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EUROPAEA

2/2025

STUDIA
UNIVERSITATIS BABEŞ-BOLYAI

STUDIA EUROPAEA

Volume 70 (LXX), 2/2025,
December 2025

ISSN (print): 1224-8746; ISSN (online): 2065-9563; ISSN-L: 2065-9563
https://studia.reviste.ubbcluj.ro/index.php/subbeuropaea/

YEAR **(LXX) 2025**
MONTH **December**
ISSUE **2**

PUBLISHED ONLINE: 2025-12-16
PUBLISHED PRINT: 2025-12-31
ISSUE DOI: 10.24193/subbeuropaea.2025.2

S T U D I A

UNIVERSITATIS BABEŞ-BOLYAI

STUDIA EUROPAEA

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CULTURAL ASPECTS OF NEGOTIATION BETWEEN ISRAEL AND EGYPT LEADING TO CAMP DAVID ACCORDS 1979

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DOI: 10.24193/subbeuropaea.2025.2.01
Published Online: 2025-12-16
Published Print: 2025-12-31

Abstract
This article explores the cultural, intercultural, and interpersonal dimensions that shaped the negotiations between Israel and Egypt leading to the 1979 Camp David Accords. Drawing on theoretical frameworks in interculturalism, leadership studies, communication theory, and negotiation analysis, as well as firsthand accounts from actors involved, this study examines how cultural perceptions, religious symbolism, linguistic practices, and interpersonal relationships influenced the peace process. The study argues that while cultural and religious factors were not the direct causes of peace, they played an important enabling role, facilitating dialogue, reducing psychological distance, and helping negotiators humanize one another. Through a thematic and interpretive approach, the article situates the peace process within broader developments in Middle Eastern intercultural dynamics, including the later trajectory culminating in the Abraham Accords. It concludes that the Israel–Egypt peace negotiations demonstrate how intercultural competence, leadership vision, and personal diplomacy can reshape entrenched conflicts, creating new paradigms of regional coexistence.
Keywords: *Interculturalism; Israel–Egypt relations; Camp David Accords; diplomacy; political leadership; religion; communication; Middle East negotiations; Abraham Accords; cultural identity.*

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INTRODUCTION

The 1979 peace treaty between Israel and Egypt stands as one of the most transformative events in the modern Middle East. Beyond its immediate geopolitical significance, the treaty marked a profound shift in the cultural, psychological, and interpersonal landscape of a region long defined by conflict and distrust. While the political and military dimensions of the treaty have been explored extensively, the cultural and intercultural factors that shaped this diplomatic achievement remain underexamined. Yet, these factors played a subtle but crucial role. Cultural perceptions, religious identities, interpersonal rapport, and communicative styles influenced how leaders approached the negotiations, how delegations interacted, and how each side conceptualized the possibility of peace.

This article examines these cultural dimensions, drawing on both theoretical literature and the insights of individuals who participated directly in the negotiations. The article treats the peace process as a site of intercultural encounter, where deeply rooted historical narratives, symbolic gestures, and personal identities met in a complex diplomatic arena. Rather than interpreting the negotiations purely through the lens of strategy or realpolitik, this article approaches the Camp David process as an intercultural negotiation shaped by social norms, religious ideas, communication patterns, and leadership styles.

The thematic, interpretive structure of the article allows for a holistic examination of the ways in which culture operated throughout the process. The first section develops a theoretical understanding of interculturalism, negotiation theory, and leadership studies, illustrating how these frameworks illuminate the specific dynamics between Egypt and Israel, while the second section gives primary examples of intercultural aspects during the negotiations between Israel and Egypt at Camp David. The final concluding section draws broader conclusions about the place of interculturalism in Middle Eastern diplomacy, connecting the 1979 peace to subsequent developments such as the Abraham Accords.

While this article does not claim that cultural factors “caused” the peace, it demonstrates that peace would have been significantly more difficult to achieve without the cultural, symbolic, and interpersonal bridges forged by the leaders and negotiators. By unpacking these dimensions, this study offers a nuanced interpretation of how the peace between Israel and Egypt became possible and what it reveals about the broader possibilities for intercultural reconciliation in the Middle East. The concept of cultural diplomacy has grown in importance in recent decades. As Joseph Nye argues, cultural diplomacy is a soft power tool, which allows countries to achieve diplomatic goals without the usage of military strength or threatening with economic power.[1] This article further explores the discussions from these vantage points.

SECTION 1 – THEORETICAL APPROACH

Culture profoundly shapes the ways nations perceive one another. Edward Said's influential work *Orientalism* highlights how cultural narratives and symbolic constructions influence political behaviour and interstate relations.[2] In the context of the Arab–Israeli conflict, these dynamics were particularly salient. For decades, Israelis and Egyptians engaged not only in geopolitical confrontation but also in a symbolic and cultural confrontation. Each side interpreted the other through a lens of historical memory, religious identity, and collective trauma.

The cultural weight of these perceptions posed obstacles to diplomacy.[3] For many Egyptians, Israel represented a Western, foreign imposition – a perception rooted in Arab nationalist discourse, anti-colonial narratives, and the trauma of repeated wars. For Israelis, Egypt symbolized the formidable military power of the Arab world, a nation whose nationalism and pan-Arab identity positioned it as Israel's primary adversary for decades. These perceptions created psychological barriers that negotiation alone could not overcome.

The intercultural encounter between the two sides required not only political courage but a willingness to deconstruct entrenched stereotypes. Although cultural differences did not determine the success or failure of the negotiations, they shaped the diplomatic environment in which these negotiations unfolded. The leaders, interlocutors, and advisors who participated in the process had to navigate this cultural terrain carefully, sometimes intuitively, and sometimes through strategies rooted in intercultural competence.

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[1] J.S. Nye Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. New York: Public Affairs, 2005

[2] E. Said, *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978

[3] See discussion on this matter in: R. Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976

Interculturalism offers a more dynamic model of cultural relations than traditional multiculturalism. While multiculturalism emphasizes the coexistence of diverse cultures, interculturalism stresses active engagement, reciprocal understanding, and genuine interaction across cultural boundaries. Scholars such as Michael Byram, who emphasizes intercultural competence, show that engaging across cultural differences requires not only knowledge of the other but the communication skills, empathy, and adaptability necessary to bridge divides.[4]

In the negotiations between Egypt and Israel, interculturalism manifested as a gradual process in which symbolic gestures, respectful behaviour, and the recognition of shared cultural and religious norms helped reduce psychological distance. The fact that both societies were part of a broader Abrahamic tradition was a subtle but meaningful bridge. While this shared religious heritage did not determine the success of negotiations, its symbolic presence helped normalize dialogue.

This dynamic reflects an important element of interculturalism: cultures rarely exist in isolation. They constantly interact, overlap, and influence one another. The Middle East, despite its deeply rooted conflicts, has always been marked by cultural interconnections – linguistic, religious, commercial, and intellectual. The peace negotiations brought these latent interconnections to the surface.

The intercultural dynamics between Egypt and Israel can also be examined through the frameworks of Geert Hofstede and Fons Trompenaars. Hofstede's dimensions, particularly individualism versus collectivism and high versus low power distance, offer useful lenses for understanding leadership and negotiation styles.[5] Egyptian political culture, shaped by millennia of centralized authority and later by Arab nationalist ideologies, reflects relatively high-power distance, collectivist tendencies, and deference to hierarchical leadership. Israel, although also influenced by strong leaders and centralized authority structures, retains characteristics of a more individualistic society with robust internal debate, dissent, and open democratic discourse.

[4] M. Byram, *Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 1997

[5] G. Hofstede, *Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work-Related Values*. Los Angeles: SAGE, 1980

Trompenaars adds further insights through dimensions such as universalism versus particularism and neutral versus affective cultures.[6] Egyptians tend to operate within a more particularistic and affective cultural framework, where personal relationships and emotional expression are integral components of communication. Israelis, while also capable of emotionally intense communication, tend to emphasize directness, universal principles, and normative frameworks.

These differences influenced the negotiation styles of Sadat and Begin. Sadat, steeped in a political culture that values symbolism, emotional resonance, and charismatic leadership, approached diplomacy through grand gestures, historical speeches, and evocative language. Begin, though charismatic in his own right, operated within a legalistic, principled, and text-oriented mode of communication. His commitment to Jewish tradition and religious symbolism infused his political language with moral weight but also with a degree of rigidity. The ability of these two leaders to navigate their cultural differences – including contrasts in communication, leadership style, and emotional expression – was one of the remarkable features of the negotiations.

Gudykunst's work on intercultural communication, and his Anxiety/ Uncertainty Management (AUM) theory helps explain how individuals manage discomfort in intercultural encounters.[7] Negotiators from different cultural backgrounds often experience uncertainty about the other's intentions, norms, and expectations. High anxiety can lead to misinterpretation, mistrust, or withdrawal, while low anxiety supports open communication and empathy.

The Camp David negotiations, occurring after decades of hostility and multiple wars, naturally generated anxiety. Both sides carried deep historical grievances. Egyptians bore the scars of repeated military defeats, Israeli occupation of Sinai, and a sense of national humiliation offset partly by the 1973 war. Israelis carried the trauma of existential wars, regional isolation, and the fear that peace might compromise national security.

Yet, through symbolic gestures, respectful behaviour, and careful interpersonal communication, Sadat and Begin gradually reduced this anxiety. Their willingness to share religious traditions, whether Sadat's prayers

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[6] F. Trompenaars, *Riding the Waves of Culture: Understanding Diversity in Global Business*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1998

[7] W.B. Gudykunst, *Theorizing About Intercultural Communication*. Los Angeles: SAGE, 2004

or Begin's observance of Jewish ritual, created a humanizing environment. These moments demonstrated how otherwise abstract intercultural theories materialize in diplomatic practice.

Leadership studies offer rich insights into how individuals shape political trajectories. Max Weber's concept of charismatic authority describes how leaders with extraordinary personal qualities can mobilize societies toward transformative goals.[8] Sadat embodied this charismatic dimension. His decision to visit Jerusalem, an unprecedented and electrifying act, shifted the course of Middle Eastern history. It communicated not only political intent but profound cultural courage.

In contrast, Menachem Begin's leadership was grounded in ideological conviction, historical consciousness, and moral narrative. As a leader emerging from the political right in Israel and the first to displace the long-dominant Labour establishment, he carried the weight of representing a new political era. His leadership resonated with a society seeking stability, national pride, and moral clarity after years of war.

While Sadat operated within an authoritarian political culture and Begin within a competitive parliamentary democracy, both leaders shared an ability to articulate a compelling vision of peace. James MacGregor Burns' notion of transformational leadership is useful here: both leaders inspired their societies not by transactional exchange but by appealing to shared values and deep cultural narratives.[9]

Finally, decision-making in international relations often involves navigating uncertainty, cognitive biases, and bureaucratic pressures. Thomas Schelling's rational choice models illustrate how leaders evaluate risks and potential outcomes.[10] For Sadat, the war of 1973 demonstrated both Egypt's military limitations and its symbolic achievements. He understood that Egypt could not regain Sinai by force and that alignment with the United States offered strategic benefits. His decision to embark on a peace initiative was thus grounded in pragmatic calculation as much as in moral rhetoric.

Begin, however, faced greater uncertainties. Withdrawal from Sinai represented a profound territorial and emotional concession. For parts of Israeli society, the Sinai Peninsula carried historical and strategic significance.

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[8] M. Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization,* Los Angeles: The Free Press, 1947

[9] J.M. Burns, *Leadership*, New York: Harper & Row, 1978

[10] T. Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict.* Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1960

Using insights from Kahneman and Tversky's prospect theory,[11] Begin's hesitation can be interpreted as the product of loss aversion: the potential losses – territorial, strategic, ideological – loomed larger than the potential gains of peace.

Yet, Begin's adherence to religious and ethical values also shaped his decisions. His belief in the moral necessity of peace, framed through Jewish prophetic tradition, enabled him to overcome the psychological barriers posed by loss aversion.[12] His leadership thus combined rational assessment, moral conviction, and emotional restraint.

President Jimmy Carter played a crucial role as mediator. His leadership style combined moral vision with interpersonal diplomacy, and his Southern Christian background made him receptive to the religious rhetoric of both Sadat and Begin. In this triadic cultural encounter, Carter often served as a bridge, not only politically, but culturally and emotionally.[13] He understood the symbolic elements embedded in the rhetoric of both Middle Eastern leaders and helped translate their narratives into diplomatic outcomes. Carter's ability to empathize, to reframe discussions, and to persist through emotional turbulence made him an essential figure in the intercultural dynamics of Camp David.

SECTION 2 – ASPECTS OF LEADERSHIP AND INTERCULTURALISM WITHIN THE CAMP DAVID ACCORDS

The peace treaty of 1979 represented a rupture in the historical pattern of Arab–Israeli relations. For the first time since 1948, a major Arab state recognized Israel, establishing diplomatic relations and ending decades of warfare. This event marked the beginning of what scholars refer to as the "cold peace" – a peace that was legally binding but socially distant, characterized by minimal cultural exchange and limited interpersonal contact between the two societies. While far from harmonious, the cold peace created

[11] D. Kahenman & A. Tversky, "Prospect theory: and analysis of decision under risk." *Econometrica* 47:2, 1979, pp. 263-291

[12] W.B. Quandt, *Camp David: Peacemaking and Politics.* Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1986, pp. 220-235

[13] Carter discussed these issues of interpersonal dynamics, especially during times of frustration or crisis. See in detail: Carter's memoirs represent his idealist approach. See: J. Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President*, Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press (reprinted edition), 1995, pp. 300-315

the conditions for later, deeper forms of engagement in the region. It broke the taboo against negotiating with Israel, paved the way for subsequent agreements, and opened back channels between Israel and Gulf states.

By situating the Camp David Accords within this broader historical arc, it becomes clear that interculturalism plays a long-term role in reshaping regional relations. Peace is not simply the product of treaties; it evolves through cultural narratives, shared histories, and interpersonal connections.

Religion occupies a central place in Middle Eastern identity formation, affecting attitudes, social norms, and political ideologies. Egyptians found it easier to negotiate with Jews who were visibly religious, as they valued religious identity and viewed atheism negatively. This dynamic reflects cultural norms in which religiosity is associated with moral integrity and cultural authenticity. However, religion was not a decisive factor in the success of the negotiations. Rather, it served as a cultural conduit – a way to build rapport, mutual respect, and symbolic connection.

Religion functioned both as a shared cultural language and a source of symbolic legitimacy. Begin often referenced Jewish tradition, biblical history, and prophetic visions. Sadat invoked Islamic concepts of justice, divine guidance, and reconciliation. Their mutual use of religious rhetoric allowed each leader to frame peace as a moral imperative rather than a political concession.

Symbolic gestures further advanced this religious dimension. At Camp David, discussions of prayer, ritual, and dietary law emerged informally among delegations. Egyptian diplomats sought kosher food in Boston because of the proximity of kosher to halal standards and how Begin hosted Egyptian delegates for a traditional Friday night Kiddush. These moments of religious and cultural sharing did not influence the content of negotiations but helped build a humanizing atmosphere that facilitated trust.[14]

Religion also generated powerful opposition. Islamist groups in Egypt denounced the treaty as a betrayal of Islamic solidarity, culminating in Sadat's assassination in 1981. In Israel, religious-nationalist movements condemned territorial concessions as violations of divine promise. These reactions demonstrate that religion played a dual role: as a bridge between leaders but a barrier among parts of the population. Thus, while religion

[14] The face-to-face discussions and their influence on the warming of the negotiation teams were detailed in M. Dayan, *Breakthrough: A Personal Account of the Egypt-Israel Peace Negotiations,* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981, especially in pages 150-200

was not the cause of peace, it was a cultural resource – one that leaders used strategically to mobilize public support, generate moral legitimacy, and construct shared narratives.

Language did not determine negotiation outcomes, but it shaped the structure of interactions. English served as the primary language at Camp David, enabling clear communication between delegations and with the U.S. mediation team. Neither Begin nor Sadat spoke each other's languages, which meant that nuance, tone, and cultural references had to be carefully communicated through English.[15]

Although the negotiations themselves were in English, both leaders relied heavily on Hebrew and Arabic when addressing their domestic audiences. These languages carry deep cultural resonance. Terms such as *shalom*, *salam*, and *sulh* embody cultural concepts of peace, reconciliation, and social order. Sadat's speeches invoked collective identity, moral destiny, and the symbolic breaking of psychological barriers. Begin's rhetoric emphasized legality, prophetic tradition, and historical continuity. Their linguistic choices reflect how leaders translate diplomacy into culturally meaningful narratives for their societies.

Finally, interpersonal communication relies on more than vocabulary. Tone, metaphor, symbolism, and rhythm shape meaning. The Camp David negotiations required not only linguistic but also intercultural translation. Interpreters navigated religious references, idioms, and emotional appeals embedded in both Hebrew and Arabic rhetoric. In this sense, language embodied the cultural complexity of the peace process, becoming a subtle but essential component of diplomacy.

To better understand these concept, one ought to discuss the Personalities of Begin and Sadat. The interpersonal relationship between Begin and Sadat shaped the atmosphere of negotiations. Although stylistically different (i.e. Begin stiff and formal, Sadat charismatic and expressive) both leaders shared a profound sense of historical mission. Their mutual respect enabled a fragile but meaningful rapport.

Sadat's decision to address the Knesset remains one of the most extraordinary gestures of modern diplomacy. Begin's respectful reception of Sadat, infused with religious symbolism, reinforced this gesture. Their encounters created a moral drama that captured public imagination and provided a foundation for trust.

[15] Quandt, *Camp David*, pp. 212-218

The Camp David summit created an emotionally charged environment. The physical isolation – without press, without external distractions – forced the leaders to confront one another repeatedly, sometimes in moments of tension, sometimes in moments of quiet reflection. Emotional highs and lows characterized the summit: walkouts, threats to end discussions, breakthroughs mediated by Carter, and personal appeals delivered in informal settings. This emotional crucible forged interpersonal connections that outpaced formal diplomatic channels.

Not only leaders but also advisors and intermediaries played essential roles. Individuals like Osama El-Baz on the Egyptian side and Israeli diplomats fluent in Arabic helped ease tensions, establish cultural bridges, and sustain communication during difficult moments. Their cultural familiarity with the other side created micro-channels of trust that supported the broader diplomatic effort.

Ultimately, the Camp David negotiations succeeded not solely because of political necessity or strategic calculation but because human beings developed trust across profound cultural divides. Their gestures, conversations, shared rituals, and emotional vulnerability allowed diplomacy to transcend ideology and strategy. These interpersonal moments constitute a core, often unrecognized dimension of peacebuilding.

SECTION 3 – CONCLUSION AND HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT OF THE MIDDLE EAST: FROM COLD PEACE TO NORMALIZATION

The Israel–Egypt peace agreement of 1979 was a landmark achievement in international diplomacy, shaped not only by geopolitics but by cultural dynamics, interpersonal interactions, and symbolic gestures. While cultural factors did not determine the outcome of negotiations, they formed an essential backdrop that influenced how leaders behaved, how communication unfolded, and how trust was established.

This article has shown that interculturalism – understood as active engagement across cultural divides – played a subtle but significant role in the peace process. The shared religious heritage of Judaism and Islam, the symbolic language used by both leaders, the cross-cultural gestures exchanged at Camp David, and the mutual respect demonstrated by Begin and Sadat all contributed to reducing psychological distance and fostering a sense of human connection.

Leadership played a decisive role. Both Sadat and Begin embodied forms of transformational and charismatic leadership that enabled them to transcend cultural constraints and envision a new regional reality. Their willingness to engage deeply with symbolic, moral, and emotional dimensions of peace gave the negotiations a cultural richness that extended beyond the formal diplomatic texts.

The peace between Israel and Egypt also laid the groundwork for subsequent forms of regional normalization, including the Abraham Accords. By breaking cultural taboos and demonstrating that dialogue was possible, the 1979 treaty initiated a long-term shift in the Middle Eastern intercultural landscape.

With a gaze into the future, the Abraham Accords of 2020 represent a later stage in the evolution of Middle Eastern intercultural diplomacy. Karataş and Uslu argue that the framing of these agreements as “Abrahamic” reflects a conscious attempt to emphasize shared religious heritage as a basis for normalization.[16] While political and strategic considerations drove the accords, the cultural framing – highlighting dignity, tolerance, and mutual respect – demonstrates the growing importance of intercultural narratives in diplomacy.

In contrast to the cold peace between Israel and Egypt, the Abraham Accords sought to generate warmth through people-to-people engagement, tourism, cultural exchange, and economic cooperation. Whereas the Egypt–Israel treaty emerged from war, the Abraham Accords emerged from overlapping interests, shared threats, and growing regional pragmatism.

Ultimately, this study suggests that peace in the Middle East – or in any region of entrenched conflict – depends not only on political negotiation but on cultural understanding, interpersonal trust, and the courage of leaders to bridge divides rooted in history, identity, and belief. The Camp David Accords stand as a testament to the transformative power of intercultural diplomacy, illustrating that when cultural barriers are softened and human relationships take precedence, even the most intractable conflicts can yield pathways to reconciliation.

[16] I. Karataş, & N. Uslu, “The Abraham Accords: can interculturalism solve grave conflicts of the Middle East?” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 57:2, 2022, p. 300-301

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MOOMIN, COTTAGECORE, AND THE RETURN TO PEACEFUL LIVING: A CULTURAL DIPLOMACY CASE STUDY OF FINLAND AND JAPAN

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DOI: 10.24193/subbeuropaea.2025.2.02
Published Online: 2025-12-16
Published Print: 2025-12-31

Abstract
From their origins as a children's book series by Tove Jansson, the Moomins were turned into Finnish national identity symbols and literary exponents of soft power. Their popularity in Japan, particularly through early TV adaptations and merchandise, offers a case study in how cultural exports can forge transnational links. The study highlights how the Moomins' aesthetic and values resonate with Japan's cultural sensibilities and Finland's nation branding as a peaceful, nature-oriented nation. The study also addresses the recent re-popularization of the characters and their tales within the "cottagecore" phenomenon, bridging nostalgia and modern soft power agendas.

