language (Amnesty International, 2015: 12). In Balego, a town in central CAR, Anti-Balaka has reportedly imposed fines for Muslims refusing to convert. Those living in western regions are not safe to travel freely or be involved in the diamond trade - a common business sector for Central African Muslims before the civil war. (Amnesty International, 2015)

\[2.3 - \text{Economic factors}\]

In contrast to the political and social factors discussed above as major drivers behind the conflict, the economic factor played more of a secondary role. As will be argued in this section, the economic factors leading to the CAR’s religious conflict did not directly cause the conflict, but rather functioned as an instrument to finance both Seleka and Anti-Balaka, which possibly prolonged the civil war and the religious conflict that followed. But first it seems useful to give a background to the economic factor, which is CAR’s richness in natural resources.

\[\text{Natural resources}\]

Africa’s richness of natural resources has interested non-African states for long. The African countries’ borders were drawn to allocate colonial powers access to its natural resource and ”enriching the industrialised economies of the North whilst locking the colonies into a dependency on imported industrial goods” (Mentan, 2014:54). The Central African Republic is rich in natural resources, for instance timber, oil, gold (discovered in 1912) and diamonds (discovered in 1914).

\[\text{The mining industry}\]

Diamond and gold mining is dominated by artisanal miners (whose activity officially is referred to as ’Artisanal and Small Scale Mining’ (ASM))\(^\text{13}\) and is mainly located in the central and western

\(^{12}\) Gbaya is a Christian ethnicity, to which Bozize belongs.

\(^{13}\) 98% of the country’s mining sector is covered by artisanal miners (World Bank, 2008)
parts of the CAR. It is estimated that in 2008 there were about 80,000 artisanal miners in CAR, and between 300,000 and 400,000 are involved in the sector, sometimes offering the only way to make a living. There is a high illegal exploitation of minerals and social problems like drug abuse, sanitary-linked diseases, sexually transmitted diseases, and prostitution are more common in mining areas than the national average. Furthermore, only 25% of children of school age go to school (World Bank, 2008). The informal sector of the diamond and gold mining provides the population with an income and is often left uncontrolled by the state, and because “artisanal mining is considered a traditional and often family-based livelihood, frequently carried out in remote areas of the country, it has proved difficult to regulate or extend governmental control (...).” (World Bank, 2008:39)

Rebel groups and criminal gangs also exploit mines as a way to finance their operations, and take advantage of the lack of state control by smuggling minerals over the border and sell (World Bank, 2008). In 2003, the CAR joined the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS) but was suspended in May 2013 after failing to comply with one of the minimum requirements of the scheme as reports showed that rebel groups were “operating in the Eastern part of the country including in a number of diamond-producing areas around Sam Ouandja, Bria and Bamingui” (Kimberly Process, 2013:1). This Kimberly Process statement confirms that, before seizing Bangui in March 2013, Seleka captured diamond mines in the east of the CAR and demanded protection fees and taxes. After capturing Bangui, the rebel group also moved into western parts of the CAR and collected taxes from miners, trader and transports companies on the border between the CAR and Cameroon. After Seleka withdrew from the capital and the western regions, they still controlled mining areas in the centre and north east of the CAR. The withdrawal of Seleka from the western parts of the country let Anti-Balaka seize diamond rich areas instead. A report from May 2015 show evidence that Anti-Balaka are still involved in diamond mining in the west - either through mining, or by imposing illegal taxes and demanding money for protection of the mining site. (Amnesty International, 2015)

Since CAR’s suspension from the Kimberley Process at the start of the conflict, sources suggest that large amounts of diamonds have been smuggled out of the country over the borders with Cameroon or DRC and entered the international market. Also, since the outbreak of the conflict, buying houses in Bangui have purchased diamonds from Anti-Balaka and Seleka-controlled mines and stored them

14 The Kimberly Process Certification Scheme was launched in 2003, aimed to prevent import and export of diamonds to finance armed conflicts (World Bank, 2008)
until they are allowed to be exported (after the Kimberley Process suspension is removed). (Amnesty International, 2015)

Some of Seleka’s members were previously involved in the diamond mining. After Bozize came to power in 2003, the CAR joined the Kimberley Process and Bozize attempted to gain greater control over the diamond sector. This caused tensions with locals involved in the sector, who became more motivated to join Seleka. Also, Bozize replaced diamond traders with members of his own ethnicity, which caused resentment among the former diamond traders, thus became motivated to regain their former activities by ousting Bozize from power. (Weyns et al., 2014).