Keywords: *Moomin; Cultural Diplomacy; Japan; Finland; Cottagecore*

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BRIEF OVERVIEW

Moomin, the beloved Finnish literary creation of writer and illustrator Tove Jansson, has transcended its origins as a children's book series to become an influential cultural ambassador for Finland, and a symbol for the rebranding of the Nordic country during the Cold War. First introduced in 1945, the Moomin characters, an eclectic family of fluffy round characters and their friends, quickly became intergenerational icons. The initial projections of the series's success were mainly concentrated at the national and regional levels; however, it had a particularly profound impact in Japan.

The initial publication of the book series in Japan occurred in the early 1960s, gaining a massive positive response. Therefore, in 1969, the Fuji Television network, famous for adapting Western stories, broadcast a 65-episode long series inspired by Jansson's books.[1] This was the second attempt for a TV adaptation, the first one being a less-known German puppet show.[2]

The initial Japanese adaptation greatly displeased the author, as it had been morphed into an inaccurate show for children, depicting violence and lacking a proper understanding of the source material. Due to legal arguments with the writer, the show hasn't been broadcast outside of Japan, and was not translated into other languages.[3] In 1972, another Japanese adaptation appeared, this one was called *Shin Mūmin (New Moomin)*, and while spotting some creative differences, it was approved by the author.[4]

In the following years, the Moomin series was also embraced by the Soviet Union, leading to an 18-minute-long adaptation from the Ekran production company,[5] another puppet show for Polish, Austrian, and German audiences,[6] as well as a more obscure Soviet reinterpretation done by Sverdlovsktelefilm.[7] In the 1990s, however, the characters returned to

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[1] ***, "The first Moomin tv-series 'Die Muminfamilie' (1959-1960)", *Moomin*, 8 June 2021, [www.moomin.com/en/blog/the-first-moomin-tv-series-die-muminfamilie/#14c37279].

[2] *Ibidem.*

[3] ***, "Japanese Moomin animations: Moomin (1969-1970) and Shin Moomin (1972)", *Moomin*, 6 July 2023, [www.moomin.com/en/blog/japanese-moomin-animations/#14c37279].

[4] *Ibidem.*

[5] ***, "The history of Moomin TV animations", *Moomin*, 29 August 2024, [www.moomin.com/en/blog/moomin-tv-animations/#14c37279].

[6] *Ibidem.*

[7] *Ibidem.*

the Japanese screens, through another adaptation, this time with a strong vision rooted in the source's material, and conducted with a Dutch company, Telecable Benelux B.V. The latter proved to be the most successful adaptation, being aired in 120 countries.[8] The series remained primarily associated with the Nordic and Baltic states, as well as Japan, while in the US, it remained largely unknown, except in Hawaii, which had a large Japanese minority.

Consequently, this lasting popularity positioned the Moomins as one of Finland's most successful cultural exports. There is an underlying theme related to children's media and the national values embedded in them, as they can serve as a soft power tool, due to the usual positive outlook within the stories, the focus on good morals, and proper conduct, which align with an idealized version of reality. Moreover, drafting such stories positions authors indirectly as contributors to a state's white propaganda toolbox.

The whimsical, yet deeply symbolic tone of the stories resonated with the Japanese audience, who sought in the Western media a crutch for the reinvention of its own soft power apparatus. Over the decades, the franchise has contributed to the development of economic and cultural ties between the countries, with the creation of Moomin theme parks, cafés, and merchandise driving Finland's soft power in Japan.

The link is also present at the Finnish embassy in Japan, where the staff presents a business card featuring a character from the series, as well as plushies in the waiting rooms; this is a particularity of the two states' relations. In a 2024 interview, the Finnish ambassador to Japan, Tanja Jääskeläinen, relates: "Handing out these unique cards to Japanese people always breaks the ice and sparks conversations. Discussing the characters fosters a warm atmosphere and provides an opportunity to promote Finland."[9]

For post WWII Finland, cultural diplomacy overlapped with a complex geopolitical configuration: nested closely to the borders of the Soviet Union, and having a perpetual suppressing presence in the culture, the state sought to depart from its geographic limitation, and contribute to the stabilization

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[8] *Ibidem.*

[9] Jun Kurosawa, "INTERVIEW | Finnish Ambassador on the Moomins and Japan-Finland Cultural Parallels | JAPAN Forward", *JAPAN Forward*, 28 June 2024, [japan-forward.com/interview-finland-ambassador-tanja-jaaskelainen-moomins-cultural-parallels].

and pacification[10] of its relations, and the development of the post-war international political superstructures.

As author Louis Clerc notes, Finland's cultural diplomacy is tied to the development of the welfare state,[11] an outcome derived from the impoverishment and isolation resulting from neighboring totalitarian regimes. Therefore, Helsinki sought to develop a better domestic context as well as maintain solid relations with both East and the West.[12] Cultural diplomacy is typically carried out through state efforts; however, in the case of the Moomins, Finnish institutions did not directly support it when the series first appeared, but rather became involved after the phenomenon gained traction in Finland.

While Finland was recovering from World War II, a strong cultural movement emerged, focused on the preservation and promotion of domestic literature and art. This strategy aligned with Helsinki's intention to project a peaceful and creative image internationally, which complemented the whimsical and philosophical nature of the Moomins. Tove Jansson's recognition through prestigious children's literature prizes linked to regional icons like Hans Christian Andersen and Astrid Lindgren, along with her popularity among Finland's Swedish-speaking minority, positioned her as a natural heir to Nobel Prize winner Selma Lagerlöf's legacy.

After the series gained widespread popularity, state institutions, municipalities, and cultural organizations played a key role in their development as cultural and economic assets, supporting the construction of *Moomin World* in Naantali, *the Moomin Museum* in Tampere, and the adoption of *Moomin imagery for Finnish Embassies* and the country promotion program, *Visit Finland.* The Finnish Film Foundation funded media projects, such as the animated series *Moominvalley*, while the Children and Youth Foundation while educational initiatives incorporated the tales to teach social values.

The book series' early adoption in the Japanese media landscape was generated by the television's desire to adapt Western media for their audience, and the children stories provide a great opportunity in this regard; other examples just as successful as the Moomins were *Heidi* or *Anne of Green*

[10] Louis Clerc, *Cultural Diplomacy in Cold War Finland*, Palgrave Macmillan Series in Global Public Diplomacy: London, 2022, [doi:10.1007/978-3-031-12205-7], p. 2.

[11] *Ibidem*, p. 5.

[12] *Ibidem*, p. 2.

Gables, all produced by Fuji TV. The simple design of the characters provided an easier template to follow for various products used as merchandise, ranging from clothing, accessories, and household items.

The Moomin brand's expansion in Japan also includes several dedicated spaces, the most notable being the *Moominvalley Park*, opened in 2019 in Saitama Prefecture. It remains the only theme park outside of Finland committed to bringing to life the world of Moomin in a faithful and immersive way.[13] Visitors are encouraged to engage with Finnish culture in a tangible, experiential manner, learning about the beloved characters, as well as Finland's natural environment, traditions, and way of life. By promoting this kind of cultural tourism, *Moominvalley Park* plays an essential role in continuing the Finnish narrative as a peaceful, nature-driven nation in the eyes of the Japanese public.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study draws on a diverse corpus of literature that explores cultural diplomacy, national branding, and the intersection of identity and soft power in the contexts of the relations between Finland and Japan. Primary sources include Louis Clerc's *Cultural Diplomacy in Cold War Finland* and Natsuko Akagawa's *Heritage Conservation in Japan's Cultural Diplomacy*, which provide historical overviews of state-led efforts to recast global perceptions through culture. Tove Jansson's biography, *A Sculptor's Daughter*, and the ideational critique in *Moomin Management: Redefining Generosity*, offer a fascinating glimpse into Finnish imagination and its soft power transfer worldwide. Articles on cultural diplomacy, videos, and tweets have been consulted as secondary sources, along with the Official Moomin website and various accounts on the topic

I. From Authoritarian Shadows to Cultural Soft Power – Japan and Finland's Strategic Repositioning

Year/Period	Japan	Finland
1868-1912	Meiji Restoration - Westernization begins	Grand Duchy of Russia - Autonomy within the empire

[13] ***, "Moominvalley Park: Theme Park about the Moomins near Chichibu", *Saitama Travel*, 1 October 2024, [www.japan-guide.com/e/e6558.html].

1930s-1945	Fascist militarism, cultural nationalism	Wartime alliance with Nazi Germany
1945-1952	U.S. occupation, democratization	Post-war neutrality, "Finlandization"
1950s-1980s	Economic miracle, cultural export (anime, technology)	Nordic identity, welfare state model
1990s-Present	Global soft power player	EU member, liberal diplomacy

Figure 1. Comparative Historical Trajectories: Japan and Finland

In the 20th century, both Japan and Finland underwent radical transformations of their national identities, driven by the dual pressures of confronting authoritarian legacies, concomitantly to adapting to a new world order. Both countries, shaped by different historical trajectories, undertook a similar mission of strategic rebranding, seeking legitimacy, power, and cohesion by rewriting their image at home and abroad.

Japan's perception of the idea of nationalism was different from that of the West, as political scientist Matsumoto Sannosuke remarked: Japanese nationalism developed as a state-centered, inward-national ideology[14] with a top-down model of government,[15] and a deep-seated assumption of Japan as a unique, advanced civilization.[16] Unlike Western nationalism, which tends to adopt universalist values, Japanese national identity was focused on the preservation and expansion of the self due to historically driven concerns about the external world.

Following the Meiji Restoration, Japan embarked on an ambitious project of modernization, incorporating Western technology, institutions, and aesthetics. However, this approach was never simply an imitation, rather it lived within a history of national grandeur and expansion. The period between the two World Wars saw the rise of militaristic fascism, where elements of Western modernity, industrial might, and mechanized warfare, were hijacked in an effort to galvanize imperial pursuits under the umbrella of traditional values such as deference to the Emperor and Bushido codes.

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[14] Natsuko Akagawa, *Heritage Conservation and Japan's Cultural Diplomacy Heritage, National Identity and National Interest*, 1st ed., Routledge: London, 2016, pp.32-33.

[15] *Ibidem*.

[16] *Ibidem*.

Japan experienced a severe identity fracture after being defeated in World War II, the breakdown of its imperial system and the imposition of democratic[17] reform required a revolutionary rebuilding of national purpose. Rather than abandoning its modernizing push, Japan remodeled it in the language of pacifism, consumerism, and soft power. In the postwar era, under the strategic cover of the US, Japan adopted a conservative cultural policy, generally eschewing the propagation of its culture in Asia.

The administration feared that cultural expansion would stir up wartime resentments on the basis of Japan's fascist imperial expansionism, damaging its economic and industrial interests in the region.[18] Cultural diplomacy was thus de-emphasized, and Japan turned inward, seeing cultural export, particularly to neighboring Asian countries, as politically unwise and foolish.

In contrast, Finland's makeover was less sensational, but similarly timidly orchestrated. Finland never fell under complete fascist domination like Japan, though it briefly cooperated with Nazi Germany during the Continuation War (1941–1944) against the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, it maintained the democratic function of political institutions, and a resilient civil society throughout the war.

In May 1949, the Finnish parliamentary committee, led by Professor Erik Lönnroth acknowledged the strategic importance of soft power in presenting Finland's image to the world. Composed of politicians, journalists, scholars, and diplomats, the parliamentary committee underscored the need to expand scientific, cultural, and artistic exchanges as tools of influence, intending to enhance the foreign role of Finland in the West, and to push forward the establishment of foreign goodwill through peaceful means.[19] This initiative contrasted the ceremonial cultural events held with the Eastern European counterparts, often carried by private organizations emanating from the communist movement.[20]

This geopolitical tightrope walking led to the popularization of the term "Finlandization", an international relations term that relates to a

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[17] *Ibidem.*

[18] Nissim Kadosh Otmazgin, "Geopolitics and Soft Power: Japan's Cultural Policy and Cultural Diplomacy in Asia", *Asia-Pacific Review*, vol. 19, no. 1, May 2012, p. 38, [https://doi.org/10.1080/13439006.2012.678629].

[19] Louis Clerc, *op.cit*, p.38.

[20] Ibidem, p.39.

situation in which a smaller or weaker state aligns its foreign policy with the interests of a more powerful neighboring country, while still retaining internal sovereignty and political independence.[21] The term gained traction after Austrian foreign minister Karl Gruber criticized Finland's foreign policy approach in his 1953 book Zwischen Befreiung und Freiheit, warning Austria not to follow the same path.

The comparative political paths of Japan and Finland illustrate how states can strategically redefine their national identities in response to past ideological entanglements. In both cases, culture and identity were central instruments to the process. While Japan translated its post-fascist rehabilitation into a reorientation around aesthetics and pacifist foreign policy, Finnish caution and institutional strength allowed it to stake out a niche position as a progressive Nordic actor in international affairs.

II. The Cottagecore trend and Moomin Resurgence: Rebranding Nostalgia in Times of Crisis

In the midst of global challenges and the erosion of credible state authority, individuals increasingly turn to artistic and symbolic narratives as forms of comfort and escapism. These cultural expressions are increasingly co-opted by countries as soft power tools, shaping their cultural diplomacy strategies and expanding influence in the online sphere.

The resurgence of the Moomin universe in the cultural consciousness of the 2020s coincided with the widespread popularization of the "cottagecore" aesthetic,[22] particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Cottagecore, an internet-born subcultural phenomenon, emerged as a romanticized response to late capitalist exhaustion idealizing rural life, domesticity, and harmony with nature.[23] It seeks to construct affective ties through shared fantasies of

[21] Woonju Roh, Jaechun Kim, Dong Suk, "Reconceptualizing Finlandization: Fear, Autonomy, Economic, and Cultural Dimensions," *The Korean Journal of International Studies*, vol. 22, no. 2, Aug. 2024, pp. 93-94, [https://doi.org/10.14731/kjis.2024.08.22.2.91].

[22] Isabel Slone, "Escape Into Cottagecore: Calming Ethos for Our Febrile Moment", The New York Times, Published 10 March 2020, [https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/10/style/cottagecore.html], Accessed 19 March 2025.

[23] Leah Brand, "Crafting Cottagecore : Digital Pastoralism and the Production of an Escapist Fantasy", The Coalition of Master's Scholars on Material Culture, 2021, [https://cmsmc.org/publications/crafting-cottagecore].

a slower, more meaningful life, set in a timeless, pastoral landscape untouched by the demands of modernity. In the context of a global health crisis, the cottagecore ideal became more than just a visual aesthetic; it also acted as a distraction repackaged as emotional self-preservation[24], favoring feelings of softness, comfort, and sensory intimacy over the hyper-mediated stress of everyday life.

The *Moominverse*, particularly the 90's Finish-Japanese animated TV series *Moomin*, which were Jansson's original books, aligns effortlessly with this ethos of cottagecore. The main characters live in a peaceful, tranquil setting nestled in Moominvalley, where daily life revolves around shared meals, walks in nature, and seasonal rituals, rather than a perpetual sense of urgency or productivity. The animation style is key to creating this immersive atmosphere: its soft pastel color palette, hand-drawn visuals, and whimsical sound design cultivate a mood of sensory intimacy and contemplative ease. At the same time, the series' emphasis on slow storytelling and relational care, illustrated in episodes like *The Spring Tune* or *The Invisible Child*,[25] showcases how the characters navigate various challenges with patience, gentleness, and communal support.

We can therefore view the Moomin books, comic strips, and animated series as a form of escapism that goes beyond the act of retreating from contemporary pressures. Instead, they offer an imaginative reorientation toward an alternate temporality, one that is structured around nostalgic imagery of domesticity and peaceful routines.[26] Even in times of crisis, these stories evoke hope through gentle resilience. For example, both *The Moomins and the Great Flood* and *Comet in Moominland*[27] follow characters displaced by disasters, yet anchored by a shared longing for reunion, safety, and the comfort of home.

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[24] Irina N. Simaeva, Anna O. Budarina, "Self-preservation attitudes of youth and adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic", *Siberian Journal of Life Sciences and Agriculture*, vol. 13, 2021, no. 4, pp. 75-98.

[25] Tove Jansson, "Moomin (TV Series)", Directed by H. Saitô and M. Kojima, Japan: Telescreen Japan, 1990-1992.

[26] Noralities, "The Moomins Nostalgia", *Youtube*, Published 26 May 2020. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=StPPKdqNbig&t=1s].

[27] Moomin, "Mamma will know what to do – How Moomin books comfort us in times of crises, part 1.", *Moomin.com*, Published 27 October 2023 [https://www.moomin.com/en/blog/moomin-books-comfort-1/], Accessed 10 April 2025.

These sequences may help explain the *Moominverse's* renewed relevance during the COVID-19 pandemic, when audiences turned to media that offered comfort and stability amid the relentless circulation of distressing news.

On digital platforms, the convergence between the Moomin universe and the cottagecore aesthetic gave rise to the viral online movement #moomincore.[28] The 2019 reboot of the series, *Moominvalley*,[29] introduced the Moomins to a new generation of viewers, sparking renewed cultural interest and fueling a surge in Moomin-themed content across social media. On the one hand, platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, Youtube, and Pinterest became sites for the circulation of Moomin-inspired imagery that blends video edits, handmade crafts, and vintage décor with whimsical illustrations of the characters.

For instance, Tumblr users curated posts that captured the serene and nostalgic essence of the *Moominverse*, featuring elements like baked goods, snowy mountains, clear streams, wildflowers, harmonica music, and candles, all tagged under #moomincore or #moominvalley. In one viral 2021 TikTok post, a user wrote "POV: Your dad kept the Moomin sweatshirt his girlfriend brought him from Japan in the 90s",[30] thus blending personal memory with a collective yearning for emotional and material continuity across generations.

On the other hand, the Moomins' influence has permeated global consumer culture, blending nostalgia with aspirational consumption. Moomin-themed ceramics, journals, coffee, and even wellness products are available in dedicated shops across Finland, Sweden, Norway, Poland, the United Kingdom, Japan, Hong Kong, and the United States[31]. Additionally, the official Moomin Shop offers worldwide shipping, making these products accessible to fans at an international level. These offerings reflect what Sara

[28] "#moomincore", Tumblr.com, [https://www.tumblr.com/tagged/moomincore], Accessed: 13 March 2025.

[29] "Moominvalley" (TV Series), Directed by Steve Box, Gutsy Animations, 2019.

[30] @tatamigal, "Thanks Yoko wherever you are it's mine now", *TikTok.com*, Published 18 October 2021, [https://www.tiktok.com/@tatamigal/video/7020428047660715270?_t=ZN-8vkpeWmYH1G&_r=1].

[31] Moomin, "Moomin Shops Around the World", *Moomin.com*, Published 26 April 2023, [https://www.moomin.com/en/blog/moomin-shops-around-the-world/?utm_source=chatgpt.com#e3c40107], Accessed 28 March 2025.

Ahmed describes as “affective economies”,[32] where emotions and attachments circulate through objects and digital spaces, shaping collective imaginaries of comfort.

The rebranding of the Moomins as cottagecore icons demonstrates how nostalgia can also serve as a form of political commentary. We can therefore argue that online trends like cottagecore offer a subtle commentary on the modern-day emphasis on speed, productivity, and individualism. In this context, the Moomins appear as agents of soft resistance against capitalist ideals,[33] not through overt or aggressive means, but through quiet subversion. Characters like Snufkin have come to symbolize a kind of anarcho-pastoral freedom, embodying a model of living that values generosity without ownership. His rejection of traditional societal structures, such as property, bureaucracy, and formalized schedules, resonates with an ethos of refusal that is both deeply personal and politically charged.

On the same note, Janne Tienari and Paul Savage’s work suggests that the Moomins offer a gentler, more value-based kind of leadership.[34] The Moomin family offers refuge to outsiders, wanderers, and misfits such as Groke, a shadowy figure who longs for warmth and connection. In a world that often feels rushed and isolating, their stories stand a quiet antidote to the loneliness that modern life can bring, offering a space where acceptance and meaningful connections flourish.

Lastly, the Moomins’ cottagecore imaginary intersects meaningfully with constructions of Finnish national identity. The *Moominverse* operates as a form of cultural capital,[35] an emotionally charged symbol that extends beyond childhood nostalgia to embody values of stability, coherence, and belonging.

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[32] Sara Ahmed, “Affective Economies”, *Social Text*, 79, vol. 22, no. 2, 2004, pp. 117-139, [https://doi.org/10.1215/01642472-22-2_79-117].

[33] Louisa Büsken, “Seeking Refuge in Nature: Escapism and the Contemporary Pastoral Impulse in Cottagecore”, *Aspeers*, vol. 17, 2024, pp. 9-24, [https://www.aspeers.com/2024/buesken].

[34] Janne Tienari and Paul Savage.,“Leadership and Humor, the Moomin Way”, *Discourses on Culture*, vol. 22, no. 1, 2024, pp. 15-39. [https://doi.org/10.2478/doc-2024-0008].

[35] Hanna Dymel-Trzebiatowska, “Moomins Take the Floor. Finnish Trolls in Contemporary Mass Social (Media) Events”, *Children's Literature in Education*, vol. 55, 2022, pp. 313 - 324, [https://doi.org/10.1007/s10583-022-09497-6].

These elements not only contribute to the construction of a national self-image, but also resonate strongly with the preferences of Generation Z (individuals born between 1997 and 2012).[36] This demographic is increasingly drawn to authentic, mindful, and visually cohesive storytelling. However, Gen Z is also known for rapidly adopting and just as quickly discarding cultural narratives, creating a dynamic environment in which multiple soft power strategies compete for attention, each offering distinct, and often conflicting, symbolic frameworks. Within this context, the Moomins represent more than literary nostalgia; they function as a form of soft power that skillfully merges national branding with the affective and aesthetic sensibilities of youth culture.

III. Cultural Storytelling and Soft Power: The Moomins as a Bridge Between Finland and Japan

Based on prior arguments, the *Moominverse* coincidence with the globally popular cottagecore aesthetics does not merely provide a comforting visual and heartfelt spectacle, it performs a sort of intrinsic cultural storytelling that extends Finland's soft power abroad. The soft, homebound, and nature-based values embodied in the Moomin tales resonate deeply with international audiences, not only as markers of Finnish identity, but as informal tools of cultural diplomacy.

This resonance is most evident in the long-standing cultural affinity between Finland and Japan, in which the emotional register of the Moomins finds particularly rich soil. Japan's aesthetics of *mono no aware* (a sensitivity to evanescent beauty) closely align with the Moomin values of simplicity, community, and a close relationship with nature. By this connection, the characters become transnational symbols of promoting a sense of openness contrasting with modern tendencies towards hostility and individualism.

The underlying motifs of soft power are also apparent in their subtle comments on recurring worldwide fears. For instance, the second book in the series, *Comet in Moominland*, has been read as an allegory for nuclear threat,[37]

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[36] Kamila Sierpień and Andrzej Tucki, "Cottagecore as an idealisation of rural life and a new dimension of tourist activity for Generation Z in rural areas", *Geographical Studies*, vol. 174, 2024, pp. 169-184.

[37] Moomin, "Dance in the face of the Comet – How Moomin books comfort us in times of crises, part 2.", *Moomin.com*, Published 3 November 2023, [https://www.moomin.com/en/blog/moomin-books-comfort-2/], Accessed 11 April 2025.

a topic that permeated even children's literature. The stories do not encourage denial, but rather, underline the importance of a secure space for dealing with fear through community, empathy, and affective resilience. This subtle affinity is an important part of what Henry Kathman identifies in the rising significance of the Moomins across younger generations, especially Generation Z.[38]

In online spaces, the appearance and emotional resonance of *Moominvalley* have also generated considerable cultural interest in Finland itself. Social media posts, YouTube vlogs, and travel blogs often connect the image of the Moomins with broader visions of Northern projections of well-being, ecological harmony, and a slow-paced life. In this way, the characters become not just an intrinsic reference point, but also a cultural portal towards the introduction of Finnish values to international audiences.

According to author Stijn Reijnders, individuals often carry a personal "treasure trove" of stories: narratives encountered during childhood through books, films, or television, that continue to shape their inner world and influence travel choices.[39] These formative stories, deeply associated with youth and nostalgia, act as powerful motivators for visiting real-world locations connected to familiar fictional worlds. This insight helps explain the widespread appeal of places like Japan's *Moominvalley Park* and Moomin Café.[40] Such sites serve as emotional touchpoints, allowing visitors to immerse themselves in beloved narratives that evoke feelings of comfort, wonder, and a refreshed sense of identity. Far beyond simple theme parks, they serve as cultural sanctuaries where personal memories intersect with national storytelling.

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[38] Henry Kathman, "The Complete Amateur's Guide to Moomin.", *Youtube*, Published June 26, 2023, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FRCzmBd5psI&t=29s], Accessed: 20 April 2025.

[39] Evgenia Amey, "The Distant Snowy Land Where Rounded Creatures Dwell", *Matkailututkimus*, vol. 19, no. 2, Dec. 2023, pp. 10–11, [https://doi.org/10.33351/mt.124944].

[40] Moomin, "Moomin in Japan: From Past to Present", *Moomin.com*, Published 8 March 2024, [https://www.moomin.com/en/blog/moomin-in-japan/#e3c40107], Accessed: 27 March 2025.

As Laura Ipatti argues, this form of nostalgic agrotourism constitutes a type of “soft nation branding”[41] wherein culturally iconic narratives, such as the Moomins, are mobilized not through overt nationalism but through immersive experiences. While Studio Ghibli advances Japanese soft power to the world, the Moomins helped Finland make its name in Japan, not through politics or commerce, but through sentiment and fantasy. In this way, the Ghibli and the Moomins are both involved in a quiet cultural dialogue between Japan and Finland, each using gentle narrative and aesthetics to build national reputations and create worldwide friendship.

Therefore, the Moomin universe serves as a soft but powerful mode of cultural diplomacy, exerting Finland’s soft power through sentimental storytelling, nostalgia, and beauty. Its alignment with values of community, nature, and emotional resilience is specifically appealing to international audiences, most notably in Japan, where cultural consonance amplifies its strength.

CONCLUSIONS

The cultural relationship between Finland and Japan offers a compelling example of how soft power, rooted in nostalgia-driven narratives, can shape international diplomacy. The *Moominverse*, with its deeply embedded values of simplicity, community, and resilience in times of crisis, has become a symbol of Finnish identity that resonates deeply with Japanese audiences. This shared affinity is not merely a product of cultural exchange, but serves as a quiet yet powerful form of cultural diplomacy, subtly aligning Finnish and Japanese values through emotionally rich storytelling and aesthetic resonance. This dynamic also illustrates a broader trend in contemporary politics, where states use iconic stories like Moomin and the cottagecore online phenomenon to influence global perceptions, thus bypassing traditional statecraft. In this context, soft power and cultural diplomacy merge to redefine a country’s national image through affective storytelling that connects across different age groups and reflects universal values.

[41] Laura Ipatti, “At The Roots of the <<Finland Boom>>: The Implementation of Finnish Image Policy in Japan in the 1960s”, *Scandinavian Journal of History*, vol 44, 2018, no. 1, pp. 103–130. [https://doi.org/10.1080/03468755.2018.1502680].

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STUDIA UBB. EUROPAEA, LXX, 2, 2025, 35-55

DILIGENT POLITICAL AGENCY FOR BRANDING THE ART: RUBENS AND (CULTURAL) DIPLOMACY

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DOI: 10.24193/subbeuropaea.2025.2.03
Published Online: 2025-12-16
Published Print: 2025-12-31

Abstract
Peter Paul Rubens' (1577-1640) agency as a (cultural) diplomat was characteristically interwoven not only with the extraordinarily intricate and troublesome historical and political contexts of his lifetime but also with his tremendous artistic ambitions and achievements. Considering the Flemish masters' diligent commitment to both politics and art, the immense quantity of biographical research dedicated to Rubens has marginally enquired about the preeminence of any domain of Rubens' engagement over the other. The present investigation attempts to find a plausible counterweight between Rubens' assiduous activism in the worlds of art and politics, respectively, as a key of acknowledging his agency as a (cultural) diplomat. Consequently, certain insights regarding Rubens' patriotism, the examination of his art within the intellectual tradition of Catholic humanism, and ultimately assessing the roles of diplomatic activism and artistic entrepreneurialism for branding his art could stand as persuasive arguments to illuminate on his (cultural) diplomatic agency at the puzzling crossroads between politics and art.
Keywords: *Rubens, art branding, Antwerp, humanism, art commissions, special envoy, cultural diplomacy.*

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THE FLEMISH PATRIOT FACING THE FRACTIOUS HISTORICAL CIRCUMSTANCES

Rubens lived his entire life under the extraordinary inauspicious circumstances of the so-called Eighty Years War (1568-1648). Following the intractable outcomes for the Dutch provinces which resulted from both the 1555 Treaty of Augsburg and the 1545-1563 Council of Trent, a series of unfortunate, oscillatory and ominous events had marked the second half of the sixteenth century and the first half of the seventeenth century until the Westphalian peace treaties of 1648. As a young boy, after the death of his father, Rubens returned to his fatherland at the age of 10 and had remained inextricably committed to the political goals of Flanders till the end of his life in 1640. When he arrived in Antwerp in 1587, Rubens had to confront the troublesome consequences of the occupation of Flanders by Spain in 1585 and the consequent partition of the Netherlands in 1587. From that time on, Rubens had lived his life within a general atmosphere of belligerence, strife and bewilderment which had mainly resulted from the division between the Lower Countries of Southern Flanders and the United Dutch Provinces in the North. The division rule had turned operational under the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio* and had instituted the reign of Catholic Spain in Southern Flanders and the Protestant confederate autonomy of seven Dutch northern provinces. In the context of the Vervins Peace Treaty between Spain and France (1598), Southern Flanders was ruled by the Habsburg sovereigns Archdukes Albert of Austria and his wife, Infanta Isabella Clara Eugenia, between 1598 and 1621.[1] Especially after the death of Archduke Albert in 1621, Infanta Isabella had a providential role upon Rubens' career both as diplomat and artist. Apart from pursuing his artistic goals as (one of) the most prominent creators of his age, Rubens' entanglements with the world of politics had turned to be outstanding and meritorious considering momentous political intricacies and the overall diplomatic impasse after 1621. Out of genuine patriotism and pacificatory spirit, Rubens had incessantly pursued at least to restore the relative tranquil conditions of the 12 years truce between Spanish Flanders/ Netherlands and the Dutch United Provinces of the north (1609-1621) within an utterly unfavourable context for Flanders, prompted by the 1623 coalition between France, England,

[1] Constantin Suter, *Rubens*, București: Editura Meridiane, 1974, pp. 19-21; Wilhelm Ribhegge, "Counter-Reformation Politics, Society and Culture in the Southern Netherlands, Rhineland and Westphalia in the First Half of the 17th Century" in *Humanistica Lovaniensia*, vol. 49, 2000, p. 175.

United Provinces and Denmark against Spain. Notwithstanding Rubens' dutifulness and conciliatory efforts, a bellicose state of affairs between Southern Flanders and the Northern United Provinces had prevailed until the signing of the Peace of Munster,[2] eight years after the death of Rubens. Intricate political interests, mischievous political machinations, volatile and perfunctory political alliances, vacillatory strategic plans and compelling marital alliances – all had deemed Rubens' commendable efforts futile, so that, in June 1635,[3] after a lifetime spent in the service of his beloved Flanders, one could find the indefatigable Rubens exhausted and disenchanted with the political.

The last three secret missions that the governess of Flanders, Infanta Isabella, entrusted to Rubens – in December 1631, August 1632, and January 1633, respectively - failed and ruined Rubens' political ideal of peace between Spanish Flanders and the Dutch provinces along the way. By that time, the Flemish master and diplomat had tirelessly believed in cosmopolitanism, peaceful interactions, economic prosperity and a blooming space of ideas and

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[2] David Freedberg, "Rubens and Titian: Art and Politics" in Hilliard T. Goldfarb, David Freedberg (eds.), *Titian and Rubens: Power, Politics, and Style*, Boston: Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, 1998, pp. 38-39; Max Rooses, *Rubens*, London: Duckworth & Co., 1904, p. 394.

[3] Rubens consistently took action, both as diplomat and artist, to serve the political goals of Southern Flanders and, accordingly, had to promote the interests of Spain. Internal frictions and rivalries of competing interests, characteristic not only for Spain but also for France and England, further complicated the diplomatic missions and efforts. In the case of Spain, King Philip IV enforced an alliance with France in March 1627, against the political calculations of his aunt, Infanta Isabella, who was favorable to an alliance with England (Freedberg, *art. cit.*, p. 42). Following Rubens' diligent diplomacy in England (1628-1630) as a special envoy of Infanta Isabella to facilitate a diplomatic agreement with King Charles I, Cardinal Richelieu masterminded a treaty with the Dutch provinces against Spain in 1635 on behalf of the French King Louis XIII. Consequently, the war with Spain put an end to the Flemish hopes for peace (Suter, *op. cit.*, p. 76). However, as long as Rubens had foreseen any possibility to help his fatherland, he would never give up fighting for the cause; probably the only imprudent diplomatic letter of Rubens to the most important Spanish minister of King Philip IV, Duke of Olivarez, stands for a witty recommendation that Spain should help queen-mother Marie de Medici to end the conflict with King Louis XIII and Richelieu in order to divert France from signing a political alliance with the Dutch provinces against Spain and the Spanish Flanders (Rooses, *op. cit.*, pp. 510-512).

art flourishing, out of genuine patriotism and moral responsibility. Receiving his early education in the spirit of courtesy, deference and elegance in Antwerp, Rubens undertook his public duties in full responsibility and engaged citizenship, whilst his agency as a (cultural) diplomat was guided by professional reliability, moral clarity and individual integrity.[4] The frequent diplomatic dissimulations[5] of Rubens and the apparent versatility of his diplomatic agency stemmed not only from inextricable political vicissitudes, shifting alliances and machinations of his age, but also from a certain pragmatic outlook of the artist himself in dealing with unpropitious contexts, on the one hand, and conjunctural opportunities regarding art commissions, on the other. As the third section of the present study reveals, the Flemish master did not compromise the diplomatic missions entrusted to him for satisfying his artistic vanity; in a sense, his diplomatic agency was aggrandized due to his prestige as an artist and, conversely, Rubens cautiously took advantage of any occasion generated by his diplomatic encounters to brand his art and enter instructive conversations with learned and influent art afficionados.

The unfathomable patriotism of Rubens and his deep concern about Antwerp stand above all considerations regarding the relationship between art and politics. Rubens truly dreamed about the magnificence, prosperity and dignity of the southern provinces of Flanders, Brabant and Luxembourg - which composed the Spanish Netherlands - and committed himself to zealous political activism to the best of his intellectual abilities and artistic talent. For instance, he strived to enhance the Catholic fervor of Spanish Netherlands as a distinct mark of the region and “a badge of national identity”[6] and reputation in opposition to the Dutch Protestant ethos. Only in the period 1609-1619, following the eight years apprenticeship in Italy, the Flemish master was commissioned to execute 60 altarpieces, 39 ceiling paintings, and 3 specific altarpieces for the Jesuit Church in Antwerp.[7] The dominant cosmopolitan spirit of Antwerp during the 16th century, the flourishing commerce, the

[4] Mark Lamster, *Master of Shadows: The Secret Diplomatic Career of the Painter Peter Paul Rubens*, New York: Doubleday, 2009.

[5] Rooses, *op. cit.*, pp. 422-423. Rubens extensively used the tactics of ‘diplomatic dissimulation’ in the allegorical communication and transmission of art contents (see infra).

[6] Henry Adams, “Rubens Was Artist, Scholar, Diplomat and a Lover of Life” in *Smithsonian Magazine*, October 1993, pp. 58-69.

[7] *Ibidem.*

entrepreneurial impetus and ultimately conviviality and connoisseurship of fine arts had steadily informed Rubens' enthusiastic patriotism, loyalty and nostalgia under ill-fated circumstances. Aside from his lifelong love of the Italian artistic mastery, Rubens had never conceived to live in a place other than Antwerp. Probably not by accident, he brought artistic allegiance to the two cities he was very fond of, by contributing with public decorations for the festivities' protocol on the inauguration of the new Antwerp governor Cardinal-Infante Ferdinand in 1635 and designing the decorum for the palace of Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga in the city of Mantua, Italy, respectively.[8] In Antwerp, Rubens always found tranquility, composure and joy; the fact that he owned a house and a workshop in the city, and another manor in the rural Steen speaks volumes about his deep attachment to what he considered as his most intimate natural environment. One might seize the lifestyle dialectics between the urban Antwerp and the rural Steen by unveiling the binary traits of Rubens' quotidian habits: entrepreneurship and leisure, public engagement and private rest, decorative agenda of his public art and quietude of natural landscape/ private environment.

THE NEOSTOIC CHRISTIAN PACIFIST AND COSMOPOLITAN HUMANIST

The age of Rubens marked the pinnacle of the Renaissance humanism of Petrarca, Boccaccio, Erasmus and Montaigne; fascinated with both the artistic Italian Renaissance and the intellectual tradition of Latin classicism and stoicism, Rubens had also embraced the Catholic faith, so that the overall intellectual 'constitution' and mindset of the Flemish master could aptly be assimilated to Christian universalism.[9] Rubens had wittily adapted his fine classical erudition in Latin culture and his positivistic education for public life to the practical morality of Christian faith. Fine connoisseur of the subtleties of Latin culture, poetry and literature (especially of the works of Tacitus, Seneca, Horatio and Ovidius), rigorously educated in the spirit of elegance, etiquette, courtesy and aristocratic manners (of crucial importance for his future diplomatic career), Rubens epitomized the character and refinement of a bona fide Christian humanist. Specifically characteristic for the post-Renaissance

[8] Wilhelm von Bode, *Maeștrii picturii olandeze și flamande*, translated by Eugen Filotti, vol. 2, București: Editura Meridiane, 1974, pp. 10-13.

[9] Otto Georg von Simson, "Richelieu and Rubens: Reflections on the Art of Politics" in *The Review of Politics*, vol. 6, no. 4, 1944, p. 427.

mindset and beliefs of scholars and intellectuals in 16th century northern Europe was the movement of neostoicism which stood at the core of this symbiosis between secular erudition, practical sense of civic duty and Catholic teachings. Even if Rubens himself was not directly affiliated with the neostoic circles of Antwerp like his sibling Philip,[10] he had sincerely shared the neostoic outlook on public commitment to moral service, responsible citizenship, friendship and pacifism. Wittily combining linguistic fluency and dexterity in several modern languages besides Latin,[11] secularism and political action, aristocratic upbringing and unfettered Christian morality, Rubens pragmatically endorsed the teachings of neostoic humanism. With his addiction to art commerce, passionate adventures in transactions and exchanges of artistic objects, and open-minded cosmopolitanism, Rubens could be accurately considered one of the outstanding forerunners of international cultural relations and preservers of cultural heritage, while affinity for the modern humanistic endeavors in travelling[12] would render him as a herald of cultural tourism. In marked contrast with the realist, bourgeois and democratic artistic environment of Rubens' contemporary Rembrandt, whereby Biblical themes and the Protestant/ Calvinist ethos prevailed, the Baroque artistic depictions and ultimately lifestyle of Rubens mirrored aristocratic routines, classicality, luxuriousness and humanist proneness of Catholic Flanders.[13] The most expressive indicator of

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[10] One of the most 'realistic' paintings of Rubens is considered a tribute to the mentor of Flemish neostoicism, philosopher Lipsius. *The Four Philosophers* painting (1611-1612) does not only illustrate the neostoic concept of eternal friendship in the spirit of "Renaissance humanistic mourning" (Justus Lipsius had passed away in 1606) and a public statement of intellectual allegiance, but also symbolically stands for an appraisal of the entire tradition of Stoic philosophy. Allegedly, the bust in the rear upper right is that of Seneca, the most important Stoic thinker (Simon Zurawski, "Reflections on the *Pitti Friendship Portrait* of Rubens: In Praise of Lipsius and in Remembrance of Erasmus" in *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, vol. 23, no. 4, 1992, pp. 734-745).

[11] Rubens' multilingualism is aptly certified by his rich correspondence in four languages, other than Latin: Flemish/ Dutch, French, Spanish, Italian.

[12] Madeline Delbé, "Peter Paul Rubens in Florence: Between Art, Feasts, and Diplomacy" in Raffaella Morselli and Cecilia Paolini (eds.), *Rubens e la Cultura Italiana: 1600-1608*, Rome: Viella, 2020, p. 64.

[13] Weihong Yan, "Comparison Between Rubens and Rembrandt's Creative Thoughts" in *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*, vol. 284, 2018, pp. 138-139.

Rubens' cosmopolitan humanism and neostoic pacifism is plainly visible in his vast correspondence[14] not only with statemen and high-level political officials, but also – and mostly illustrative – with outstanding intellectuals and secular scholars in Europe of his times (e.g., Palamède Fabri de Valavez and his brother Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc, Pierre Dupuy, Jan Caspar Gevaerts, Thomas Howard, 2nd Earl of Arundel, among other scientists, philologists, and art collectors).

More than most, the figure of Rubens matters as the very embodiment of the painter-humanist, for whom artistry stands as a cultural code for translating mythological, religious and antique thematic paintings into public, aristocratic and moral values.[15] Even if Rubens enthusiastically embraced the canonical patterns of Renaissance Italian art and the great Italian masters[16], he nevertheless acknowledged a kind of natural bond with the pragmatic and positivist orientation specific to his homeland art tradition. The Baroque art of

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[14] *Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard* is probably the most instructive and comprehensive archive collection of publications, documents, digital resources, and art history references (www.rubenshuis.be) about Rubens and his age, including his artistic collaborations with disciples, such as Anthony van Dyck and Jacob Jordaens, among others. Complementarily, one could have access to Rubens' letters at https://emlo-portal.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/collections/?catalogue=peter-paul-rubens.

[15] Otto von Simson, *Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640): Humanist, Maler and Diplomat*, Mainz: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 1996.

[16] After eight years of assiduous artistic apprenticeship in Italy (1600-1608), Rubens returned too late to Antwerp to participate at the burial of his mother. In a letter to his good friend, Johann Faber, Rubens confessed that he would happily abandon his duties as a 'courtier' to focus exclusively on his fascination with the Italian art (Anne T. Woollett and Ariane van Suchtelen, *Rubens and Brueghel: A Working Friendship*, Los Angeles and The Hague: The J. Paul Getty Museum and Royal Picture Gallery Mauritshuis, 2006, p. 21). In another letter to minister Annibale Chieppio, Rubens admitted that the Italian masters were both foundational and inspirational for his artistic evolution (see, for instance, Raffaella Marselli, *Tra Fiandre e Italia: Rubens 1600-1608. Regesto Biografico-Critico*, Rome: Viella, 2018, p. 276), with special acknowledgements for the Venetian school of Titian, Giorgione and Veronese, for Leonardo and Michelangelo, and for the Paduan and Parma art schools in the works of Mantegna and Correggio, respectively. Regarding contemporary Italian art, Rubens had cultivated a deep lifetime admiration for Caravaggio, the Italian master of Baroque painting. The Flemish master extensively copied the works of the Italians, creating "the greatest repertoire of forms ever" (Freedberg, *art. cit.*, p. 32).