The timber industry

The Central African Republic is also rich in timber, and the sector used to make up "40% of the country’s export earnings" (EU FLEFT Facility, 2014). A Global Witness report (2015) reveals that timber was used to finance Seleka’s activities before and after the coup in 2013, through three foreign logging companies (one French, one Lebanese and one Chinese company), who have paid Seleka in 2013 a total of 3.4 million euros in "bribes, to pass roadblocks, for armed escort, and for the protection of their logging sites". The Government of the Central African Republic has denied the allegations, arguing that Seleka and Anti-Balaka has never seized the forestry areas in the southwest of the CAR where majority of logging occur, and the logging companies concerned have not voluntarily contributed financially to Seleka or Anti-Balaka, but that they were rather forced to pay members of Seleka and Anti-Balaka at illegal road check points (Le Citoyen, 2015).

There is no equivalent to the Kimberley Process for timber but there are export agreements that attempt to regularise the process of exportation. For instance the Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) of the European Union (EU) aims to prevent illegal exports from Central African Republic to the EU and impose a set of economic, social and environmental conditions. The agreement has been implemented in the CAR since 2012 and is still ongoing (EU FLEGT Facility, 2014). However, unlike the Kimberley Process, conflict timber does not force suspension of the CAR’s exportations to the EU since the outbreak of the conflict, which means that the forestry sector has financially contributed to the conflict.
Seleka and Anti-Balaka plundering activities

In addition to the above discussion on how natural resources is one of the economic factors contributing to the conflict, there conflict has a second economic cause - plundering. Rather than directly causing the conflict, it was used as an instrument to motivate fighters, and finance their activities. Plundering on civilians and government buildings was carried out by both Seleka fighters and Anti-Balaka fighters.

Anti-Balaka’s economic motivations contributed to the conflict in two ways. On the one hand Christians’ bitterness grew over time because both national and foreign Muslims were talented businessmen and had long experience in the mining industry (World Bank, 2008). This bitterness towards Muslims was added to the already existing social factors of the conflict (discussed in section 2.2), and may have played a minor role in the outbreak of the religious conflict. It should be noted that the mining activities were not only operated by Central Africans. Foreign nationals (both Muslims and Christians) from Sudan, Chad, Cameroon, Mali and Senegal were also involved, sometimes causing tensions between foreign miners and Central African miners (World Bank, 2008).

The second economic factor for Anti-Balaka was one that emerged after the religious conflict started. As explained above, Anti-Balaka’s original motivation behind attacks was firstly self-defence from Seleka attacks, and later the resentment of successful Muslim businessmen. But these economic motives grew as the conflict developed, and eventually Anti-Balaka attacks against Seleka and civilians became greed-motivated (Weyns et al., 2014). Anti-Balaka groups active in the west of the country plundered and offered ”protection against money” at mining sites and mineral export houses. Additionally, Anti-Balaka groups collected illegal taxes for road transports. (Weyns et al. 2014; Amnesty International, 2015b).

As discussed above, although Anti-Balaka may have had some economic interests that made them advance deeper into the conflict, their motivations seem to have been mainly social, and later religious, rather than economic. In addition to the lethal attacks carried out by Anti-Balaka towards Muslims, plundering of civilians followed. Looting was a way to motivate fighters as well as a way to finance the operations by later selling stolen valuable items and therefore allowed a continuation of the conflict. (Weyns et al., 2014)
Before seizing the capital, Seleka’s looting did not specifically target civilians, but Seleka was rather interested in necessary items, like food and military equipment (Weyns et al., 2014) However, after gaining power and as Anti-Balaka attacks intensified, Seleka members took advantage of the chaos and plundered NGOs, government building, and police and military depots, to collect arms, vehicles and fuel (ICG, 2014).
In the previous sections of this paper, the political, social and economic causes behind the religious conflict have been discussed. Although these were discussed in three separate parts, I argue that they did not act independently of each other. This part of the paper will discuss the overlapping relationship between these factors. There are several themes that are linked to the social, political and economic factors, useful to gain a deeper understanding of the outbreak of the civil war and the religious violence. Firstly it will be argued that lawlessness in the CAR explains how Anti-Balaka was created. Secondly, the role of the CAR’s weakened state and how it prolonged the civil war, will be discussed. And thirdly, the importance of nationality, ethnicity and religion in the conflict will be examined. At end of this part of the paper there will also be a brief discussion about the situation in the CAR today, and what can be done to resolve the ongoing instability in the CAR.