Rubens is not only the expression of the Flemish master's most intimate artistic sensibility but also stands for a grand public statement of the artist, signifying the departure from his deep indebtedness to the great Italian tradition. Originally coined by Ernest Hemingway, the term 'Rubenesque' is the holistic epithet used to encapsulate painting features - such as grandiloquence, passion, force, vitality, theatrical choc and carnation – characteristically incorporated into the Baroque art of Rubens. Art critics have astutely observed the essential syncretism and dissimulation strategic undertakings within the Baroque vocabulary of the Flemish master. Velazquez, the master of Spanish realist painting, noted that syncretism in Rubens was the result of "mixture of genres" and "hybridization of portraiture"[17], while Rubens' own techniques of copying and retouching art works were consistent with his perspective of "selective imitation". In keeping with the methodological principle of *translatio, imitatio and aemulatio,* Rubens undertook the procedural steps from model to the copy of the model, followed by adaptation and interpretation, towards original invention.[18] Through this methodological technique, Rubens not only aimed to dissimulate and conceal the true meanings of his art and even diplomatic missions,[19] but it also stood for Rubens' strategic maneuvers for branding his art. To exemplify, Rubens used to conceal the true references regarding the strength and virtue of powerful rulers of his time by aestheticization and allegorical dissimulation of power politics. His painting *Landscape with St. George and the Dragon* stands for a symbolic pictorial representation of the reformer King Charles I of England fighting the antagonistic forces of both Calvinism and Elizabethan Puritanism;[20] moreover, his (mythological) hunting

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[17] See Barbara Jouves, "Compte Rendu d'Exposition: 'Rubens. Royal Portraits'", *Groupe de Recherche en Histoire de l'Art Moderne*, November 22, 2017, https://grham.hypotheses.org/5172

[18] Jeffrey M. Muller, "Rubens's Theory and Practice of the Imitation of Art" in *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 64, no. 2, June 1982, p. 244.

[19] The German contemporary artist and art critic Joachim von Sandrart, who accompanied Rubens during the 1927 artistic tour of Holland, doubted that Rubens was truly interested of being introduced to the newest tendencies of the Dutch art and suspected – alongside other diplomatic envoys – that Rubens concealed, in fact, his true intentions (Rooses, *op. cit.*, p. 419).

[20] Nicholas Grindle, "Rubens's *Landscape with St George and the Dragon*: Relating Images to their Originals and Changing the Meaning of Representation at the Court of Charles I" in *The Court Historian*, vol. 25, no. 2, 2020, pp. 142–157.

art could be approached as allegorical readings of confrontations between the forces of good and evil, (educated) culture and (raw) nature, benevolent hegemony and illegitimate domination, protectorate and abuse of power, etc.[21] Generally, modern art critics overlooked the present investigation's contention that the tactics of dissimulation and the symbolic distortions in the art of Rubens could be instrumentalized as artistic means for branding artistic productions.[22] Probably the most revealing occurrence of Rubens' diplomatic strategy of artistic dissimulation worked effectively between 1622 and 1625 when the artist was commissioned to execute 24 large paintings as decorations for the Luxembourg Palace of Marie de Medici,[23] in attempting to restore the damaged reputation of the French mother-queen and soften the tensed relation with her son, King Louis XIII.

The concoction between art and politics in Rubens had always subordinated the realist style of accurate historical portrayals to the Baroque mannerism of magisterial expression with a view to augmenting the art while domesticating the political and enhancing the Rubens brand to the detriment of obeying political constraints. Probably due to Rubens' persuasive skills and apparently fearing that limiting the artist's freedom of expression would diminish his monumental intuitions, there is almost no evidence that high-level political commissioners had imposed imperative artistic demands on Rubens. Following Erwin Panofsky's conceptual distinction, Rubens had fully developed his artistic genius through the iconological acumen of pictorial representation (i.e., using allusive and allegorical references of the political) rather than resorting to descriptive iconographic modes of expression (i.e., tantamount to representing historical, social and contextual connotations of the

[21] Maurice Sass, "The Predatory Core: Peter Paul Rubens and the Hunt" in *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 106, no. 4, 2024, pp. 8-13.

[22] Modern art critics, such as Giovanni Pietro Bellori and Roger de Piles, thought that *disegno* imperfections in the art of Rubens were the result of the Flemish master's exaggerated preoccupation with mechanical productivity in his workshop. At the end of the 18th century, in his *Discourses on Art*, Sir Joshua Reynolds rather eulogized deficiencies of drawing as the very signature of Rubens' brilliant inventions (Freedberg, *Peter Paul Rubens: Oil Paintings and Oil Sketches*, New York: Gagosian Gallery, 1995, pp. 10-11).

[23] Sara Galletti, "Rubens's Life of Maria de' Medici: Dissimulation and the Politics of Art in Early Seventeenth-Century France" in *Renaissance Quarterly*, vol. 67, 2014, pp. 878–916.

political).[24] The present study on the intersections between art and politics in Rubens maintains that his excellent *allegorical pictorial representation, as both the strategy of diplomatic dissimulation and the expressive tool of art branding, stands for a peculiar type of historical re-enactment of a glorious past and its transfer into present political contexts.*[25] The degree of Rubens' esoteric use of allegorical symbolism variously oscillates between the analogical[26] and the anagogical[27]. By and large, the overall diligence of the Flemish master's engagement with the political and the public realm reveals an "unique blend of learning, artistry and international diplomacy"[28] that renders unidimensional and non-correlative interpretations of his lifetime political activism incomplete and limitative.

THE DIPLOMAT IN-BETWEEN: POLITICAL LIABILITY AND ART BRANDING IN RUBENS

Peter Paul Rubens, the painter-diplomat, had been tactful, skillful and adroitly intelligent when it came to finding the right balance between his political duties and artistic endeavors; on the one hand, the diplomat had to be

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[24] Klaus von Beyme, "Why Is There No Political Science of the Arts?" in Udo J. Hebel and Christoph Wagner (eds.), *Pictorial Cultures and Political Iconographies: Approaches, Perspectives, Case Studies from Europe and America*, Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 2011, p. 16.

[25] See also other two suggestive studies: Kristina af Klinteberg, "The Divine Role of the Diadem in Rubens's Marie de' Medici Cycle" in *Journal of Art History*, vol. 93, no. 1, 2024, pp. 46-62 and Ianthi Assimakopoulou, *The Offspring of the Medici: A Visual Dialectic Between Myth and History*, Mantua: Editoriale Sometti, 2020.

[26] One might find the analogical use of pictorial allegory in Rubens' *Daniel in the Lions' Den* (ca. 1614-1618), whereby Daniel stands for the mighty protectorate of the Spanish kingdom and the ten lions symbolize the ten provinces of Southern Netherlands (see Rachel Aviva Pollack, *Peter Paul Rubens' Daniel in the Lions'* Den*: Its Sources and Its Political Significance*, Doctoral Dissertation, University of Maryland, 2015).

[27] The rather cryptic convey of allegorical representation could be found, for instance, in one of Rubens' late works, *Conversatie à la Mode* (ca. 1632-1634), whereby the Flemish master synthesized his encounters with the diplomatic milieus by evoking gallantry, etiquette, social interactions, finesse, courtship, fashionable conversations and courtesy (see Elise Goodman, "Rubens's Conversatie à la Mode: Garden of Leisure, Fashion, and Gallantry" in *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 64, no. 2, June 1982, pp. 247-259).

[28] Simson, *op. cit.*

careful not to compromise the political aims he had to pursue; on the other, the painter had always been keen on taking whatever arising opportunity to brand his art and increase his artistic prestige. In short, diplomatic tact, discretion and professionalism, on the one hand, and artistic inspiration, innovation and expertise, on the other. The present section explores the labyrinthine context of Rubens' agency as a painter-diplomat at the intersection between the tricky corridors of politics and the clever command of artistic commissions.

The correspondence of the Flemish master aptly illuminates his ability to coalesce the political intricacies of his age and the artistic ambitions he aimed to achieve. Educated as a page in the service of Marguerite de Lalaing, Comtesse de Ligne, in a general atmosphere of court pomp and etiquette, language skills, and formal learning for a career in public service at the Latin school of Rombout Verdonck,[29] Rubens had intermittently performed several important diplomatic duties, roughly between 1608 and 1636.[30] Apart from early entanglements with the field of diplomacy, such as the 1603-1604 first mission to Spain as emissary of the Duke of Mantua during his eight years apprenticeship in Italy (1600-1608),[31] Rubens' mostly substantial agency as a (cultural) diplomat was prompted by the death of Archduke Albert VII of Austria, husband of Archduchess Isabella Clara Eugenia, in July 1621. From that time on, Rubens had performed on-and-off duties as the very protégé of Infanta Isabella in the conjunctural, and sometimes perfunctory, roles of

[29] See Piet Bakker, "Peter Paul Rubens" in Arthur K. Wheelock Jr. (ed.) *The Leiden Collection Catalogue*, New York: The Leiden Collection, 2017; Woollett and Suchtelen, *op. cit.*, pp. 17-18.

[30] Peter Paul Rubens, *Pictor și Diplomat (Scrisori)*, București: Editura Meridiane, 1970. In a letter to his good friend Peiresc, Antwerp, December 18, 1634, Rubens complained about the more and more tedious duties he had to fulfill as a special envoy, expressing his wish for the termination of his political commitments.

[31] In a letter to Annibale Chieppio, Mantuan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, dated April 2, 1603, Rubens provided useful information about his role both as a member of the Mantuan embassy at the court of Spanish King Philip III in Valladolid, and – more importantly – as a gift missionary for the most influential Spanish minister, the Duke of Lerma; the impressive *Equestrian Portrait of the Duke of Lerma* (1603) speaks eloquently not only about Rubens' talent as a young artist and his intention to present himself as a learned artist, but also about his early ambitions to brand his art (see Rubens, *op. cit.*, p. 9 and Alexander Vergara, *Rubens and His Spanish Patrons*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp. 7-16).

"diplomatic negotiator, covert intermediary, and spy".[32] The present study considers only three cardinal moments of the evolution of Rubens' diplomatic agency which are explanatory for the Flemish master's lucid and balanced peregrinations between politics and art with a view to comply with his diplomatic roles and to enhancing the artistic brand of his name.

Firstly, between 1622 and 1625, Rubens was commissioned to execute a monumental series of paintings honoring the French Queen-mother Marie de Medici. Veraciously suspected by the French officials of promoting the interests of his native land and the Spanish kingdom, Rubens had to operate cautiously, even more considering the failure of the 1623 maverick maneuvers of King Charles I of England to marry Infanta Maria Anna, daughter of Spanish King Philip III. Within the troublesome French context of political machinations, marital arrangements and covered actions and intentions, Rubens had to carefully pursue the unofficial peace negotiations with the English stateman George Villiers, 1st Duke of Buckingham, and secure the interests of Spain along the way.[33] Additionally, the execution of the commission per se was a burdensome achievement, since the Flemish master had to cleverly conceal or disclose – as the case may have been – the authentic meanings of his works in order to avoid offenses or partisan interpretations. Secondly, in 1628, Infanta Isabella sent Rubens for a secret diplomatic mission to Spain, on the pretext of recommending him as the most skillful painter to her nephew, King Philip IV. Initially, even if Rubens managed to win the sympathy of the most influential Spanish minister, the Duke of Olivarez, the King himself did not share his aunt's confidence in the diplomatic abilities of the Flemish master. Shortly afterwards, highly impressed by the artistic mastery of the well-educated Rubens, King Philip IV personally consigned the Flemish to diplomatic affairs

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32 Freedberg, *art. cit.*, p. 38.

33 *Ibidem*, pp. 40-45. At the end of his French diplomatic mission and artistic commission, Rubens kept up a detailed correspondence with friends and Infanta Isabella herself on both successes and frailties of his mediation efforts. In a long letter to Infanta Isabella, dated March 15, 1625, Rubens mentioned his perilous offices as confidant and/ or adviser of high-level officials entrusted with the difficult task of achieving a peace agreement between the Protestant Northern Provinces of the Netherlands and the Catholic Southern Provinces of Flanders (Rubens, *op. cit.*, pp. 75-82). Later, in a letter to his friend, the French scholar and humanist Pierre Dupuy, dated October 18, 1625, Rubens mentioned a detailed report he wrote for Infanta Isabella in conclusion of the negotiation process (*ibidem*, p. 89).

at the court of England.[34] Thirdly, the already famous Rubens was dispatched to England in 1629 to facilitate the strenuous treaty between Spain and England, following a long period of backlashes and antagonistic diplomatic relations between the two countries. The fact that the artist was entrusted with such a complicated assignment speaks volumes not only about his solid diplomatic background and expertise, but also about his notoriousness and prestige as an artist. Apart from the extensive research dedicated to Rubens' diplomatic agency and art commissions in England, three letters addressed by Rubens himself to the favorite Spanish minister of King Philip IV, the Duke of Olivarez, elucidate the backs and forths of this knotty business.[35]

In full complementarity with the landmarks of Rubens' diplomatic career, art branding stood as a steady preoccupation of the Flemish master. Plainly visible in his correspondence, the overall tone and mood of the artist towards the political wanes in comparison with the generally passionate and self-absorbed dedication to art innovations, commerce, collecting and communication. It is probably true to assert that Rubens' diligent agency in political diplomacy "bolstered his artistic commissions",[36] as it is probably equally pertinent to assume that precisely his artistic mastery and prestige paved the way for varying diplomatic encounters and expanding acquaintances. Moreover, even in situations of full-time diplomatic responsibilities, Rubens

[34] Adams, *art. cit.* Fascinated with the art of Rubens, King Philip IV dispatched him to England "as a gift… to his art-loving English cousin" in attempting to ease the tensions between Spain and England, even more after King Charles I had declared war on Spain in 1625 (Michael Auwers, "The Gift of Rubens: Rethinking the Concept of Gift-Giving in Early Modern Diplomacy" in *European History Quarterly*, vol. 43, no. 3, 2013, p. 422).

[35] Selectively chosen for the purpose of this investigation, the three letters of Rubens chronologically registered the achievements and shortcomings of his diplomatic agency in London. The first one, dated June 30, 1629, stands as a kind of preliminary report to inform the Duke of Olivarez about the preparations and the subdued course of events in anticipation of a possible treaty between Spain and England (Rubens, *op. cit.*, pp. 176-181). The second, dated September 2, 1629, reveals an already familiarized Rubens with the intrigues at the English court and informs the Duke of Olivarez about the sympathy of the English King towards Spain, despite dividing interests and opposition of the courtiers (*ibidem*, p. 193). Finally, the third letter, dated December 14, 1629, shows a regretful and resigned Rubens for failing to achieve more on the English issue (*ibidem*, pp. 197-198).

[36] Lamster, *op. cit.*

had never ceased to paint extensively and quite rarely abandoned his artistic projects and commissions. Infrequently, any time his diplomatic adversaries aimed to discredit him and doubted his real intentions, there were accusations pointing to the egotistic Rubens "acting solely from his own interest".[37] It is probably accurate to underwrite that Rubens had carried with him the personal artistic capital and prestige: his pictorial representations operated as mediums of diplomatic translations and transactions for various cultural codes and environments, as groundbreaking material instruments for troublesome negotiation processes, as means to bypass difficult "communication channels" and to transcend political and religious barriers.[38] By and large, the Rubens brand was a syncretic conglomerate of robust managerial skills, elitist social network, noble businessman circles, passionate collecting, artistic productivity and versatility. After 1610, the workshop art studio of Rubens – the very instrument of the Rubens brand – had incessantly functioned in the spirit of tireless industriousness and entrepreneurship, producing creative synthesis with the Italian art, drafting and printmaking, engraving and drawing, commissioning and bargaining.[39] Rubens had remained linked to his workshop until the end of his life, working in 'double harness' with his assistants and disciples to produce large paintings for public consumption – a professionalized and business-like approach to cultural entrepreneurialism. This artistic mass production is not consistent with a trivial marketing strategy for branding the Rubens name only; Rubens' workshop was genuinely an art school in the lofty acceptance of the term, which mission was teaching and practicing art techniques properly. Among his disciples and collaborators, one

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[37] Rooses, *op. cit.*, p. 395.

[38] Toby Osborne, "Translation, International Relations and Diplomacy" in Sue-Ann Harding and Ovidi Carbonell-Cortes (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Translation and Culture*, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2018, pp. 517-532. See also Toby Osborne, "Anthony van Dyck: A Painter-Diplomat of the Thirty Years' War?" in Luc Duerloo and R. Malcolm Smuts (eds.), *The Age of Rubens. Diplomacy, Dynastic Politics, and the Visual Arts in Early Seventeenth Century Europe*, Turnhout: Brepols, 2016, pp. 181-196. When comparing Rubens and his disciple van Dyck, one could note that Rubens performed his diplomatic duties in the limelight in attempting to maximize his (artistic) influence (*ibidem*).

[39] Thomas Ruggio and Thomas Germano, *Peter Paul Rubens and the Flemish 17th Century: Masterworks from the Arnold & Seena Davis Collection*, New York: Iona College Arts Center, 2017.

could find names of future famous artists, such as van Dyck, Jordaens, Snijders, Brouwer and Jan Brueghel. Rubens was not only artistic mentor for his young apprentices but also played the role of a patron and/or an impresario.[40]

Infiltrating politics through art branding is ultimately an act of public statement in the field of cultural diplomacy. Since, after Giorgio Vasari, paintings were visual signatures of cosmopolitan artistry, and their authors' reputation, honor and prestige were measured precisely by the impact of their works upon foreign courts in early modern Europe,[41] branding the artist's name through his art works meant more than gaining temporary material benefits and/or winning political favoritism. International art branding truly was a broad exercise in cultural exchanges and the expression of the symbolic status of the artist as an influential agent in intercultural communication. Rubens' diplomatic agency - mostly as an unofficial envoy, mediator and facilitator - would have probably been insignificant outside his indelible role as a cultural pacificator stemming from his aura of artistic celebrity.

APPRAISING RUBENS AS A CULTURAL DIPLOMAT

Even in the absence of his bold activism as an unofficial/ special envoy, the resonance of the name Rubens in the field of cultural diplomacy could not be denied. The impact of the 'Rubens brand' outstrips artistic canons to embrace art commerce and public art, international cultural relations and exchanges (i.e., through a vast correspondence and cultural encounters for promoting art collections, literary, scientific and scholarly innovations), and ultimately art diplomacy (i.e., influencing and reforming hard-power politics by using the instruments of art gifts, art commissions, protocol decorum, art furnishing of royal buildings, etc.). This section briefly overviews Rubens' pioneering role in the field of cultural diplomacy by considering his outstanding art diplomacy, cultural entrepreneurialism and art commercialism, and ultimately his cultural legacy as an erudite art collector and philologist. Moreover, mentioning certain prestigious memberships he was devoted to during his lifetime and the most important royal distinctions which came in

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[40] Michael Jaffe, "Rubens as a Collector" in *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, vol. 117, no. 5157, 1969, p. 659.

[41] Auwers, *art. cit.*, pp. 421-441. In his *Recollections from Rubens* (1898), art historian Jakob Burckhardt celebrated the international cultural recognition of the Flemish master as the very epitome of the "grand collective public art tradition" (English translation by Mary Hottinger, London: Phaidon Press, 1950).

recognition of his merits is demonstrative regarding Rubens' refined agency in cultural diplomacy.

Beyond Rubens' commitment to elevating the status of public art and art production in the city of Antwerp,[42] numerous royal and high-level political art commissions epitomize the notoriousness of the Rubens artistic brand and the growing popularity of the Baroque art jargon in 16th and 17th centuries in Europe. Only in the period 1620-1621, Rubens was commissioned to execute 39 ceiling paintings for the Antwerp Jesuit Church and 24 large decorative canvases for the Luxembourg Palace in honoring the former French King Henry IV and his wife, Queen Marie de Medici, not to mention Rubens' personal assurance to paint a series of large canvases for the Prince of Wales in 1621.[43] It goes without saying that Rubens could not have possibly carried out solitarily such industrious commitments, even if he was fully aware of royal patrons and noblemen' dissatisfaction with collective collaborations and art studio processes understood in terms of a suspect and "pernicious specialization".[44] After 1601, until his death in 1640, with or without involving apprentices and collaborators, Rubens delivered a large amount of high-level official commissions not only in the city of Antwerp but also in Italy, France, Spain and England, enhancing the impact of his art diplomacy upon the gloomy political milieus in the first half of the 17th century. Alongside allegorical paintings and portraits properly, the art diplomacy of high-level official commissioning included architectural decorations for palaces, churches, private residences and public buildings, and protocol decorum for inaugurations, weddings, burials and official visits.

The art diplomacy of Rubens also entails cooperations in the areas of international cultural relations and exchanges, cultural entrepreneurialism, cultural authorship and effervescence in collecting artifacts. Rubens truly persevered in upholding long-term (friendly) cooperations as a forerunner of international cultural relations and exchanges. His correspondence fully attests long-standing mutual exchange of thoughts and ideas, friendly guidance and consultation, sometimes patronage and advisement towards his collaborators, information and communication to - and from - statemen, cultivated scholars,

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[42] Nils Büttner, "The Hands of Rubens: On Copies and Their Reception" in *Kyoto Studies in Art History*, no. 2, 2017, pp. 41-53.

[43] Letter to the English envoy to Brussels, William Trumbull, September 13, 1621 (Rubens, *op. cit.*, pp. 56-58).