3.1 - Lawlessness and the creation of Anti-Balaka

The instability in the northeastern areas of the CAR (discussed in section 2.1) and the coup d’etat that ousted Bozize in 2013 (explained in section 1.2), shows that the CAR is a weak state with a continuing inability to gain control over its territory. It can be argued that the political, social and economic factors discussed in the previous sections are all due to the CAR’s fragile and unstable state, and the lawlessness that has dominated the country for years. The CAR’s lawlessness is important in the causes for the religious conflict, because firstly it allows rebel groups, criminal gangs and road bandits to operate freely, especially in the rural areas of the country. Secondly, it created a favourable environment for both Seleka to carry out attacks on civilians (explained in section 1.2) and the creation of Anti-Balaka.

In addition to the Central African, Chadian and Sudanese rebel groups active in the northeast of the CAR (Giroux et al. 2009), the country’s northwestern border areas shared with Cameroon and Chad is also heavily frequented by road bandits, who operate in gangs of between 15 and 20 individuals, attacking local communities as they search for valuable items and money. Using automatic arms like Soviet Union Kalachnikov, Belgian Fal, and French Mas 36, road bandits commonly attack in the mornings or evenings in the rural areas. During an attack, habitants are generally grouped together in the town centre, while each habitant separately collects valuable items and money from...
their home. Rape and kidnapping of young girls, who are generally returned in exchange of a sum, is also common. The emergence of road bandits in the area is mostly due to instability in the region, partly because of the Chadian civil war between 1970 and 1980 and interethnic tensions among Sara and other local ethnic groups spilling over the borders to Cameroon, Chad and Sudan. Some ethnic groups are more often than others accused of being road bandits, which causes further tensions between the different groups. Furthermore, the lack of livelihood opportunities encourages individuals to turn to criminality in order to make a living, leaving the area is a sort of "no man’s land". (Touoyem, 2011:38)

The lack of national security forces in the country leaves the population in a vulnerable state. Unable to rely on the state to keep its population safe, inhabitants find other ways to impose order and safety in communities. When conflicts arise in the rural areas, village chiefs are generally addressed to restore peace, and in the urban areas of the CAR, the quarter chief leads the peace process. In many communities, inhabitants prefer this alternative as "village chiefs provide justice that is rapid, less expensive, and results in judgements that are in keeping with their communities’ values" (World Bank Group, 2012:39). The village chiefs, advised by five counsellors, are either elected or hereditarily given the responsibility of conflict resolution, and in some cases consider themselves as state representatives, although the state does not share this view (World Bank Group, 2012).

The lawlessness in the CAR has also forced the emergence of self-defence groups in the western parts of the country. These self-defence groups play an important role in how the religious conflict developed because Anti-Balaka has its origins in such self-defence groups. The community self-defence groups that later formed the Anti-Balaka movement emerged in mid-2000 (about the same time as the Central African Bush War started), in the areas around Bossangoa, Bocaranga and Bozoum, in western CAR. Originally composed of traditional hunters resisting attacks from armed pastoralists and road-bandits (locally known as Zaranguinas), these self-defence groups were a direct consequence of the CAR’s lawlessness. As explained in section 2.1 (under ‘Anti-Balaka’s political aspirations’), Anti-Balaka shifted its operations from only fighting Zaranguinas to carrying out revenge attacks against Seleka fighters, which clearly demonstrates how lawlessness played a major role in how the religious violence emerged. Although these defence-groups originally consisted of Christians, Muslims and Animists, since the emergence of Muslim-dominated Seleka, its membership became mainly Christian. As argued in part 2.2, Seleka’s almost exclusive Muslim membership
was a major factor leading to the uprise of Christian civilians, who became increasingly motivated to join the Anti-Balaka movement. (Weyns et al., 2014)

The lawlessness of the CAR discussed above can be explained by the country’s weakened state, which will be discussed in the next section.

3.2 - A weakened state

One of the main causes for the CAR’s weakened state is foreign involvement in national politics. In section 2.1 it was explained that France has a long history of political involvement in its former colonies, including the CAR, and that Chad and Sudan have interests in Central African politics. This section will draw upon a theory developed by Andersen (2000) to explain how international pressure to democratise the CAR has further weakened the state and made it more vulnerable to civil war. Secondly, I will make use of theories of pre-conditions for social conflict and explain how the CAR’s weakened state, together with other factors caused the religious conflict to break out. Thirdly, it will be argued that the state’s weakness also contributed to Djotodia’s inability to control Seleka fighters, who’s atrocities against civilians was a major direct cause for the outbreak of the religious violence. And finally, I will use theories about how civil war is prolonged by the involvement of foreign states and natural resources, which allowed the civil war to continue and eventually break into sectarian violence.