[44] Woollett and Suchtelen, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

art collectors, scientists and humanists of his age.[45] Entrepreneurship also stands as an indelible trademark of Rubens' entanglement with the field of cultural diplomacy. Initially acquired in the artistic workshop of his art educator Otto van Veen in Antwerp and later consolidated during his eight years autodidactic stage in Italy, the culture of art entrepreneurialism not only encompassed specific techniques in mechanical reproduction of art works (e.g., engravings) but also pointed to professionalization of public art production and commerce (e.g., management, acquisition and distribution of artistic goods). The flourishing of public art markets in early modern Europe had been inextricably linked to passionate art collectorship and exchange of art objects: Rubens had definitely promoted public art transactions and lived his entire life as a zealous art collector.[46] In the aftermath of his death in 1640, the inventory of his art collection registered 314 paintings (not including his unfinished works), sculptures, vases, rocks, medals, minerals and jewelry.[47] Lastly, appraising Rubens as an outstanding cultural diplomat is tantamount to assimilating his contributions to dissemination of scholarly knowledge, books popularization and his own auctorial efforts. In this last respect, three works are worth mentioning: his ambulant Pocket-Book which registered impressions from his travels in sketches and drawings,[48] the 1622 guide of the Genua Palace comprising architectural observations, drawings and plans,[49] and the more valuable art treaty *De Imitatione Statuarum*, dealing with Rubens' ruminations on the concepts of copies, replicas and imitations, derived from his aesthetic

[45] To exemplify, Rubens perpetuated a fertile long-time letters' conversation with his friend and adviser Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc on various topics, including books, scientific innovations, art commerce and artifacts, politics. At times, out of deference, courtesy and pragmatism, Rubens collaborated with unreliable high-level officials, such as Balthasar Gerbier, Anglo-Dutch diplomat, not only on political issues but also regarding personal interests and art concerns; for instance, Gerbier mediated the art transaction between Rubens and the Duke of Buckingham (see Rubens' letter to Gerbier, May 19, 1927, in Rubens, *op. cit.*, p. 127).

[46] One of the most illustrative testimonies for assessing Rubens' unremitting excitement with collection of antiquities is exemplified by the business negotiation with Sir Dudley Carleton, English ambassador and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, regarding the acquisition of antique sculptures by Rubens in exchange of some of his paintings (see Rubens, *op. cit.*, pp. 38-51).

[47] See Jaffe, *art. cit.*, p. 649 and Jeffrey M. Muller, *Rubens: The Artist as Collector*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989.

[48] Jaffe, *art. cit.*, p. 648.

[49] Suter, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

theory.[50] In addition, Rubens' artistic membership of the *Guild of Saint Luke* in Antwerp and his affiliation to the humanist and intellectual circles of the *Latin Solidarity* and *Romanists Association*,[51] respectively, complete the profile of one of the most devoted cultural diplomats of modern Europe.

Several distinctions marked Rubens' multilateral agency as a courtier, diplomat and artist, in full acknowledgement and appreciation of his merits. Three rulers awarded Rubens nobiliary titles, mirroring the increasing prestige of his status. The Flemish master started his unofficial duties as courtier and was formally appointed court painter by the Duke of Gonzaga in Mantua in 1603 and by Archduke Albert and Infanta Isabella in 1609[52] after his return to Antwerp. The more solid the relationship between Rubens and the Spanish kingdom, the more prestigious the distinctions and awards. Following the patent of nobility received by Rubens from King Philip IV in 1624 and the appointment as Secretary to the Privy Council for life in 1629, the supreme recognition of his artistic mastery and long-standing loyalty came only in July 1631 when King Philip IV of Spain knighted the Flemish master.[53] This initiative might have been inspired not only by the express recommendation of Archduchess Isabella but also by the decision of Charles I of England to knight Rubens one year earlier, in March 1630, as a tribute to both the artistic brilliance and the good offices of the Flemish master. According to Jean Puget de la Serre, courtier and confidant of Queen-mother Marie de Medici, Rubens was "a man whose industry, though rare and marvelous, is the least of his good qualities: his judgment in affairs of state and his wit on government exalt him so high above the condition he professes that the works of his wisdom are as remarkable as those of his brush".[54]

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[50] Marina Daiman, "Rubens, Replicas, and Reputation: Reflections in Italian Art Theory" in Morselli and Paolini (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 149-164. Moreover, his brother Philip published *Electorum Libri II* (1608), a work on Roman public life and customs, to which the painter contributed a few plates (Cristopher White, *Peter Paul Rubens, Man and Artist*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

[51] Suter, *op. cit.*

[52] The 'painter of the court' distinction exempted Rubens from routine public duties. In 1609 Archduke Albert and Archduchess Isabella gave Rubens a sword, a gold chain and a medal, as gifts in recognition of his new status (Woollett and Suchtelen, *op. cit.*, pp. 23-24).

[53] Rooses, *op. cit.*, pp. 399, 466, 498. In the meanwhile, in October 1629, the University of Cambridge awarded Rubens the secular honorary degree entitled Master of Arts (*ibidem*, p. 491).

[54] Apud Rooses, *op. cit.*, p. 513.

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STUDIA UBB. EUROPAEA, LXX, 2, 2025, 57-81

DÉFAILLANCE DE L'ÉTAT ET VIOLENCE LÉGITIMATRICE : ENTRE DÉCHÉANCE DU POUVOIR RÉGALIEN ET SOUVERAINETÉ PAR LE BAS DANS LE TERRITOIRE DE FIZI, SUD-KIVU EN RD CONGO

STATE FAILURE AND LEGITIMIZING VIOLENCE: BETWEEN THE DECLINE OF REGALIAN POWER AND SOVEREIGNTY FROM BELOW IN THE TERRITORY OF FIZI, SOUTH KIVU IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

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DOI: 10.24193/subbeuropaea.2025.2.04
Published Online: 2025-12-16
Published Print: 2025-12-31

Abstract
The failure of the Congolese state is now clear for all to see, having reached its peak, particularly in the highly symbolic territory of Fizi. The sovereignty of the DRC has been severely tested by armed groups, both internal and external, which have taken advantage of the absence of a state capable of ensuring its security. Given that the DRC is highly coveted by some of its neighbors with expansionist ambitions, and even by multinationals eager to see it dismantled because of its many natural resources, it is particularly surprising that Congolese politicians do not recognize this with deterministic realism. In reality, the political elite often plays a double-edged role in the political change and modernization of societies, particularly in the DRC.
Keywords: *Failed state, sovereignty, regalian power, legitimizing violence, and Fizi.*

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INTRODUCTION

La défaillance de l'Etat en Afrique subsaharienne et particulièrement en Rdc pousse à la perte de la souveraineté de certains parmi eux. En effet, cette partie du continent où se trouve coincée la RD Congo (2.345.410 km^2) figure parmi les grandes régions du monde où la nécessité d'étudier rigoureusement la lutte armée, les rébellions, le sécessionnisme ou le séparatisme s'est fait sentir avec une acuité plus élevée et cela notamment à cause du pullulement de ces phénomènes depuis les indépendances des années 1960 et surtout depuis la vaguelette décevante de démocratisation des années 1990[1]. Parmi les facteurs déclencheurs et accélérateurs du viol de la souveraineté de l'Etat congolais, l'absence de l'Etat prend le summum argumentatif. Stevio Ultrich Baral-Angui[2] montre que si les causes du conflit congolais se limitaient à la faillite de l'État, la guerre pourrait être évitée mais les facteurs aggravants comme les effets du génocide rwandais ont précipité le pays dans la guerre, tandis que la manipulation ethnique, les problèmes fonciers et l'exploitation illégale des ressources naturelles ont servi de combustible pour alimenter le conflit. Ngoie Tshibambe[3] ajoute que les auteurs désignent les maux inhérents aux Congolais eux-mêmes : les inédites politiques de destruction et d'autodestruction des successives classes politiques, sans scrupule, irresponsables et dépourvues du sens de l'intérêt général, et qui s'affairent avec dextérité et d'une manière obscène à l'enrichissement personnel, exhibé sans vergogne et avec insolence ; l'appât du gain facile en haut et en bas de société ou la corruption généralisée ; le laxisme dans la gestion des flux migratoires dans les provinces du Kivu ou l'absence de politiques migratoires ; la non-résolution de problèmes fonciers subséquents aux migrations incontrôlées et à la base du problème de nationalité des Banyarwanda, instrumentalisés par les uns et les autres, et à ce titre une véritable épine dans le pied du gouvernement congolais et qui sert de

[1] Samia Chabouni, « Les trajectoires politico-militaires et diplomatiques de Paul Kagame : du rebelle au leader régional, *in* Sergiu Mişcoiu, Jean-Michel De Waele et Andreea Bianca Urs (dir.), *Maquisards, rebelles, insurgés... politiques. Le devenir des chefs de guerre africains*, Cluj-Napoca: Casa Cărţii de Ştiinţă, 2023, pp. 37-62.

[2] Stevio Ultrich Baral-Angui (2016), pp.222-238 *in* Dominique, Kenge et Sergiu Miscoiu, *dir*., « Rétroactes du conflit congolais (RDC) et regard sur ses causes », *in* : *Studia UBB. Europaea*, 65(2), 2020, p.107.

[3] Mbuyi Kabunda, préface *in* Germain, Ngoie Tshibambe, (s/*d), Identités, ressources naturelles et conflits en RDC. Défis méthodologiques et voies de sortie*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 2013, p.14.

prétexte à l'éternel motif d'intervention rwando-ougandaise au Congo, un pays sur lequel la violence prédatrice est imposée se manifestant par des pillages à grande échelle. Et la paix s'éloigne dans le Fizi/Alembelembe. Camel Camilleri[4] note qu'il ne peut exister d'identité – pour soi substantialiste ; il n'y a que des identités en situation, produites par des interactions. Cet article omet volontiers les luttes d'accès au pouvoir coutumier sur lesquelles je consacrerai un autre article dans l'avenir.

La présente dissertation recourt à la méthode réflexive ou interprétativiste d'investigation. Nous partons d'une situation de non Etat dans le territoire de Fizi et ambitionnons de le comprendre. L'objectif de cette recherche est de connaître, nommer, découvrir, décrire les variables entre les relations que nous découvrirons et de ce fait, analyser la problématique de la défaillance de l'Etat, des crises identitaires et l'émergence de la souveraineté par le bas dans Fizi. L'analyse documentaire et l'observation directe ainsi que l'analyse des discours des acteurs sont particulièrement utilisées afin de saisir le bilan de la littérature. Les paradigmes systémique, constitutionnaliste, interactionniste et les théories de la décision et des jeux plus le constructivisme nous ont aidés pour atteindre nos résultats[5]. L'imaginaire social est inextricablement lié au sens lié à autrui, à l'Etat, au pouvoir, etc. Il traduit ce qu'Achille Mbembe appelle ‘'la reconstruction des logiques de sens et l'organisation de nouvelles significations de l'existence, en référence à une mémoire collective »[6]. La mémoire collective est parfois porteuse des archétypes difficiles à extirper. Les stigmates des crises restent présents dans cette zone rouge où les élites dominent la masse populaire.

Cette réflexion analyse les mécanismes par lesquels la défaillance de l'État congolais dans le territoire de Fizi a favorisé l'émergence d'une souveraineté alternative. Spécifiquement, l'étude voudrait : (a) Identifier les formes de défaillance du pouvoir régalien dans le territoire de Fizi ; (b) Recenser et analyser les acteurs non étatiques qui exercent une forme d'autorité ou de souveraineté locale, (c) Interpréter les logiques sociales et culturelles qui confèrent une légitimité à la violence exercée par certains groupes armés ou autorités coutumières ; (d) Évaluer les implications

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[4] Carmel, Camilleri et *alii*, *Stratégies identitaires*, Paris : PUF, 1990, pp.43-83.

[5] Sergiu Mișcoiu, *Naissance de la nation en Europe. Théories classiques et théorisations constructivistes*, Paris, l'Harmattan, 2010.

[6] Achille, Mbembe, *Afriques indociles. Christianisme, pouvoir et Etat en société postcoloniale*, Paris : Karthala, 1988, p.35.

politiques et sécuritaires de cette souveraineté "par le bas" pour l'État central et pour la gouvernance locale. S'agissant de la pertinence de cette recherche, s'inscrivant dans la droite ligne de l'Odd16, elle vient contribuer à enrichir les débats théoriques sur la souveraineté fragmentée (haut et bas), la gouvernance hybride et les formes de pouvoir en contexte postcolonial africain et particulièrement en Rdc. *In fine*, c'est l'étude de la gouvernance, de la paix, la stabilité, la sécurité et le développement local de Fizi. Concernant la pertinence contextuelle, politique et sociale, en donnant la parole aux populations locales, cette étude permet de visibiliser les perceptions populaires de la légitimité, de la sécurité et du pouvoir, souvent absentes des analyses officielles. D'où l'intérêt des entretiens semi-directifs de recherche. Quatre théories sont mobilisées comme fondement de la résistance populaire et mode d'organisation de la souveraineté par le bas. Il s'agit de : la théorie de la souveraineté populaire : les autorités congolaises ont reconnu la souveraineté populaire dans la Constitution du 18 février 2006 (articles 3, 171 et 175) qui ne sont jamais appliquées.

Fizi est identifié comme étant occupé principalement par les Bembe. Les « sous-groupes » de Masanze, Zoba et Bwari comme d'autres peuples. Pour Olga Boone, dans ce « territoire habité par les Bembe, vivent aussi quelques familles d'autres peuplades, à savoir : des Vira, des Rundi, des Masanze et des Rwanda »[7]. Contrairement aux autres ethnies de la Rdc, les pygmées de Fizi ne sont ni représentés dans l'administration territoriale, ni au Gouvernement provincial ni au niveau Central ni local. Faut-il attendre qu'ils prennent aussi les armes ? Dans le Sud-Kivu, la forte contestation de l'identité autochtone vise les regroupements de populations barundi et, davantage, une communauté de Banyarwanda qui s'est fait appeler « Banyamulenge », à partir de 1973[8]. Ivan

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[7] Olga, Boone, *Carte ethnique du Congo quart Sud-Est*. Tervuren : MRAC (« Annales. Serie in-8°, Sciences humaines », n° 37) (1961), p.20 *in* Jean, Omasombo Tshonda, s/d, Théodore, Assumani Kilembwe ; Rigobert, Birembano Bahati ; Joris, Krawczyk, Mohamed, Laghmouch ; Paul, Olela, *République Démocratique du Congo, SUD-KIVU, Enjeux de territoire, Tome 1, Cadre naturel, peuplement et occupation de l'espace*, Tervuren, Africa Museum, 2024, p.77.

[8] Jean, Omasombo Tshonda, s/d, Assumani Kilembwe Théodore., Birembano Bahati Rigobert, Krawczyk Joris, Laghmouch Mohamed, Olela Paul, *République Démocratique du Congo, SUD-KIVU, Enjeux de territoire, Tome 1, Cadre naturel, peuplement et occupation de l'espace*, Tervuren, Africa Museum: 2024, p.77.

Krastev[9] montre que la souveraineté des Etats est limitée par des normes internationales, des droits humains ou des accords supranationaux. Elle reconnait que les Etats doivent parfois céder une partie de leur souveraineté pour respecter des engagements internationaux (art. 217 de la Constitution du 18 février 2006). Davantage encore, la reconnaissance par les NU, dans la dernière décennie du 20ème siècle, du « droit d'ingérence humanitaire » a pu justifier la possibilité de combattre par la force des régimes qui méconnaissaient gravement ces valeurs[10]. Il est clair que si la protection des peuples est foulée aux pieds, celui-ci a le droit de se défendre lui-même à défaut d'avoir en face un pouvoir politique et administratif capable d'exercer un contrôle efficace sur les individus. La souveraineté suppose un duo. Le 1er est l'Etat, et le second c'est le pouvoir populaire. Le peuple agit à travers ses représentants. Cela montre que le peuple exerce directement sa souveraineté. C'est dans ce cadre que la souveraineté est contestée par des mouvements sociaux ou populaires en passant par cette légitimité[11]. La théorie de la souveraineté conditionnelle nous aide à montrer que la Rdc est incapable de garantir la sécurité, la paix et le bien-être des citoyens. Il n'y a pas de carte d'identité nationale depuis 1996.

L'invasion programmée de la République Démocratique du Congo (RDC) ou lutte entre puissances

L'invasion ou la prise de contrôle du Zaïre ne s'est faite ni en quelques jours ni sans violence et peu de personnes se sont aperçues qu'elle avait commencé en fait dès 1994[12]. C'est paradoxalement un rapport des services de renseignements du département d'Etat américain du 04 novembre 1994 qui dévoile le projet d'ensemble : « Le FPR tentera de vaincre les insurgés/ génocidaires et portera le combat dans l'est du Zaïre[13]. Au cours d'une visite aux USA en août 1996, un mois avant le début de la « rébellion », Kagame déclare aux Américains qu'il est sur le point d'intervenir, d'autant plus que,

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[9] Ivan, Krastev, *The Sovereignty of the State in the Age of Globalization. In The Challenge of Globalization*, Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution Press, 2007, pp.27-42.

[10] Philippe, Braud, *Sociologie politique*, 12ème édition, Paris : LGDJ, 2020, p.72.

[11] V. Sergiu Mișcoiu, *Le Front National et ses répercussions sur l'échiquier politique français 1972-2002*, Cluj-Napoca, EFES, 2005, pp. 12-21.

[12] Charles, Onana, *Holocauste au Congo. Omerta de la communauté internationale. La France complice ?* Paris : L'artilleur, 2023, p.115.

[13] United States Department of State, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, « Entering a More Dangerous Phase in Rwanda and Burundi », 4 nov 1994.

selon certaines sources, les ex-Far s'apprêtent à mener une offensive à grande échelle depuis Goma et Bukavu contre le Rwanda. (…) Malgré tous les signaux d'avertissement, l'embargo sur les armes imposé au Rwanda pendant le génocide de 1994 est levé le 1er septembre 1996[14]. Ce qui peut revenir à expliquer la thèse du complot avancée par Onana, Mbeko, Ngbanda, …. Il faut rappeler que pour le Rwanda, la question n'est pas de protéger les Banyamulenge ; c'est plutôt inventer tous les stratagèmes afin de les déporter au Rwanda ou ailleurs et ainsi occuper leurs terres (1). Pour l'establishment rwandais, les Banyamulenge n'existent pas ; ce sont des Rwandais, mieux des Tutsi à ''défendre'' à tout prix et n'importe où ils se trouvent (2). Attaquer la Rdc, l'objectif n'est pas de sauver les Banyamulenge, mais mettre le Zaïre sous contrôle américain (3) et fin à l'influence de la France en Afrique médiane.

Les acteurs sous régionaux dans la déstabilisation de la Rdc

Profitant de la conjoncture du capharnaüm organisationnel étatique de la Rdc, du soutien des Usa, de la Grande-Bretagne et du Canada, le Rwanda ne veut plus accepter les frontières tracées par Berlin. Ses terres sont exiguës pour nourrir une population galopante. Et il y a longtemps que des pasteurs tutsi, mais aussi des paysans hutu, se sont installés, par vagues successives, dans les pays voisins… Notamment sur les rives occidentales des lacs Albert, Édouard, Kivu et Tanganyika, dans tout l'est du Zaïre, aujourd'hui Rdc, dans les provinces Orientale, Nord-Kivu, Sud-Kivu et Katanga. Et il y a longtemps également que, pour résoudre cette question existentielle, est née, chez les Tutsi et leurs « cousins » les Hima, l'idée d'une République des Volcans, d'un Tutsiland, d'une Swahili Republic, une idée parfois dissimulée derrière celle d'une libération régionale. Cette volonté expansionniste des dirigeants rwandais n'est pas propre aux seuls Tutsi. Les Hutu, quand ils étaient au pouvoir (1960-1994), regardaient également vers les terres de l'Ouest. Après d'autres, Yoweri Museveni et Paul Kagame portent au milieu des années 1990 ce projet qui est la ou une des cause(s) de l'impossible paix dans l'est de la Rdc, et partant dans tout le pays[15].

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[14] Filip, Reyntjens, *La grande guerre africaine. Instabilité, violence et déclin de l'Etat en Afrique centrale (1996-2006). Le bruit du monde*, Cambridge University Presses : éd. Les belles lettres, 2012, p.50.

[15] Pierre, Péan, *Carnages. Les guerres secrètes des grandes puissances en Afrique*, Paris : Fayard, 2010, p.179.

Etats faillis, fragile, en déliquescence ou déstructuré

Denis Bouchard[16] montre que le concept même pose problème selon François Gaulme[17]. Ce dernier postule que le vocabulaire est incertain et fluctuant. Plusieurs mots ou expressions sont utilisés, suscitant débats et polémiques. L'expression *« État failli »*, traduction littérale de *failed state*, est à la fois péjorative et ambiguë : il s'agit en effet moins d'une faillite financière que d'une situation plus générale d'échec à remplir ses missions. Dans cette configuration, le territoire de Fizi, à l'image de tout le pays, ressemble à un champ de bananiers se situant à côté d'un parc des gorilles sans gardes-forestiers. Et cette forêt est dévastée sans aucune mesure de protection.

La violence politique et la conquête de la souveraineté interne : la terre

Quatre options peuvent être considérées comme explication de violences politiques de l'indépendance à nos jours dans le territoire de Fizi : l'accès à la souveraineté en tant qu'Etat-Nation, lutte contre la dictature militaire de Mobutu, l'accès à la nationalité et la terre congolaises, la résistance contre les différents groupes armés étrangers présents à Fizi. La thèse de conquête terrienne du Rwanda au Congo a été aussi confirmée par un rapport de 159 pages établi par le parlement rwandais publié le 03 juin 2024. Précisons qu'une commission avait été mise en place par le Parlement rwandais en janvier 2023. Cette commission était chargée d'étudier la problématique des conflits à la frontalière dans la région des grands lacs. En effet, dans une conférence intitulée « la vérité sur la formation des frontières du Congo-Rwanda »[18] que le professeur Tshibangu Kalala a animée à Bruxelles, le 19 février 2025, celui-ci souligne qu'aux numéros de pages 33-34 et suivant de ce rapport en kinyarwanda traduit en anglais par un logiciel, le parlement rwandais, falsifie l'histoire et écrit l'histoire à sa manière. En effet, pour ce parlement, les territoires de Rutshuru, Masisi au Nord-Kivu, au sud-kivu, les territoires d'Uvira et de Fizi y compris les plateaux d'Itombwe font partie du royaume du Rwanda. C'est la colonisation qui est responsable de tous les problèmes à l'est de la Rdc aujourd'hui. Les députés rwandais ont pris la parole et déclaré qu'ils vont demander au gouvernement de tout faire pour récupérer ces territoires

[16] Denis, Bouchard, *Etats fragiles*, Politique étrangère n°1, 2011, pp.10-11.