Foreign involvement in the CAR and democracy

The African continent has seen some of the world’s longest serving Presidents with Chad’s Idriss Deby in power since 1990, Libya’s Mohammed Khadafi serving between 1969-2011, and Gabon’s Omar Bongo Ondimba who ruled between 1967-2009. Democratic elections are not a tradition in most African countries and a forced coup d’etat is a more common path to power. Since independence, the CAR has had a violent history of coup d’etat, and it is difficult to argue that it has a tradition of democracy. Between 2006 and 2013, the independent watchdog organisation Freedom House rated the CAR as a ‘partly free’ country. Since 2014, however, it has received the worst results possible in terms of its freedom, civil liberties and political rights (2015). To theorise the link between the CAR’s lack of democratic tradition and the current religious conflict, I will use a theory developed by Andersen (2000).
Andersen (2000) argues that countries experienced with long democratic history generally benefit from multiparty elections is based on trust and enhances togetherness, as voters feel they have the possibility to express their opinion. But in countries lacking democratic traditions, multipart elections can have the opposite effect, by instead causing competition between social groups. Taking the example of Rwanda’s genocide in 1994, he argues that pressure by aid donors to democratise Rwanda weakened the regime, which is suggested to be one of the factors enabling the Rwandan genocide to happen.

Democratic elections in the CAR was encouraged by foreign states in the early 1990s, which led to the country’s first election held in 1993 when Patasse came to power (and re-elected in 1999) (Royal African Society, 2016). Since then, the CAR has organised elections regularly; in 2005 and 2011 when Bozize was re-elected after seizing the country in a coup in 2003; and in 2016 when Bozize’s former prime minister Faustin Archange Touadera was elected. Applying Andersen’s theory to the CAR case and taking into account the importance ethnicity plays in the CAR (discussed in section 2.2) and the lack of democratic tradition, it is doubtful that democratic elections has benefitted the country. Instead it may have further weakened the state (as was the case in Rwanda), and made the CAR more vulnerable to rebel groups and foreign involvement (as argued above). In this way, it can be argued that similarly to the Rwandan case, the attempts to democratise the CAR resulted in a weakening of the regime. This weakened state can be blamed for not only for being more vulnerable to the coup d’etat and the civil war, but also failure to prevent and stop the sectarian violence.

In lines with the above argument that stateside weakened by pressure from foreign states to democratise countries without a history of democracy, it can also be argued that the use of power-sharing peace agreements had an impact on the outbreak of the CAR’s religious violence. When a power sharing agreement was signed between rebel representatives and Bozize’s regime in 2008 (that marked the end of the 2004-2008 civil war), the Central African state was further weakened as it put Bozize’s regime in an even more vulnerable position, as few power sharing agreements in Africa succeed (Mehler, 2009). Tull and Mehler (2005:376) argue that the proposed solution of power sharing is ”the west’s preferred instrument of peace-making in Africa”. However, as Mehler’s study (2009) reveals, the conditions of some peace agreements (like power sharing) is rarely successful in Africa and it can has devastating results as they weaken the existing regime.
The CAR’s weakened state was not only associated with Bozize’s regime. When Seleka seized Bangui in March 2013, Seleka fighters carried out attacks on civilians. Its leader, Djotodia, reportedly had difficulties controlling Seleka’s combatants and, as mentioned earlier, formally dissolved the coalition in September 2013. It can be argued that Djotodia’s failure to control Seleka fighters (which was a direct cause for the outbreak of violence) was due to the weakened state. When some former members of the national army and Bozize’s presidential guard joined Anti-Balaka (Weyns et al., 2014), Djotodia was faced with an unstable national army and armed militias groups. With the collapse of the state after the coup d’etat, it was, for obvious reasons, impossible for the state to control the situation and prevent the escalation of the conflict. Furthermore, when Djotodia disbanded Seleka, the rebel coalition lacked leadership. Seleka, that came to power with the help of Chad and Sudan, now instead consisted of groups of individuals without clear leadership (Weyns et al., 2014). This, it is argued, certainly played a role in how the religious conflict escalated and made it more difficult to solve. The peace talks that were originally held between Bozize and Seleka leaders (for instance the Libreville Agreement signed in January 2013 (United Nations, 2013b)) was now replaced with peace talks (for instance the Brazzaville ceasefire agreement signed in July 2014 (IRIN, 2014)) between two militias groups lacking united leaderships; the Anti-Balaka (that had lacked proper leadership from the start) and Seleka fighters that remained active despite Djotodia’s efforts to disband the movement.