[17] François, Gaulme, « *'États faillis', 'États fragiles' : concepts jumelés d'une nouvelle réflexion mondiale* », Politique étrangère, n° 1, 2011, pp.17-29.

[18] YouTube, *La vérité sur la formation des frontières du Congo-Rwanda*, du 20/4/2025.

perdus pour les annexer au Rwanda. Et ces propos ont été confirmés par le président Paul Kagame en visite officielle au Bénin, le 15 avril 2023[19]. Mais pourquoi Kagame ne s'aventure pas en Tanzanie ?

Les différents conflits ethnico-politiques burundais (1972, 1993 et 2015)

Après son accès à l'indépendance le 01 juillet 1962, le Burundi a été secoué par des crises politico-ethniques cycliques à partir de 1965 mettant aux prises Hutu et Tutsi instrumentalisés politiquement. Evariste Ngayimpenda[20] explique en long et en large la tragédie burundaise de 1972 et son lot de malheurs. Pour lui, ce génocide était planifié par les Hutu contre les Tutsi. Pour sa part, l'ancien Président Sylvestre Ntibantunganya, le « génocide de l'élite hutu » s'est déroulé sans véritable résistance de la masse de la population[21]. Ces réfugiés burundais de 1972 se sont installés principalement dans les localités de Makobola, Swima, Mboko, Nundu/Kenya, Sangya, Bamate, Lusenda, Atanga et Malinde.

L'impact du génocide au Rwanda et arnaque du peuple congolais par l'élite politique à travers les dialogues de ''paix''

A la suite du crash de l'avion falcon 50 qui transportait les présidents Juvénal Habyalimana et Cyprien Ntaryamira un génocide des Tutsi a été opéré au Rwanda en 1994. Des populations rwandaises y compris des militaires des Far et miliciens Interahamwe avec armes et munitions ont fui vers le nord-kivu et le sud-kivu en Rdc (Kamanyola, Uvira et Fizi) sans laisser derrière eux leur idéologie génocidaire. Dans cet environnement, les forces armées zaïroises, soit elles restèrent passives, soit elles aidèrent activement les milices hutu dans les violences commises sur les Tutsi, notamment en leur fournissant des armes ; mais d'autres commentaires officiels appuyèrent les groupes « autochtones » dans les efforts déployés pour expulser les Banyarwanda. Plusieurs dizaines de

[19] Jassalh, Saleh Assisa, *Elite politique et souveraineté de la RDC. Pour la conquête de la paix des Territoires de Fizi et Uvira, Sud-Kivu, Rdc. In* Studia Europaea, LXIX,2., 2024, p.13.

[20] Evariste, Ngayimpenda, *Histoire du conflit politico-ethnique burundais. Les premières marches du calvaire (1960-1973)*, Bujumbura : Editions de la Renaissance, 2004, pp. 379-526.

[21] Sylvestre, Ntibantunganya, *Une démocratie pour tous les Burundais. De l'autonomie à Ndadaye (1956-1993)*, T.1. Paris : L'Harmattan, 1999, p.10.

milliers de Tutsi se déplacèrent du Congo au Rwanda fin 1994 et en 1995[22]. Ces derniers affirment que le 28 avril 1995, le Parlement de Transition adopta une « résolution sur la nationalité » qui décrivait tous les Rwandais comme des étrangers « qui avaient acquis la nationalité zaïroise de manière frauduleuse ». Dans le Sud-Kivu, le Commissaire du district d'Uvira ordonna en septembre 1995 un inventaire de tous les biens et toutes les terres appartenant aux Banyamulenge. Les expulsions des Banyamulenge du Sud-Kivu de leurs maisons devinrent courantes, de même que les déportations, principalement au Rwanda et au Burundi, atteignant un pic en 1996. Les Banyamulenge reçurent des ultimatums pour quitter le pays et des slogans en faveur du nettoyage ethnique apparurent : *« opération rendre les Rwandais au Rwanda », « Bukavu et Uvira villes propres »*. En 1998, les discours de haine devinrent particulièrement virulents ; parmi certaines déclarations officielles, le ministre des Affaires étrangères Abdoulaye Yerodia Ndombasi affirma publiquement que les Tutsi étaient *« de la vermine » digne « d'être exterminés »*, ce qui aurait directement conduit au massacre de plusieurs centaines de Tutsis. Le Rwanda a clairement exacerbé un problème latent afin de créer un prétexte pour lancer son opération. Même si les Banyamulenge ont des griefs légitimes, la décision de lancer une opération militaire n'a pas été prise par eux, mais par Kigali[23]. Le Rapport mapping[24] souligne que depuis les années 1980, la question de la nationalité des Tutsi vivant au Sud-Kivu était, comme celle des Banyarwanda au Nord-Kivu, un sujet de polémique. La plupart des Tutsi du Sud-Kivu affirmaient être des Zaïrois banyamulenge, c'est-à-dire des descendants des Tutsi du Rwanda et du Burundi installés dans les Hauts Plateaux des territoires d'Uvira et de Fizi avant le partage colonial de 1885. Les autres communautés considéraient à l'inverse que la plupart des Tutsi vivant au Sud-Kivu étaient

[22] Pacifique, Ngoma-Binda ; Jean, Otemikongo ; Leslie, Moswa Mombo, *République Démocratique du Congo. Démocratie et participation à la vie politique : Une évaluation des premiers pas dans la IIIème République*, Une étude d'AfriMAP et de l'Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa, Johannesbourg : Open Society Foundations, 2010, pp.43-44.

[23] Filip, Reyntjens, *Op cit*, 2012, p.50.

[24] RDC, *Rapport du Projet Mapping concernant les violations les plus graves des droits de l'homme et du droit international humanitaire commises entre mars 1993 et juin 2003 sur le territoire de la République démocratique du Congo, Nations-Unies, Août* 2010, p.73.

des réfugiés[25] politiques ou des immigrés économiques arrivés au cours du 20ème siècle et ils leur contestaient le droit à la nationalité zaïroise. La décision prise en 1981 par le Président Mobutu d'abroger la loi de 1972 par laquelle il avait accordé la nationalité zaïroise de manière collective aux populations originaires du Rwanda et du Burundi présentes sur le territoire zaïrois avant le 1er janvier 1950 avait conforté la position des communautés dites « autochtones ». Depuis lors en effet, la suspicion quant à la nationalité réelle des Tutsi du Sud-Kivu était devenue générale et aucun député tutsi n'avait pu être élu dans la province. Comme au Nord-Kivu en 1989, la controverse sur la nationalité dite *« douteuse »* des Tutsi de la province avait d'ailleurs conduit au report des élections. Pour autant, en l'absence de conflit foncier majeur et eu égard à l'importance numérique relativement faible de la communauté banyamulenge et tutsi dans la province, la libéralisation politique du régime après 1990 n'avait pas débouché au Sud-Kivu sur le même degré de violence et de manipulation tribaliste qu'au Nord-Kivu[26]. Rappelons que les armes circulent librement c'est-à-dire en toute impunité.

Dans les Hauts et Moyens Plateaux des territoires d'Uvira, de Fizi et de Mwenga, les populations bembe, dont les contentieux historiques avec les Rwandais n'avaient jamais été réglés, ont profité de ce contexte pour s'organiser en groupes armés et multiplier à leur encontre les actes d'intimidation et les vols de bétail. Face à cette situation, un nombre croissant de jeunes Tutsi et de Banyamulenge sont partis au Rwanda suivre une formation militaire au sein de l'Apr. Certains sont revenus rapidement au Zaïre et ont créé une milice d'autodéfense. D'autres sont restés au Rwanda afin de participer à la création d'une rébellion banyamulenge devant permettre à l'Apr de neutraliser les ex-Far/Interahamwe et aux Tutsi du Sud-Kivu et du Nord-Kivu d'obtenir la reconnaissance de leur nationalité zaïroise pleine et entière

[25] Gisaro Muhoza, un député national d'origine tutsi élu du territoire d'Uvira a popularisé ce terme à partir de la fin des années 1960 afin de distinguer les Tutsi installés de longue date au Sud-Kivu, les Banyamulenge, de ceux arrivés à partir des années 1960 comme réfugiés ou immigrés économiques. Banyamulenge signifie « gens de Mulenge », du nom d'une localité située dans le territoire d'Uvira où les Tutsi sont très nombreux. Il convient de noter cependant que la majorité des habitants de Mulenge ne sont pas des Tutsi mais des Vira. Avec le temps le terme « banyamulenge » a de plus en plus été utilisé pour désigner indifféremment tous les Tutsi zaïrois/congolais.

[26] RDC, *Op cit, Août* 2010, p.73 et s.

par un nouveau régime à Kinshasa[27]. À partir de juillet 1996, avec le début des opérations d'infiltration des éléments armés banyamulenge/tutsi au Sud-Kivu, la situation des civils tutsi en général est devenue extrêmement précaire. Après que les Faz ont intercepté, le 31 août 1996, des militaires rwandais au niveau de Kiringye, à 60 kilomètres au nord d'Uvira, le Commissaire de zone, Shweka Mutabazi, a appelé les jeunes locaux à s'enrôler dans des milices combattantes et a donné l'ordre aux Faz d'arrêter tous les Banyamulenge et les Tutsi 160 vivant dans le territoire d'Uvira. Dans ce contexte, l'Équipe Mapping a documenté les incidents allégués par différents groupes ethniques[28]. Est-il possible que Fizi renaisse, tel un phœnix, de ses cendres et ainsi reconquérir une paix durable ? Oui.

À partir de 1993 cependant, l'arrivée dans la province des réfugiés et des groupes armés hutu burundais[29] et rwandais et l'intégration après juillet 1994 de nombreux Banyamulenge et Tutsi du Sud-Kivu dans l'armée et l'administration du nouveau régime rwandais[30] ont eu pour effet d'attiser le sentiment anti-banyamulenge et anti-tutsi chez de nombreux Sud-Kivutiens. Accusés d'être des agents des gouvernements rwandais ou burundais voire ougandais, de nombreux Tutsi étrangers mais aussi des Banyamulenge ont perdu leur emploi et ont subi des discriminations et des menaces. Ce fut donc le début de l'embrasement de la Rdc et de toute la région. James Kabarebe, ancien ministre de la Défense rwandais, qui fut pendant un temps le Chef d'Etat-major de l'armée congolaise sous le régime de Raoul Benyam (nom de code de L-D Kabila), a lui-même reconnu, lors d'une allocution à l'Université Libre de Kigali que « les Banyamulenge n'existent pas. Les

[27] RDC, *Ibidem*.

[28] RDC, *Ibidem*.

[29] Après l'assassinat, le 21/10/1993 à Bujumbura du Président Melchior Ndadaye, des violences inter-ethniques ont éclaté au Burundi entre les Hutu et les Tutsi. Face à la répression organisée par les Fab dominées par les Tutsi, des dizaines de milliers de Hutu se sont réfugiés au Sud-Kivu entre 1993 et 1995. Dans leur sillage, en 1994, le mouvement hutu burundais du Cndd de Léonard Nyangoma et sa branche armée, les Fdd se sont installés dans les territoires d'Uvira et de Fizi. À partir de leurs arrières-bases dans le Sud-Kivu, ils ont lancé plusieurs attaques contre les Forces armées burundaises (Fab). La branche armée du mouvement hutu burundais, le Palipehutu, le Fnl, a également utilisé le Sud-Kivu comme arrière base dans sa lutte.

[30] Patrick, Mbeko, et Honoré, Ngbanda Nzambo, *Stratégie du chaos et du mensonge. Poker menteur en Afrique des Grands Lacs*, Québec : Editions de l'Erablière, 2014, p.331.

prétendus Banyamyulenge sont, en réalité, des Rwandais », car dit-il, « ils parlent le Kinyarwanda et ont la culture rwandaise ». C'est donc de la manipulation qui doit être combattue et mise à nu si la justice est en action.

Etat fragile et souveraineté par le bas dans le Territoire de Fizi

Dans ce territoire, nous y observons trois principales formes d'organes de violences légitimatrices s'exprimant toutes contre la souveraineté de l'Etat. Il s'agit de la violence contre (a) l'occupation rwando-burundo-ougandaise depuis 1996 et son corollaire, (b) la violence identitaire revendicatrice de la protection des Rwandais tutsi qui luttent contre le pouvoir politique légitime. Cette ethnie est en quête de la nationalité et partant de la terre, source du pouvoir politique et économique. Cette violence s'oriente aussi contre la population (autochtone *versus* allogène) et notamment les chefs coutumiers. En riposte, ces derniers agissent par vengeance auto-protectrice et destructrice en vies humaines, bétails, maisons, etc. Il y a enfin la violation de la souveraineté de la Rdc par des (c) groupes armés étrangers en provenance du Burundi et du Rwanda (Fdlr, M23/Afc et leurs alliés, les Red Tabara) qui ont érigé des bases arrières dans les territoires de Fizi et Uvira pour conquérir le pouvoir dans leurs pays d'où ils sont venus.

Sur ce dernier registre, il est remarquable, répétons-le, que la lutte ethnique entre Hutu et Tutsi au Burundi et au Rwanda continue mais elle a juste changé de territoire et de cible. Le tout au service de la procuration anglo-saxonne. Cette transposition de lutte majorité-minorité (Hutu-Tutsi) ne peut pas s'appliquer dans cet espace car on risque de transformer la crise identitaire congolaise en crise raciale. Et pourtant, comme nous l'avons déjà dit, il s'agit fondamentalement de conflits liés aux puissances et au pillage des ressources naturelles de la Rdc. Qui plus est, il n'y a pas d'animosité culturellement cultuelle entre Bembe, Vira, Nyindu, Bwari contre les Tutsi. A titre exemplatif, dans le village de Nundu, Groupement Babungwe, Secteur de Tanganyika, Mrs Norbert Andolo Bwengwe (+) et Habibu Matete W'Abango ont arraché des griffes des assaillants y compris un pasteur de l'Eglise Méthodiste Libre, Mme Angèle Bambarayandi (Tutsi burundaise, mère de 7 enfants, épouse de Mr Augustin Mossi wa Lobelo). A Abela, dans le Secteur de Mutambala, vécut une prophétesse tutsi de renom appelée Mariam wa Lutabùla et dont le fils Jérémie épousa une infirmière bembé qui exerçait à l'hôpital de Nundu qui avait un médecin Chef de Zone de Santé, un Munyamulenge appelé Mugabe. A cette époque Mr Ngandu assassiné dans sa fuite à Akyumba par les agresseurs de l'Afdl en 1996 était l'Administrateur de cet hôpital financé par les USA.

Bien plus, Mgr Jérôme Gapangwa, l'évêque d'Uvira dans lequel fait partie le territoire de Fizi, d'origine Munyamulenge, et Sibomana Déogratias furent les premiers à s'inscrire à l'école primaire catholique de Baraka, dans les années 1950. Inscrit ensuite au petit séminaire de Mungombe, Jérôme Gapangwa fut hébergé par la famille Isungapala Frédéric, à Mwenga. Les Congolais qui ont accueilli Mgr Gapangwa du temps où il était encore jeune réfugié tutsi ont manifestement été identifiés[31]. Dans une vidéo devenue virale[32], Mgr Gapangwa Nteziryayo, devant un groupe des jeunes Banyamulenge, les exhorte à excepter qu'ils sont Rwandais, et il n'y a pas de crime à cela. Il affirme que sur sa carte de baptême, le 02/02/1955, il est bien écrit qu'il est Rwandais. De même, Manassé Ruhimbika, Tutsi militant de la cause banyamulenge, explique que « le nom Banyamulenge veut souligner notre présence ancienne au Zaïre à ne pas confondre avec les réfugiés rwandais des années 1960. Le nom Banyamulenge ne se réfère ni à un de nos vingt-six clans, ni à un ancêtre commun mais au village de Mulenge où se sont installés nos arrière-grands-parents[33]. Le pire incident fut sans doute le massacre de Makobola perpétré à la Saint-Sylvestre en 1998 : plus de 800 civils massacrés (hommes, femmes et enfants). Ces éléments ont renforcé une ligne de fracture entre les Nilotiques, dont les Tutsi/Hima sont perçus comme faisant partie, et les Bantous. Ces derniers, majoritaires, préjugeant les premiers comme rusés, dominateurs, ayant de la fourberie. Du coup, toute cohabitation pacifique est hypothéquée entre ces deux groupes.

La résistance populaire : ressources naturelles, foncières et autochtonie

La souveraineté parallèle dans le territoire de Fizi a engendré une résistance populaire continue. Cette dernière s'emploie à vouloir pondérer la faillite de l'État mais sans la neutraliser durablement. Dans le contexte fizien, la résistance prend deux figures (douce et violente). Pour le général William Amuli Yakutuma[34], la Cnpsc (Coalition Nationale du Peuple pour la Souveraineté du Congo) est un mouvement politico-militaire congolais qui

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[31] Charles, Onana, *Op cit*, 2023, p.263.

[32] YouTube, consulté le 07 avril 2025. Il dit sur ma carte de baptême dans l'église catholique, on mentionnait aussi son ethnie : Je suis Munyarwanda et c'est la vérité.

[33] Manassé Ruhimbika, 2001, p.21 *in* Charles, Onana, *Op cit, 2023,* p.263.

[34] William Amuli Yakutumba, né en 1964, Gradué en Sciences Politiques et Administratives de l'Université de Lubumbashi, entretien du 24 avril 2023 dans son QG de Matelo/Fizi.

combat la mauvaise gouvernance d'une part, et de l'autre part, l'inefficacité de l'Etat congolais depuis le régime de Joseph Kabila, à protéger la souveraineté de la Rdc et celle de son peuple. C'est pour cela que la Cnpsc appelle au patriotisme et à une révolte populaire pour renverser le système et non le régime. Car il faut combattre l'occupation de notre terre natale suscitée par l'impérialisme occidental et tous ses collaborateurs locaux ou voisins qui nous empêchent de profiter de nos richesses et partant, de nous développer. Notez que la Rdc a tout pour son développement, mais les Congolais en général et ceux de Fizi en particulier, n'en profitent jamais. En outre, ceux qui ne connaissent pas nos idéaux pensent que notre combat est orienté contre le Rwanda ou les Tutsi. Ils se trompent largement sur notre objectif. En effet, ceux-là constituent l'une de notre cible parce que les impérialistes les utilisent pour parvenir à la balkanisation[35] de la Rdc. Bref, si les traitres étaient d'une autre ethnie, on les combattrait autant que les Tutsi. Il faut retenir que notre idéologie n'est pas identitaire mais plutôt celle de sauvegarder la souveraineté de notre pays. Soulignons toutefois que ces VDP Volontaires pour la Défense de la Patrie) attentent aux droits humains suite à un manque de formation sur le droit humanitaire. H. Ngbanda[36] montre que cette résistance farouche à la pénétration des forces rwandaises de l'Afdl à Fizi en 1996 a consacré la création des « Mai-Mai » sous sa forme actuelle. Ces combattants organisés en véritables résistants avaient pour seul objectif : empêcher les troupes rwandaises de Kagamé d'occuper les terres bembé. En 1997, Laurent Désiré Kabila qui connaissait bien la perspicacité des combattants bembés pour les avoir ralliés à son maquis, trouva des moyens de négociations pour briser l'opposition et ouvrir un passage pour l'Afdl en direction du Nord Katanga. Selon le schéma et le calendrier initial des Américains, le Katanga aurait dû tomber avant la province orientale. Mais, à cause de la résistance imprévue des Mai-Mai, on changea d'itinéraire et Kisangani fut programmée avant Lubumbashi. Dans cette négociation avec les Maï-Mai, les généraux Sylvestre Luetcha et Sikatenda furent mis à contribution pour convaincre les combattants congolais qui sont de la même tribu qu'eux. Ils leur tinrent le discours suivant :

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35 To Save Congo, Let it Fall Apart - By J. Peter Pham, Directeur du Centre Afrique au Conseil Atlantique, New York Times-November 30, 2012, Puis Envoye Special des USA dans la Region des Grands Lacs Africains de 2018-2020.

36 Honoré, Ngbanda Nzambo, *Crimes organisés en Afrique Centrale. Révélations sur les réseaux rwandais et occidentaux,* Paris : Editions Duboiris, 2004, pp.146-147.