I argue that the CAR’s weak state, and hence being vulnerable to foreign interventions, contributed to the conflict in the sense that it prolonged the civil war and enabled it to escalate into the tensions between Muslims and Christians.

3.3 - A prolonged civil war due to a weakened state and natural resources

This section explains how the civil war was prolonged due to the CAR’s weakened state and natural resources. This is important in the discussion of the causes behind the religious conflict because it can be argued that the elements discussed below allowed the continuation of the conflict and therefore indirectly caused the coup d’etat to develop into civil war, which developed into sectarian violence.

Cumingham (2010) argues that when a country is in such a fragile state as the CAR, it is an easy target foreign states’ political interventions because the country lacks the inability to gain control
over its territory. When foreign states participate in civil wars, the conflict is less easily solvable, partly because the human and economic costs of the war have less impact if it is abroad, than if it happens on national territory. Applying Cumingham’s theory, it is argued that foreign state’s involvement (discussed in section 2.1) in the conflict did not only cause the coup d’état, but its involvement also complicated the situation and, by adopting Cumingham’s argument, it prolonged the civil war and allowed it to turn into the peak of violent clashes occurring throughout 2014.

Lockyer (2011) argues that when rebel groups are supported by foreign states, it modifies the original balance of power between a conflict’s different parties. When one a rebel groups, like Seleka, receive the support of a nation, it’s gain in power in undeniable and naturally influences the balance of power. By applying this theory the CAR case, it is argued that Seleka’s power to overthrow Bozize was enhanced by Chad’s support for the rebel coalition. Seleka was composed of former Chadian soldiers (among other) that stayed in the north east of CAR after the CAR Bush War (Weyns, et al., 2014) and their membership added a military strength to Seleka. However, the impact of Chad’s political support had for Seleka cannot be ignored as it contributed immensely to Seleka’s military success.

In addition to the discussion above on how foreign actors prolong a civil war, Humphreys (2005) argues that natural resources also enables conflicts to be prolonged, because natural resources help parties to finance their operations. Above, it was explained that both Seleka and Anti-Balaka were exploiting mines after Bozize’s fall, which motivated militias to continue (Weyns et al., 2014). Although Seleka was originally financially assisted by Chad (Weyns et al., 2014), and Anti-Balaka by Bozize (Bodansky, 2014), Humphreys’ theory can be applied to the conflict, and it is argued that the natural resources they held hands on enabled the war to continue and escalate into the violent clashes between Muslims and Christians.

Furthermore, Goulding (1999) argues that conflicts in Africa are more difficult to solve if they are internal conflicts (like the CAR’s ethno-religious conflict) than conflicts between states. The explanations found are firstly, the fact that factors leading to internal conflicts are of “high political sensitivity (the quality of governance, law and order, the equity of economic and social systems, ethnic or other discrimination)” (1999:160). Secondly, one of the parties involved in the conflict is likely to be less experienced in political negotiation, violent and lacking discipline. Thirdly, civilians are more exposed to violence and atrocities occurring during internal conflicts than during external con-
flicts. Applying Goulding’s theory to the CAR’s civil war, the difficulty to solve the conflict can be explained by the lack of good governance, the country’s lawlessness, and the government’s discrimination against Central African Muslims discussed in previous parts of this paper. In terms of the parties’ experiences in negotiation, the Seleka can be considered as a relatively experienced negotiator as the rebel groups forming the coalition were involved in the negotiations with Bozize’s government marking the end of the Bush War in 2007-2008, and with Chad’s support backing Seleka rebels. However, it can be argued that the Anti-Balaka was less experienced in negotiation, both because of its fragmented nature (composed of loose groups and the lack of a united leadership) and that the movement originates in less organised self-defence groups that originally did not have a political agenda nor were they politically active.

3.4 - Pre-conditions for rebellion and social conflict

This section will use a theoretical approach to show how the political, social and economic factors overlap and together caused the civil war. Continuing the discussion of how the CAR’s weakened state caused the conflict, social conflict theories developed by Collier and Hoeffler (2004) and Nasong’o (2015), it will be added to the discussion.

When a social group expresses grievance towards the state, Nasong’o argues that there are two kinds of responses by the state, “depending on the nature and orientation of its political elites” (2015:18). Either the state take into consideration the grievances and instruments are put in place to address the issues, or it ignores the grievances and instead encourages ”suppression, expulsion, institutionalised discrimination, or even extermination of the group” (2015:18). Going back to the discussion on how Bozize refused to implement the peace agreements signed with rebel groups in 2008 (ICG, 2008), it can be argued that Bozize’s regime chose the second option, and ignore the grievances, which understandably left groups with deeper grievances.