> *« Nous ne venons pas faire la guerre contre nos frères bembés, nous demandons seulement un passage pour aller jusqu'à Kalemie et Katanga, car l'AFDL, après la chute de Bukavu, a comme objectif d'aller jusqu'à Kinshasa.»*

Jusqu'à son dernier souffle dans la prison de Ndolo à Kinshasa le 04 juin 2025, où il était incarcéré, le général Sikatenda est resté l'incarnation de la résistance mai-mai dans le territoire de Fizi. Pour leur part, Messieurs Azarias Ruberwa (ancien vice-président de la Rdc et plusieurs fois ministre) et Moïse Nyarugabo (sénateur), à la solde de P. Kagame, se sont montrés comme les plus grands ténors de la cause tutsi et de leur résistance à travers deux milices les plus meurtrières Twirwaneho et Ngumino pour saucissonner la Rdc selon le programme américain. Le bilan des victimes est difficile à établir pour toute la période de 1996 à ce jour. Notons qu'en 1999, 818 personnes civiles ont été tuées, non comprises les victimes qui seront plus tard retrouvées dans les buissons ». Telles sont les grandes lignes du récit de l'Abbé Bulambo, complété par d'autres survivants du drame. Un rapport de la Coordination des jeunes de la société civile du Kivu (Cojeski) fait état de 818 victimes Babembe, Bavira et Bafuliiru tuées le 1er janvier 1999) au cours des tragiques événements de Makobola[37]. Alenga Mweci Ebunga[38] avance qu'au niveau de la gestion du pouvoir de l'Union sacrée, la responsabilité à ce niveau est de l'élite politique. S'agissant de la lutte contre l'occupation, un député national[39] élu de Fizi qui a requis l'anonymat souligne que le peuple m'mbondo et la souveraineté sont les deux faces d'une même médaille. Dès lors qu'il s'agit de protéger son espace vital et l'histoire du territoire, le M'bembe n'hésite jamais à se défendre par tous les moyens possibles, y compris par les armes. Et ceci n'a pas commencé aujourd'hui. Cela a commencé avec Mbavu Moya qui a lutté contre les Allemands, puis le général Sylvestre Lwe'ya, Sikatenda, Shabani Ndalo Maulana, Madoa-Madoa, etc. Il y a toujours un mariage intime entre un M'mbondo et la terre (ésé, ébalo : notre terre, notre pays). Dès lors que dans tout conflit, les armes parlent. Sans doute qu'il doit y avoir des victimes directes et indirectes à déplorer. Malheureusement c'est souvent l'enfant, le jeune et surtout la femme qui sont les plus concernés ; des incendies et vols.

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[37] RDC, *Livre Blanc,* Kinshasa, 2001, p.16. Cfr le Rapport Mapping 2010.

[38] Chef de Groupement de Bashim'muma-Nord, né en 1982, entretien du 12 juin 2024 à Baraka.

[39] M. Anonyme, entretien du 10 avril 2025, député national de Fizi, réalisé à Bujumbura.

Pour Msaselwa Makelele, pour sortir de cet état, les Babembe doivent accepter une cohabitation pacifique avec les cinq autres tribus. Et les Rwandais devraient faire alliance avec les Bembé au lieu de les considérer comme leurs ennemis congénitaux[40]. Msaselwa rappelle que le 25 décembre 1998 à Makobola, les maï-maï associés aux fdd ont tué des malades banyamulenge hospitalisés à l'hôpital de Makobola parmi lesquels il y avait des militaires blessés aux combats et ont exposé leurs corps près du pont de la rivière Makobola. Une Munyamulenge des hauteurs d'Abumbe/Mkubwe qui venait d'accoucher à cet hôpital a été massacrée et son bébé éventré.

Bilan de la souveraineté parallèle dans le territoire de Fizi

Le bilan de cet état de fait est très alarmant sur le plan politique, économique, financier, sécuritaire, social, voire humain. Plus de 35 barrières payantes des VDP et des Fardc dans un même territoire. Pour voyager dans son territoire par exemple quitter Makobola pour aller à Nyange ou Elembwe, le citoyen est obligé de payer plus de 20 000 FC aux militaires et son motard plus de 18 000 FC. S'il faut ajouter les frais de transport qu'il doit payer au motard qui est de 140 à 150 000 FC, il arrive à payer plus de 180 000 FC soit plus de 60 $ pour un aller simple. Ce montant correspond exactement au coût nécessaire pour faire le tour de nos pays voisins de plus de 1300 km (Bujumbura - Dar salaam - Kampala - Kigali) par véhicule[41]. C'est en effet, la criminalisation de l'Etat[42]. Sur le plan humain, parmi les massacres les plus notoires, citons le meurtre par les soldats Banyamulenge d'Henri Spaack, chef coutumier Bembé du groupement de Basimunyaka, le 12 septembre ; le massacre de 300 Banyamulenge à Baraka le 26 septembre ; et une tuerie massive perpétrée par des soldats Banyamulenge à Abala le 28 octobre 1996, au cours de laquelle 101 civils, pour la plupart Bembé, furent massacrés pendant la

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[40] M. Msaselwa Makelele, né en 1976, ancien aide de camp du général autoproclamé William Amuli Yakutumba, entretien du 18 avril 2017 à Bujumbura.

[41] Nyamangyoku Ishibwela, Obedi, *Rapport de vacances parlementaires, session de Mars 2024*, Kinshasa : 2024, pp.26-27.

[42] Jean-François Bayart, « L'Afrique invisible », *Politique internationale*, 70, hiver 1995-1996, pp.287-299 et - en collaboration avec Stephen, Ellis et Béatrice, Hibou - *La Criminalisation* de *l'État en Afrique*, Bruxelles, Complexe, 1997 (trad. angl : Oxford, J. Currey, Bloomington, Indiana Univ. Press, 1999), ainsi que W. Reno, *Corruption and State Politics in Sierra Leone*, Cambridge : Cambridge Univ. Press, 1995.

messe[43]. Des Congolais en majorité des Banyamulenge ont également été massacrés à Gatumba au Burundi le 17 août 2004. Un lourd bilan de 152 personnes tuées, 106 blessés et 8 portés disparus a été enregistré par les Nations-Unies (S/2004/821 du 18 octobre 2004). Des vies entières sont détruites pour la sécurité d'un pays, le Rwanda. Toutes ces atrocités de part et d'autres méritent justice pour aspirer à la réconciliation et à la paix.

Tableau n°1 : Cartographie des cachots des VDP et justice parallèle

N°	Responsable du roupe rebelle	Localisation
1.	Zela Mbuma	Alénga-Nord
2.	Ebuéla Mtetezi	Baraka-Centre
3.	Alexis Dunia	Mongemonge
4.	William Amuli Yakutumba	Mwamsombo YEP, Atchanga Cité Malkia wa Ubembe Fizi-Centre Ananda
5.	Chinja Huwa	Elombwe-Lulémba
6.	Biloze Bishambuke	Akomba

Source: *RDC, Société civile Sud-Kivu. Bureau de coordination provinciale : juin-août 2025*, Bukavu, p.36.

Ces cachots où la corruption et la torture la plus atroce sont la règle se trouvent pourtant installés dans des secteurs contrôlés par l'Etat congolais.

Tableau n°2 : Les déplacés dans la zone de santé de Minembwe

N°	Aire de santé	Effectif des déplacés
1.	Rugezi	4.970
2.	Kitumba	6.626
3.	Kinyokwe	4.098
4.	Ilundu	6.275
5.	Irumba	5.855
6.	Abengu	7.117
7.	Kahwela	4.453
8.	Akenge	4.613
9.	Kihunga	3.793
	Total	47.860

Source : *RDC, Société civile Sud-Kivu. Bureau de coordination provinciale : juin-août 2025*, BK, p.39.

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[43] Jason, Stearns, *L'ancrage social des rébellions congolaises. Approche historique de la mobilisation des groupes armés en République démocratique du Congo,* Congo Research Group : New York University, 1997, p.21.

Minembwe est l'une des localités habitées majoritairement par les éleveurs rwandais. Cependant, il est difficile de déterminer les déplacés par ethnie.

Tableau n°3 : Cas des viols référés répertoriés entre mai et août 2025

N°	Zone de santé	Période	Nombre	Référencement
1.	Fizi	Mai – juillet	28	Hôpital général de Fizi
2.	Nundu	Juin – juillet	14	Hôpital général de Nundu
3.	Embe-Lulenge	Mai – août	4	Hôpital de Lulemba
	Total		**46**	

Source: *RDC, Société civile Sud-Kivu. Bureau de coordination provinciale : juin-août 2025*, BK, p.42.

Ces statistiques représentent les déplacés dans le seul groupement de Bashim'muma-Sud. Les conditions de vie de ces déplacés sont très précaires. Ils sont dépourvus de toute assistance humanitaire, sans eau potable ou soins de santé appropriés pour les blessés de guerre et de violences sexuelles. Si rien n'est fait et rapidement, ces groupes armés constituent une menace existentielle du territoire par le règne de la *vendetta*. Et comment peut-on prétendre au développement local dans un environnement très incertain transformé en monde des assassins et pilleurs ? Il convient de signaler que la plus grande structure armée parmi les différents groupes actifs dans le territoire de Fizi c'est la Cnpsc. Le GEC[44] souligne que la Cnpsc a lancé en 2017 une offensive de grande envergure s'emparant rapidement de bases de l'armée congolaise. Elle a obtenu d'importantes quantités de munitions, pris brièvement le contrôle de vastes zones d'extraction d'or, et atteint la périphérie d'Uvira, un carrefour commercial régional important. La coalition comprenait au moins sept groupes armés répartis sur des centaines de km^2. A peine plus d'un an plus tard, le groupe fut frappé par une offensive de l'armée régulière et chassé de la plupart des centres de population, mais il reste toujours une menace pour les civils et la stabilité de la région. Dès 2023, la Cnpsc s'est alliée aux Fardc et à la Force de Défense Nationale Burundaise (Fdnb) dans la lutte contre les agresseurs du M23/Afc/Rdf. Un contingent des Fdnb est très présent dans le territoire. L'armée burundaise est dans le territoire de Fizi pour deux raisons majeures ; à savoir (1) traquer les Fnl, Cnrd et Red Tabara financées par le Rwanda et

[44] Groupe d'Etude sur le Congo, décembre 2018, pp.1-14.

(2) sécuriser ses frontières de Kamanyola jusqu'au Tanganyika contre les Rdf. Les Fdnb protègent Uvira, Fizi et surtout les Banyamulenge contre les attaques de Red Tabara/M23.

Tableau n°4 : Groupes armés locaux et étrangers dans le territoire de Fizi

N°	Groupe armé	Chef du G.A.	Secteur	Village
1	Coalition Nationale du Peuple pour la Souveraineté du Congo (Cnpsc)	William Amuli Yakutumba	'Ngangya Mtambala, Lulenge	Babengwa, Matelo, Muonda, 'Ngangya, Eleca, Bwala, Misese, Ngalula, Nyange, Makungu, Lubicako I et II ; Babengwa, Mkela, Sembe, Ecula, Bikalakala, 'Wa Mabwe, Ibumba
2	Mai-Mai ALIDA	Alonda Bita Alida	'Ngangya, Mtambala	Eônde, Nemba, Bubwalé, Beteli.
3	CPLC/FABB (Congrès Patriotique pour la Liberté des Congolais) Forces d'Auto-défense Biloze Bishambuke	Delphin Kalembe Ngomanzito	'Ngangya Mtambala, Lulenge, Tangania	Bashikika, Milemba, Rugezi, Kitumba, Bikalakala, Kinyokwe, Bulembo, Akye/Kitamabanga, Abangya, Namulasi, Eleca, Natulonge, Muonda, Kisanya, Misunga, Esembe.
4	Mai-Mai Mulumba	Mulumba Hondwa	Lulenge	Muonda
5	Mai-Mai Toronto	Toronto	Tangania	Lweba, Lusenda, Bitobolo, Andale, Esombe, Atenga, Mkyamba, Lubumba
6	Mai-Mai Réunion	Réunion Warusasa Musombani	Tangania	Lulambwe, Majaga, Etundu, Akenga
7	Mai-Mai Mupekenya	Vincent Nelonge	Tangania	Kiringi, Lufunda, Mitambo
8	Raiya Mutomboki Muhasha	Muhasha Mushimbi	Tangania	Kakuku, Bitakiro, Lutabula
9	CPLC/FABB Assani	Célestin Assani Mbakanyi	'Ngangya, Lulenge	Milimba, Kitumba, Rugezi, Bikalakala, Lwamabwe
10	Mai-Mai Kakobanya	Kakobanya Kalambi	Tangania	Bilende, Angùle, Etasha 1 et 2

N°	Groupe armé	Chef du G.A.	Secteur	Village
11	Mai-Mai FPLC	Muchingwa Aluta	Tangania	Lulambwe
12	Twirwaneho/ Ngumino	Michel Rukunda Makanika et Ndakize Kamasa	Mtambala, Lulenge, Tangania	Mleca, Abingu, Akenge, Akangala, Alonge, Masha, Ilumba, Lunundu, Ecabo
13	Groupe des Jeunes	Mumasa Kajiweka Queensiera	Lulenge	Musika, Muonda, Tubondo, Rubondo, Malingi, Kisanya
14	CPDC	Medi Kamugoko	Lulenge	Nabibuye, Ibumba, Lebera
15	Les Audacieux	Kawawa	Lulenge	Elembwe
16	Mai-Mai Kasherwa	Kasherwa	Tangania	Mulinga

Source : *RDC, Présidence de la République, Programme de Désarmement, Démobilisation, Relèvement Communautaire et Stabilisation (P-DDRCS)*, Coordination Provinciale du Sud-Kivu, Antenne d'Uvira, Fizi et Mwenga du 14 juin 2024, pp.3-4.

Des jeunes garçons et filles sont massacrés sans oublier des viols, enlèvements et enrôlements de force dans les groupes armés. Cette raison pousse chaque village se dote des VDP face à l'inertie de Kinshasa.

Tableau n° 5 : Groupes armés étrangers dans le territoire de Fizi

N°	G.A.	Chef du groupe armé	Secteur	Localité/Village
1.	Red Tabara	Bahati Five One/Burundi	Itombwe, Lulenge	-
2.	Fdlr	Amada/Rwanda	Lulenge	Hewa Bora, Epupu
3.	Cnrd	Théophile/Rwanda	Lulenge	Asolelo
4.	Fr	Aloys Zabampema/Bdi	Lulenge	Mimbililo, 2 maisons

Source : *Rdc, Présidence de la République, Programme de Désarmement, Démobilisation, Relèvement Communautaire et Stabilisation (P-DDRCS)*, Coordination Provinciale du Sud-Kivu, Antenne d'Uvira, Fizi et Mwenga du 14 juin 2024, p.6.

En 2020, le Kivu Security Tracker a rapporté 585 incidents violents avec 1175 victimes, dont 330 personnes décédées[45]. Ce rapport identifie les victimes et les auteurs parmi les différents groupes en présence. Ces violences sont

[45] Okumenisches Nef Zentralafrika/Réseau Oeucumenique de l'Afrique Centrale, *De nouveaux niveaux d'escalade dans le conflit. Insécurité croissante en République Démocratique du Congo*, Berlin : Février 2021, p.4.

également orientées entre les groupes. Bien plus, la violence est bien une réalité dans les 4 secteurs du Territoire de Fizi, 18 groupements et 388 localités. Aucun village n'est à l'abri des violences contre les civils. La GEC[46] précise qu'en 2003 (power sharing 1 + 4*[47]), un accord de paix a unifié le pays et la plupart des groupes armés ont été intégrés dans une nouvelle armée nationale, notamment le groupe de Dunia. Yakutumba qui était devenu commandant de bataillon pour Dunia, a lancé une nouvelle rébellion en janvier 2007 avec la complicité de son ancien commandant et Looba Undji. Sa rébellion a finalement été baptisée Forces Armées Alléluia (Faal) avec une branche politique appelée le Parti pour l'action et la reconstruction du Congo (Parc). Le moment était critique : bien qu'un accord de paix ait uni le pays et que les groupes armés aient été supposés se joindre à une nouvelle armée nationale, les tensions entre les communautés ont persisté et des signalements d'infiltrations rwandaises ont continué. Les *wazalendo* (résistants patriotes) se sont formés et ont été reconnus comme protecteurs de la terre[48] à travers ce qu'on appelle la Réserve Armée pour la Défense (RAD) par la loi n°23/014 du 22 mai 2023 portant institution de la réserve armée de la défense en RD Congo, col.14 et le décret n°23/36 du 24 octobre 2023 relatif aux mesures d'application de cette loi (n°23/014). En effet, l'Etat a validé les milices locales sans aucune formation militaire bien appropriée.

CONCLUSION

Les crises identitaires manifestes dans le territoire de Fizi sont conséquentes de la défaillance de l'Etat. Celle-ci a prévalu dans l'émergence de la souveraineté par le bas sur base de la domination traditionnelle et charismatique. Cependant, il s'agit d'une mauvaise interprétation de l'article 64 de la Constitution du Congo appelant la population à la résistance. La mise en place d'un leadership visionnaire est un impératif. Cette vision doit s'accompagner de l'éducation citoyenne à la conscience nationale, la création d'un Etat de droit en Rdc ; la résolution de la récurrence et profonde crise économique et de la fragilité de l'Etat ; la gestion responsable des flux migratoires et des conflits fonciers entre *« autochtones »* et *« allochtones »* qui en

[46] Groupe d'Etude sur le Congo, *idem*.

[47] Insertion personnelle.

[48] Jassalh, Assisa Saleh, *Elite politique et souveraineté de la Rdc. Pour la conquête de la paix des territoires de Fizi et Uvira, Sud-Kivu, RDC, in* Studia Europaea, LXIX, 2, 2024, p.129.

résultent. En visite à Goma en octobre 2020, le Président Félix-Antoine Tshisekedi avait promis en vain d'étudier la problématique de la commune de Minembwe[49]. Ce qui contribuerait à décanter la situation sécuritaire de Fizi-Uvira-Mwenga.

La Rdc doit former militairement tous les jeunes de 18 ans, créer une armée républicaine dissuasive dans la région en se débarrassant des infiltrés en son sein. La Rdc doit s'adapter non seulement au principe de bon voisinage mais aussi sa politique extérieure doit s'intégrer aux nouvelles contraintes géopolitiques et géophysiques régionales. La justice transitionnelle reste d'une importance capitale afin d'assainir son espace politico-administratif pour mettre fin à la domination du peuple par rapport à l'élite tant interne qu'externe.

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[49] Jean-Claude Willame, *Banyarwanda et Banyamulenge: Violences ethniques et gestion de l'identitaire au Kivu* (Bruxelles/Paris: Institut Africain-CEDAF/L'Harmattan, 1997) *in* Jason, Stearns et *al.*, *Les Banyamulenge: Insurrection et exclusion dans les montagnes du Sud-Kivu, (Bruxelles/Paris: Institut Africain-CEDAF/L'Harmattan, 2013), pp.14-20.*

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STUDIA UBB. EUROPAEA, LXX, 2, 2025, 83-112

L'INSTRUMENTALISATION DE L'IDENTITÉ SOCIALE COMME FACTEUR DES CONFLITS ARMES ET INTERETHNIQUES EN RÉPUBLIQUE DEMOCRATIQUE DU CONGO

The Instrumentalization of Social Identity as a Factor in Armed and Interethnic Conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo?

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DOI: 10.24193/subbeuropaea.2025.2.05
Published Online: 2025-12-16
Published Print: 2025-12-31

Abstract
For several decades, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has been engulfed in recurrent cycles of armed conflict and intercommunal violence driven by a complex interplay of endogenous and exogenous factors. While existing scholarship predominantly attributes these conflicts to the illegal exploitation of natural resources, this article broadens the analytical lens by examining additional structural and sociopolitical determinants. Central to this inquiry is the role of social identity in shaping, intensifying, and sustaining interethnic and intercommunal tensions. The study addresses two key questions: How has social identity contributed to the escalation of violent conflict in the DRC? And what mechanisms can mitigate this fragmentation in order to promote

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national unity and cohesion? By engaging these questions, this article contributes to ongoing scholarly debates on social identity theory, demonstrating its relevance as a critical explanatory framework for understanding the roots of armed conflict and interethnic violence in the DRC.
Keywords: *Social identity, Instrumentalization, Interethnic conflict, Armed conflict, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)*

INTRODUCTION

Depuis plusieurs décennies, la République Démocratique du Congo (RDC) a traversé de multiples cycles de conflits armés et intercommunautaires dont les causes sont à la fois complexes et multidimensionnelles. Alors que plusieurs études dans la littérature se focalisent sur l'exploitation illégale des ressources naturelles comme la cause majeure des conflits armés en République Démocratique du Congo, cet article explore plusieurs autres facteurs endogènes et exogènes de ces conflits. Parmi ces facteurs, l'identité sociale constitue l'objet central de cette étude. Les questions fondamentales auxquels cet article entend répondre sont celles de savoir : **de quelle manière l'identité sociale a-t-elle contribué à l'exacerbation des tensions interethniques et intercommunautaires, jusqu'à engendrer certains des conflits armés les plus violents du continent africain ? Et comment remédier à cette fragmentation sociale afin de promouvoir l'unité et la cohésion nationales tant recherchées?** En répondant à ces deux questions, cette étude contribue de manière significative au débat scientifique sur la théorie de l'identité sociale, considérée comme l'une des principales sources de conflits armés et de tensions interethniques.

La théorie de l'identité sociale, développée par Henri Tajfel dans les années 1970, met l'accent sur les relations entre groupes sociaux plutôt que sur les interactions entre individus et leurs groupes d'appartenance.[1] Dans le cadre de cette analyse, il s'agit de comprendre comment cette théorie éclaire la dynamique des conflits en RDC. À cette fin, l'article mobilise trois perspectives théoriques complémentaires : **l'estime de soi** (*self-esteem theory*), la **construction sociale et l'identité collective**. Ces approches, intégrées à une conception élargie de l'identité sociale, permettent d'examiner respectivement les dimensions individuelles et collectives de l'appartenance des membres à des

[1] Henri Tajfel et John Turner, « An integrative theory of intergroup conflict », in Stephen Worchel et William G. Austin (dir.), *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, Pacific Grove (CA), Brooks/Cole, 1979, p. 33-48.

groupes ethniques, tribaux ou communautaires, ainsi que les processus par lesquels ils s'identifient soit à ces groupes, soit à une nation.

Comme il sera démontré dans les sections suivantes, il convient de souligner que l'identité sociale ne constitue pas en elle-même la cause principale des conflits intercommunautaires et interethniques en République Démocratique du Congo. Toutefois, elle devient un facteur déterminant lorsqu'elle est instrumentalisée par des acteurs politiques ou des leaders communautaires dans le but de poursuivre des objectifs politiques ou socio-économiques, notamment dans un contexte de compétition pour des ressources naturelles limitées telles que l'accès au pouvoir, à l'emploi, à la terre, à l'eau, à la faune, à la flore, ainsi qu'aux minerais du sol et du sous-sol.