Collier and Hoeffler argues that ”rebellion occurs when grievances are sufficiently acute that people want to engage in violent protest” (2004: 564). The growing grievances of northerners and Central African Muslims explain how Seleka gained members and could start mobilise these, which marked the beginning of Seleka’s offensive against Bozize.
Nasong’o proposes a theory that show how these different elements are linked together and when put together they constitute the pre-conditions for social conflict.

Nasong’o suggests the following equation to foresee situations in which group violence can emerge:

"Ethnic Political Mobilisation + Policies of Denial + an X Factor = Group violence” (2015:18)

Whereas the X factor

"could be the existence of a strong external patron for the mobilised group, the emergence of a leadership radically committed to the cause of the group, the rational calculation on the part of the mobilised group leader that the potential benefits of fighting outweigh the cost of conflict, or the failure of the state to effectively suppress the mobilised group and thus reduce the cost-benefit incentives for mobilisation” (2015: 18)

Applying this theory to the religious conflict in the CAR and the factors outlined in previous sections of this paper, the equation would be:

Seleka’s political mobilisation (see Part 2 of this paper) + How Bozize’s ignored grievances put forward by northerners and Muslims (see Part 2), + Seleka’s support from Chad and other neighbouring countries (see Part 2) = Conflict

These theories help to explain why the Seleka’s motivations, Bozize’s role in the conflict, and how foreign states’ involvement caused the outbreak of conflict. However, Collier and Hoeffler, and Nasong’o’s theories explains pre-conditions of social conflicts in general. As the conflict in the CAR has a religious aspect to it, it is relevant to continue the discussion into how the conflict turned into sectarian violence.
The social, ethnic and religious factors (more precisely ethnic favouritism in politics and discrimination against Central African Muslims) was one of Seleka’s motivations to capture Bangui and remove Bozize and his regime from power. There is little sign that Bozize’s regime did anything to address the discrimination against the country’s minority Muslims. When Central Africans in remote areas of the country, especially in the north east, mobilised for political action, Bozize responded with no real action for change. Furthermore, the peace agreements signed by Bozize and rebel groups by the end of the Central African Bush War, were not implemented (ICG, 2010). Another suggestion that Bozize refused to take into account the unstable situation in the north is demonstrated with an incident in northern CAR in 2002. 63 Sudanese nomads were killed in the north of CAR and Sudan tried to calm down locals by financially compensating the victims’ families and were planning to construct a school as well as a mosque. The financial resources for the plans were, however, embezzled by Bozize’s regime that came to power shortly after (ICG, 2007). Bozize’s lack of engagement can be seen as a major part of the outbreak of the conflict.

When Seleka came to power it represented a “foreign”, already marginalised group of fighter that Bozize’s regime was already discriminating (ICG, 2010). Furthermore, its Muslim membership, ruling over a majority Christian population, made many Central African Christians react, and became increasingly motivated to join Anti-Balaka to fight back. When Seleka fighters responded with revenge attacks, the Anti-Balaka got even more motivated, although they were not necessarily fighting against a foreign group. Although the different factors contributing to the conflict is discussed throughout this paper, it does not quite explain what role religion actually play in the conflict. This will be the focus of the next section.

3.5 - Religion, nationality and ethnicity - the religious violence explained

Throughout this paper, it has been argued that many underlying factors (mainly political and social, but to some extent also economic) have caused the outbreak of the civil war and the attacks between Christians and Muslims that is often referred to as a ‘religious conflict’. I argue that the religious conflict between Muslims and Christians in the Central African Republic had little to do with religion. Instead, the attacks between Muslims and Christians was a mainly social conflict. To begin the discussion of how the conflict was not a religious conflict, it is useful to discuss what is meant by “religion” and to attempt to provide a definition of the term.
Religion and the conflict

Emile Durkheim’s theory of religion offers a foundation in order to understand the social aspect of religion, and consequently the ethno-religious conflict discussed in this paper. Stemming from a sociological approach of religious beliefs and organisations, Durkheim defines religion as

“a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden - beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them.” (1915:47)

Furthermore, he argues that religion is an “eminently collective thing” (1915:47) and sees religion as “something eminently social” (1915:10). The idea of religion as being something social, is useful in the context of this paper, and Durkheim brings out the social aspect of religion and the importance of religious communities and groups for a religion’s mere existence. As argued in this paper, the conflict between Muslims and Christians in the CAR has a social cause behind it, although the political and economic are also important. It has been argued throughout this paper that the Anti-Balaka and Seleka are two distinct groups that have been portrayed as religious groups due to their almost exclusive Christian and Muslim members. To support this idea, it can be argued that individuals sharing a common religious belief “feel themselves united to each other by the simple fact that they have a common faith” (Durkheim, 1915:43). In the Central African case, it can be argued that religion has taken the role of uniting groups of people (in this case Christians versus Muslims) and because of political and economic factors, these groups have clashed and the unity within the group has further grown.

Seleka, who consisted mainly of members from the country’s minority Muslim community, has not shown any sign being interested in a religious conflict with the country’s majority Christian population. In a highly symbolic act, Pope Francis visited a mosque in the capital Bangui in November 2015, and urged Muslims and Christians in the CAR to reconcile. Muslim militias were reportedly present at the mass held at the Barthelemy Boganda stadium in Bangui, and shared the joy of the pope’s presence with civilians present. (The Guardian, 2015b) Instead, Seleka had mainly political and social motivations to pursue their attacks. Seleka’s attacks on civilians in the beginning of the conflict were not specifically directed towards Christians. With only 12% of Central Africans being Muslims, attacks on civilians is for obvious reasons going to affect the country’s Christian majority too. After the Muslim rebel coalition seized the capital, Anti-Balaka responded to the attacks by
adding a religious aspect to the conflict, by solely attacking individuals believed to be Muslims as Anti-Balaka militias assumed all Muslims supported Seleka’s atrocities, just likeSeleka fighters later assumed all Christians supported Anti-Balaka’s atrocities. Instead this paper argues that the root of the conflict is a conflict between two social groups, who have used religious identification as a way to differentiate between "us and them”.

Hardin (1997:169) takes the example of the Rwandan genocide and focuses on social differences between Hutu and Tutsi in Rwanda, and argues that these two groups were social categories determined by their social status, rather than ethnic categories, and suggests that "(...) the division of the Tutsi and Hutus into hostile ethnic groups is not an escapable primordial fact but a social construction (...)". I argue that this theory also applies to the relation between Muslims and Christians in the CAR. The view of Central African Muslims as being foreigners is a social issue rather than a fact, and additional marginalisation of Muslims in politics led to the resentment that Muslims, and especially grievances Seleka had towards Bozize’s regime. It can be argued that a major difference between the Rwandan genocide and the CAR religious conflict is that at no point did the CAR government (neither Bozize’s regime nor Seleka’s leadership) officially encourage attacks on the population, which was the case in Rwanda. This can have helped a even deeper escalation of conflict that could have ended in genocide, as it did on Rwanda.

Hardin also suggests that "ethnic groups in almost all quarters of the globe seem deliberately to engage in violence in order to preempt violence against themselves. In this, they are like Mafia leaders, who strive to murder rivals for the leadership in order to preempt suffering further themselves (1997:153). Hardin also argues that "violence is a tipping phenomenon because, once it begins or reaches a high enough level, it is often self-reinforcing” (1997:155), which seems to apply to the conflict in the CAR.

Both Central African and foreign Muslims living in the CAR had a reputation of being successful in the business sector (Weyns et al., 2014) and in the diamond sector (Amnesty International, 2015). When Anti-Balaka started carrying out attacks on Muslims in Bangui and the western part of the CAR, Muslims involved in the diamond industry fled the advancing Anti-Balaka militias (Amnesty International, 2015). However, Amnesty International (2015) findings show that that not all Muslims were equally viewed. Muslims of Senegalese and Malian origin, as well as Muslims of Christian descent, were more accepted by Central African Christians than Muslims from Chad or Sudan.
These findings suggest that Anti-Balaka attacks on Muslims was not necessarily directed towards Muslims, but rather individuals of Chadian and Sudanese origins.

When the Seleka alliance attacked civilians in the beginning of the conflict, it was not on religious ground. However, the conflict took a religious turn when the Anti-Balaka made revenge attacks against Muslims, and Muslims responded with violent attacks (Weyns et al., 2014) The Anti-Balaka were motivated by the fact that Seleka, who took over power, were Muslims, and seen as foreigners that took over the country, adding to the fact that Djotodia was the country’s first ever Muslim president. (IRIN, 2015).

One of Seleka’s motives was a social and political change in the CAR; stop exclusion of Muslims from the political arena and the discrimination the Muslim community. As Seleka started attacks and plundering civilians in the northern region of CAR in late 2012, Christians were not particularly targeted. It was in the conflict’s later stages, when the Anti-Balaka started attacking Muslims by revenge, that the Seleka started targeting Christian civilians more than Muslim civilians (Berg, 2008).

**Conflict resolution**

The religious violence in the conflict reached its peak in 2014, and since then the number of attacks have decreased. However, most of rural CAR is still controlled by Seleka and Anti-Balaka fighters and as explained above, the overall lawlessness, and social problems still remain. Since the civil war started in 2013, an estimated 6500 people have been killed and 369 000 people are internally displaced (Council of Foreign Relations, 2016). It is estimated that out of the 122 000 Muslims living in the capital before the civil war started, only 15 000 are left and are ”surrounded by Christian militias” (The Guardian, 2015b).

It can be argued that foreign intervention (for instance France, South African and the African Union) has helped to calm tensions down since 2014. In March 2016, France announced that it will end its military intervention and withdraw its 2500 troops, by the end of the year (France 24, 2016). This can be interpreted as a sign that the most critical moment of the sectarian violence and political uncertainty has passed. However, the country is still in a fragile state. The problem with active rebel groups, lawlessness and a weakened state discussed above is still an issue. Touoyem (2001) argues that in order to restore stability in the region, it is essential to address the issues of road-bandits, and
the ethnic tensions that occur in the border areas. Cooperation between Chad and CAR is also needed to address the issue of the instability in the complicated border area (International Crisis Group, 2014b).
PART 4 : CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper was to discuss the political, social and economic factors behind the Central African Republic sectarian violence that started in 2013. The first part of this paper provided a general introduction to the conflict while the second part discussed the causes behind tensions between Muslims and Christians in detail.

The political factors found are of two kinds - the external and internal political actors. The external actors are France, Sudan and the ECCAS. Sudan and Chad supported Seleka rebel coalition in a strategic attempt to install stability in the northeast of the Central African Republic bordering to Chad and Sudan. The internal political actors actively contributing to the civil war were Seleka and Anti-Balaka. While Seleka had clear political motivations from the start, Anti-Balaka had rather social motivations that drove them to participate to the civil war.

The social, ethnic and religious factors of the conflict is the Central African political tradition to favour members of one’s ethnicity; both in politics; health and education. This ethnic favouritism is closely linked to the marginalisation of Central African northerners, who are mainly Muslims.

The economic factors behind the conflict are mainly natural resources (especially the diamond, gold and timber industry) and greedy looting. Reports have shown that both Seleka and Anti-Balaka have exploited the CAR’s natural resources; which has contributed to financing the civil war.

It is argued that these three factors are important at different stages of the conflict. The political factors played a crucial role in the early stages of the conflict. Political interests drove Seleka to oust Bozize (an event that sparked the outbreak of the civil war). The social factors (marginalisation and ethnic favouritism) played a more central role in the events after the coup d’etat and it can be argued that these social factors were the reason why the coup d’etat turned into a civil war with religious conflicts. Once the civil war had started and attacks between Anti-Balaka and Seleka intensified, the economic factor is important. The two parties’ gained revenue from natural resources and looting, which enabled them to finance their activities and continue the war.

The third part of this paper discussed some additional factors behind the conflict; the CAR’s lawlessness and its link to the creation of Anti-Balaka; how the weakened Central African state was
vulnerable to civil war and failed to stop the sectarian violence; and how the war was prolonged because of foreign involvement and exploitation of natural resources. Nasong’o’s theory of the preconditions for social conflict allowed us to see how the some of the factors discussed in part two are linked together, and caused the civil war to break out.

Throughout the paper, the main focus lies on the social, political and economic side of the conflict. However, at the end of the paper, there was a discussion about what role nationality, ethnicity and religion play in the conflict. It was argued that the ‘religious conflict’ had little to do with religion. Sources showed that Seleka never really had a religious agenda, and Anti-Balaka seemed more concerned with the fact that many Seleka fighters were of Chadian origin.

A quote by Central African Archbishop Dieudonne Nzapalainga sums up the non-religious aspect of the conflict. Speaking at an award ceremony by the Sergio Vieira de Mello foundation in August 2015, Nzapalainga argues that “the anti-balaka were not Christian militias but defensive militia who wanted avenge their brothers (...) The same with Seleka, who were not Muslim rebels but young people who’d been exploited by political groups” (Caritas Internationals, 2015). It is hoped that this paper will contribute to the already existing literature on religious conflicts by demonstrating the importance of studying the underlying factors that causes conflicts between social groups – conflicts referred to as “religious conflicts” but in fact has little to do with religion.


• Bodansky, Y. 2014. Africa - the looming yet preventable crisis. [pdf] Issue no. 258. ISPSW. Available at: mercury.ethz.ch/serviceengine/Files/.../258_Bodansky.pdf [Accessed 6 May 2016].