Les conflits Hutu-Tutsi dans les provinces du Nord et du Sud-Kivu (1996-1997, 2012-2013), le conflit entre Katangais et Kasaïens (1990), ainsi que les affrontements Hema-Lendu dans la province de l'Ituri, constituent des exemples significatifs de cette instrumentalisation de l'identité sociale. Ces cas illustrent davantage la dimension intergroupe analysée par Henri Tajfel dans sa théorie de l'identité sociale, que la dimension individuelle mise en avant par Leon Festinger dans sa théorie de la comparaison sociale ou encore par la théorie de l'estime de soi (*self-esteem theory*).

1. L'IDENTITE SOCIALE : THEORIE DES CONFLITS INTERETHNIQUES

Dans l'élaboration de sa théorie de l'identité sociale, Henri Tajfel s'est appuyé sur les fondements de la théorie de la comparaison sociale développée par Leon Festinger.[2] Dans ses travaux, Leon Festinger s'attache à analyser les mécanismes psychologiques qui conduisent un individu à considérer une proposition comme véridique, jusqu'à ce qu'elle se transforme en croyance.[3] Leon Festinger distingue les sources de validation des croyances, des opinions et des attitudes individuelles en fonction de leur nature, qu'elle soit **physique ou sociale**.[4] De ce fait, certaines croyances peuvent être validées sur la base de données physiques, accessibles par la perception individuelle, tandis que d'autres ne disposent pas de cette possibilité de vérification empirique et relèvent essentiellement d'une validation sociale.[5] Dans ces situations,

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[2] Leon Festinger, « A Theory of Social Comparison Processes », *Human Relations*, vol. 7, no 2, 1954, p. 117-140, [en ligne], disponible sur : https://hum.sagepub.com

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] *Ibid.*

l'individu est contraint de solliciter autrui et de recourir à une validation sociale pour confirmer la pertinence de ses croyances, opinions ou attitudes.[6]

Selon Festinger, contrairement aux croyances et aux opinions, les capacités individuelles peuvent être hiérarchisées sur une échelle de valeurs. Dès lors, l'individu est animé non seulement par le désir d'obtenir une perception claire de ses propres aptitudes, mais également par la volonté de se situer de manière avantageuse par rapport aux autres.[7] Inspiré par les travaux de Leon Festinger, Henri Tajfel applique des principes similaires à l'analyse des situations intergroupes naturelles. Alors que la théorie de la comparaison sociale de Festinger se limite principalement à un niveau d'analyse interindividuel, Tajfel élargit la perspective en mettant l'accent sur les dynamiques collectives et les relations entre groupes sociaux.[8]

Henri Tajfel considère que l'identité d'un individu dépend largement de ses appartenances groupales, et plus spécifiquement de la distinction établie entre le groupe auquel il appartient (ou ses différents groupes d'appartenance) et les autres groupes.[9] L'analyse de Henri Tajfel a été approfondie par l'apport majeur de Sergiu Mișcoiu, dont la théorie de la « construction collective contingente » examine la nation comme une identité collective construite, plutôt qu'une entité naturelle.[10] Selon Mișcoiu, la cohésion nationale n'a rien de naturel : elle résulte d'un processus construit de différenciation et de comparaison entre groupes. [11]La nation est donc une **identité sociale macro-groupe,** qui organise la perception du monde via le prisme « nous/eux ».[12]

En d'autres termes, Mișcoiu montre que la nation constitue une identité sociale de type « macro-groupe », structurant la perception du monde à travers le prisme du contraste « nous/eux ». Elle se construit en établissant des frontières symboliques opposant les « nationaux » aux « étrangers », « envahisseurs » ou encore aux « minorités ».[13] À ce stade, Mișcoiu confirme l'analyse de Tajfel selon laquelle l'identité sociale se fonde sur la différenciation

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[6] *Ibid.*

[7] *Ibid.*

[8] *Ibid.*

[9] *Ibid*, p.255

[10] Sergiu Mișcoiu, *Naissance de la nation en Europe. Théories classiques et théorisations constructivistes*, L'Harmattan, Paris, 2010, p. 207.

[11] *Ibid.*

[12] *Ibid.*

[13] *Ibid.*

entre un endogroupe et un exogroupe, comme évoqué précédemment. Comme nous le démontrerons dans les sections suivantes, les frontières symboliques - opposant les « nationaux » aux « étrangers », « envahisseurs » ou aux « minorités », telles que décrites par Mișcoiu - permettent d'expliquer, d'une part, les conflits interethniques; et d'autre part, elles éclairent l'incapacité du gouvernement congolais à construire une identité nationale véritablement collective.

Par ailleurs, les arguments avancés par Mișcoiu convergent avec ceux de plusieurs grands théoriciens de l'identité sociale. Plusieurs autres théoriciens de l'identité sociale corroborent les arguments de Tajfel et de Miscoiu. John Turner, par exemple, considère que **l'identité sociale renvoie à la dimension du concept de soi qui émane de l'appartenance à divers groupes.**[14] Ainsi, l'individu ne se caractérise pas seulement par ses attributs personnels, mais également par son inscription au sein de catégories sociales telles que le genre, l'origine ethnique, la nationalité ou la classe sociale.[15] Dans le même ordre d'idées, à travers leur théorie de l'identité sociale, Tajfel et Turner montrent que la **mobilité sociale** rend possible, pour un individu appartenant à un groupe donné, de quitter ce groupe afin d'intégrer un autre perçu comme plus valorisé.[16]

Tajfel et Turner considèrent que les frontières entre groupes sont ainsi perçues comme perméables, ce qui revêt une importance particulière pour les changements de groupe « vers le haut ». Cette mobilité sociale se manifeste lorsque l'individu, issu d'un groupe désavantagé, cherche à améliorer son statut en rejoignant un groupe considéré comme plus prestigieux.[17] Comme Turner et Tajfel, Miscoiu montre que l'identité nationale n'est pas stable : elle est **mobilisée** ou **démobilisée** selon les moments politiques (guerre, élections, crise identitaire).[18] De ce fait, es acteurs politiques (État, élites nationalistes) **activent l'identité nationale** pour créer la mobilisation.[19] En d'autres termes, Miscoiu considère que la nation n'est pas une permanence : c'est une identité sociale **contextuellement activée**.[20]Pour sa part, Pierre Bordieu L'identité

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[14] Henri, Tajfel et John Turner, *op. cit.*

[15] *Ibid.*

[16] *Ibid.*, p.33

[17] *Ibid*

[18] Sergiu Mișcoiu, *op. cit.*

[19] *Ibid.*

[20] *Ibid.*

sociale résulte de **structures sociales intériorisées (**habitus), qui conditionnent nos pratiques, goûts, valeurs et appartenances.[21] Il estime que les groupes (classe sociale, nation, ethnie) sont produits par :la **classification** (catégories imposées par l'État, l'école, les institutions), la **légitimité symbolique** (langue, culture légitime), les **rapports de pouvoir.**[22]

Tout en soutenant les arguments de Bourdieu, Tajfel, Turner, et Miscoiu, il convient de relativiser en rappelant que, en tant que construction sociale, l'identité sociale n'acquiert une véritable importance que lorsqu'elle est investie d'une forte croyance, au point d'être perçue comme une norme immuable. À défaut, elle demeure une réalité flexible, susceptible d'être réinterprétée, adaptée ou même remplacée en fonction du milieu et de l'environnement dans lesquels évolue l'individu.[23] L'argument de la mobilité identitaire soutenue par Bordieu, Tajfel, Turner et Miscoiu est tout à fait pertinente dans le contexte identitaire congolais. Henri Tajfel et John Turner définissent l'identité sociale comme une **partie du concept de l'estime de soi (***self-esteem***)** dérivée de l'appartenance à des groupes sociaux, et de la valeur ainsi que de la signification émotionnelle que cette appartenance confère à leurs membres.[24]

Le self-esteem : une approche de l'identité sociale

Encrée dans une approche *self-esteem*, la théorie de l'identité sociale permet aux individus cherchent à maintenir une image positive d'eux-mêmes. Cette estime de soi est en partie dérivée de l'appartenance à des groupes valorisés.[25] Comme il sera démontré dans la sous-section suivante, l'instrumentalisation de l'identité sociale à des fins politiques, devenue monnaie courante en République Démocratique du Congo, explique le fait qu`une personne née des parents appartenant à deux ethnies différentes réclame son appartenance soit à l une ou l'autre de deux ethnies au pouvoir, ou choisir l'identité qu'il estime être convenable et interchangeable en fonction de contexte, de temps et de circonstance socio-politique. De ce fait, les individus activent leurs différentes identités selon le contexte.[26]

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[21] Pierre Bordieu, Le sens pratique, Paris, Minuit, 1980

[22] *Ibid.*

[23] *Ibid.*

[24] *Ibid.*

[25] Henri, Tajfel et John Turner, 1986 *op.cit*, p. 15

[26] *Ibid.*

À partir de l'articulation entre la catégorisation sociale et la volonté de se distinguer positivement sur une échelle de valeurs, Henri Tajfel énonce les principes fondamentaux de la théorie de l'identité sociale : (i) Recherche d'une identité sociale positive : les individus tendent à atteindre ou à préserver une identité sociale valorisée; (ii) Comparaison intergroupe favorable : une identité sociale positive repose principalement sur des comparaisons avantageuses entre l'endogroupe et des exogroupes pertinents, l'endogroupe devant être perçu comme distinct et supérieur; (iii) Stratégies face à une identité sociale insatisfaisante : lorsque l'identité sociale est jugée négative ou dévalorisée, les individus cherchent soit à quitter leur groupe pour rejoindre un groupe mieux évalué, soit à améliorer la position de leur groupe actuel afin de le rendre plus favorablement distinct.[27]

Les trois principes de la théorie de l'identité sociale formulés par Tajfel permettent de mieux comprendre les logiques de rivalité et de violence observées dans les conflits interethniques en République Démocratique du Congo. Premièrement, la recherche d'une identité sociale positive pousse les individus à valoriser leur appartenance à un groupe ethnique ou communautaire, ce qui renforce le sentiment d'exclusivité et de supériorité. Deuxièmement, cette identité sociale positive repose sur des comparaisons intergroupes favorables : les communautés cherchent à se distinguer en mettant en avant des caractéristiques perçues comme supérieures (origine, culture, accès aux ressources), ce qui alimente la compétition et la méfiance envers les exogroupes. Ainsi donc, l'identité sociale et son approche de *self-esteeem* est une construction sociale dont les personnes se servent, soit pour se distinguer des autres individus ou des groupes sociaux, ethniques ou nationaux qu'ils estiment différents, inferieurs ou supérieurs aux-leurs.

L`identité en tant que Construction sociale

L'identité sociale, en tant que théorie des relations intergroupes, est une construction sociale exacerbée par l'accès limité aux ressources naturelles et l'instrumentalisation de l'ethnicité par les acteurs politiques, voire religieux. Tajfel et Turner insistent sur le fait que l'identité sociale est un système de croyances qui ne coïncident pas forcément terme à terme avec la réalité objective, cependant « on doit s'attendre à rencontrer une corrélation marquée entre le degré de stratification objective dans un système social (de quelque

[27] *Ibid.*

manière qu'il soit mesuré) et la diffusion sociale et l'intensité du système de croyances au 'changement social' ».[28] Ils estiment que l'existence de systèmes de croyances, qui se développeraient à partir des situations inégalitaires réelles et participeraient à leur légitimation, en restreignant par exemple les possibilités de comparaisons intergroupes à des groupes de statuts comparables, pourrait contribuer à expliquer cette tendance au statu quo.

Comme Tajfel et Turner, Pierre Bordieu, considère que les groupes sociaux- qu'il s'agisse de classes sociales, de nations ou d'ethnies - se constituent par plusieurs mécanismes interdépendants : la **classification**, c'est-à-dire les catégories définies et imposées par l'État, l'école ou d'autres institutions ; la **légitimité symbolique,** qui confère une valeur normative à certaines langues, pratiques ou cultures ; et les **rapports de pouvoir,** qui structurent et hiérarchisent ces groupes.[29] À travers le concept **d'habitus**, Bourdieu fournit un cadre analytique permettant de concevoir l'identité collective comme un construit social, résultat des interactions entre ces différents facteurs.[30]

L'identité sociale se construit à partir de l'appartenance à des groupes et de la perception des différences avec les autres. Selon Henri Tajfel, elle repose sur la distinction entre **endogroupe et exogroupe,** qui permet à l'individu de se situer et de valoriser son groupe.[31] John C. Turner approfondit cette approche en soulignant le rôle de la **catégorisation sociale** et de la **dépersonnalisation,** processus par lequel l'individu se perçoit comme membre du groupe plutôt que comme un « moi » isolé.[32] Il considère que les groupes se définissent autour de **prototypes,** qui guident comportements et perceptions, renforcent la cohésion interne et peuvent générer des biais vis-à-vis de l'exogroupe.[33]

Sergiu Mișcoiu montre que la nation, en tant qu'**identité collective,** est socialement construite : la cohésion nationale résulte d'un travail constant de **distinction et de comparaison** entre « nous » et « eux », à travers l'établissement de frontières symboliques entre « nationaux » et « étrangers » ou « minorités ». Ce mécanisme éclaire à la fois les conflits interethniques, comme ceux qui opposent les Tutsis congolais aux autres groupes de l'est de la

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[28] Henri, Tajfel et John Turner, *op. cit.* p.10

[29] Pierre Bordieu, *op. cit.*

[30] *Ibid.*

[31] Henri Tajfel, *op. cit.*

[32] John Turner, op. cit.

[33] *Ibid.*

RDC, et la difficulté à construire une identité nationale collective. Pierre Bordieu complète cette perspective en insistant sur la production des groupes sociaux par la **classification institutionnelle,** la **légitimité symbolique** et les **rapports de pouvoir**. Le concept d**'habitus** permet de comprendre l'identité collective comme un produit social façonné par l'interaction entre pratiques, structures et hiérarchies symboliques. Ainsi, ces quatre approches combinent dimensions cognitive, symbolique et structurelle pour offrir une compréhension intégrée de l'identité sociale et collective, toujours construite dans des processus de distinction et de pouvoir.

Dans le contexte local de la République démocratique du Congo, les individus oscillent entre plusieurs identités sociales selon les enjeux sécuritaires, politiques ou socio-économiques qui les obligent de se sévir de leur ethnie ou tribu comme moyen de servie. Ce phénomène explique très bien la notion de la mobilité identitaire évoquée et analysée par Tajfel, Rurner, Bordieu et Miscoiu dans la sous-section précédente. Dans les situations sécuritaires liés aux conflits armés, par exemple, l'identité **ethnique** devient saillante et mobilisée comme instrument de différenciation et de revendication. Comme nous allons le démontrer dans les prochaines sections, les cas des conflits Katangais-Kasaiens, Tutsi-Hutu et Hema-Lendu sont une parfaite illustration de l'instrumentalisation de l'identité sociale à des fins économiques et politiques.

L'argument de la mobilité identitaire, tel que développé par Bordieu dans ses analyses sur l'habitus et les stratégies d'acteurs, ainsi que par Tajfel et Turner dans la théorie de l'identité sociale, ou Miscoiu dans son approche constructiviste, apparaît particulièrement heuristique pour comprendre les dynamiques identitaires en République démocratique du Congo (RDC). Dans ce contexte marqué par une forte politisation de l'appartenance ethnique, l'identité sociale tend à être mobilisée comme ressource stratégique, tant par les acteurs politiques que par les individus.

La pratique, désormais récurrente, consistant à instrumentaliser l'identité ethnique à des fins de positionnement ou de proximité avec le pouvoir, illustre ce phénomène. Par exemple, un individu issu d'un père katangais et d'une mère kasaïenne peut privilégier l'identification au groupe katangais lorsqu'un président originaire du Katanga accède au pouvoir. Inversement, le même individu peut réajuster son identité et se réclamer kasaïen lorsque le pouvoir politique devient kasaïen. Cette logique opportuniste de reconfiguration identitaire, loin d'être marginale, se retrouve dans plusieurs autres groupes ethniques du pays.

Même parmi les individus dont les deux parents appartiennent à une même ethnie, la mobilité identitaire demeure possible grâce à l'existence de patronymes plurivalents. Certains noms - tels que Ilunga, Ngoy, Mutombo ou Kabongo - permettent une identification crédible à plusieurs groupes ethniques, offrant ainsi aux individus une latitude stratégique pour ajuster leur identité en fonction du contexte politique et des avantages potentiels qui en découlent. Ces observations mettent en évidence l'imbrication entre identité sociale et champs politiques, où les identités ethniques ne sont pas des catégories fixes, mais plutôt des constructions socialement et politiquement malléables. Dans le cas congolais, la fluidité identitaire apparaît comme une réponse adaptative aux configurations changeantes du pouvoir, confirmant ainsi la pertinence de la notion de mobilité identitaire dans l'analyse des dynamiques sociopolitiques contemporaines de la RDC.

2. L'IDENTITE SOCIALE SOURCE DES CONFLITS INTER-ETHNIQUES KATANGAIS-KASAÏENS

Le conflit intercommunautaire opposant les Katangais aux Kasaïens s'est intensifié en raison de deux dynamiques principales : d'une part, la rareté des opportunités d'emploi au sein des entreprises publiques, perçues comme une ressource limitée ; d'autre part, l'instrumentalisation stratégique de l'appartenance ethnique par certains acteurs politiques. Les Katangais, se considérant comme les « originaires » de la province, dénonçaient l'accès privilégié qu'auraient obtenu les Kasaïens, qualifiés de « non-originaires », aux postes de responsabilité dans les entreprises publiques telles que la Générale des Carrières et des Mines (Gécamines) et la Société nationale des chemins de fer congolais (SNCC). Cette tension sociale, exacerbée par le chômage et la grogne dus à la nationalisation de la Gécamines et d'autres entreprises publiques, fut instrumentalisée par les dirigeants de l'Union des Fédéralistes Républicains Indépendants (UFERI), qui en tirèrent parti pour attiser la xénophobie et nourrir une hostilité tribale des Katangais à l'égard des Kasaïens.[34]

Malheureusement, ce clivage socio-culturel s'étend également aux églises dites de réveil, lesquelles auraient pu jouer un rôle de médiation en favorisant la réconciliation et le vivre-ensemble entre Katangais et Kasaïens. Loin d'être au

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[34] Bakajika Banjikila, *Épuration ethnique en Afrique : les "Kasaïens" (Katanga 1961 – Shaba 1992)*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 1997, p. 117.

`milieu du village, ces institutions religieuses se trouvent elles aussi traversées par des clivages tribaux et une politisation excessive. Elles contribuent parfois à renforcer l'identité communautaire et la prééminence tribalo-ethnique d`une communauté vis-à-vis des autres, plutôt qu'à promouvoir une posture de neutralité et de rassemblement. Par ailleurs, les observations réalisées dans les principales villes du Grand Katanga montrent que les églises dirigées par des pasteurs d'origine kasaïenne regroupent majoritairement des fidèles kasaïens, tandis que celles placées sous la direction de pasteurs katangais attirent principalement des fidèles katangais.

Certains leaders des églises de réveil transforment leurs chœurs en tribunes politiques, mobilisant leurs fidèles en faveur de candidats avec lesquels ils entretiennent des affinités tribalo-ethniques, au détriment des autres. Loin de construire une identité chrétienne commune, certains responsables religieux se muent soit en opposants politiques, soit en mobilisateurs de partis, selon leurs tendances tribales ou ethniques. Cependant, en tant que construction sociale, l'identité n'empêche pas une infime minorité des membres de ces deux communautés de transcender ce clivage tribalo-ethnique et de se défaire des stéréotypes, clichés et critiques négatives qui les empêchent de percevoir les membres de la communauté kasaïenne comme leurs propres frères et sœurs, et vice versa. L'identité sociale, en elle-même, ne constitue pas une source de conflits. Elle devient une cause de tensions lorsqu'elle est instrumentalisée par des leaders politiques, religieux ou communautaires.

Par ailleurs, l'identité sociale peut devenir une source de conflits lorsqu'elle entre en compétition avec une ou plusieurs autres identités, ce que Samuel Huntington décrit comme le « choc des civilisations » (*clash of civilizations*).[35] Huntington estime que lorsque deux civilisations entrent en contact, la plus forte tend à engloutir, assimiler, voire acculturer la plus faible.[36] S'appuyant sur la notion de *self-esteem*, chaque ethnie considère son identité comme supérieure. Ainsi, lorsqu'une identité sociale est perçue ou se considère comme la meilleure, au point de vouloir dominer, assimiler ou faire disparaître d'autres identités sociales, cultures, civilisations ou religions, elle devient une source potentielle de conflit.

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[35] Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Paris, Éditions Odile Jacob, 1996, p. 45.

[36] *Ibid*, p.45

L`instrumentalisation politique de l'identité sociale au Katanga

Dans le cas du Katanga, les représentations de supériorité que la communauté katangaise entretenait à l'égard des Kasaïens installés dans la province furent exploitées par des leaders politiques tels que Nguz a Karl-i-Bond et Antoine-Gabriel Kyungu wa Kumwanza, sous l'instigation de l'ancien président Mobutu Sese Seko. Cette instrumentalisation identitaire visait à attiser la frustration, la haine tribale, la stigmatisation et le rejet, allant jusqu'à légitimer l'exclusion et les violences contre la communauté kasaïenne. Comme démontré par John Dollard, Neal E. Miller, Leonard W. Doob, Orval H. Mowrer et Robert R. Sears, à travers leur théorie de frustration-agression, « l'apparition d'un comportement agressif suppose toujours l'existence d'une frustration et, à l'opposé, l'existence d'une frustration conduit toujours à une certaine forme d'agression. »[37]

Les discours démagogiques de Kyungu wa Kumwanza et Nguz a Karl-i-Bond, sous l'instigation de Mobutu Sese Seko, ont instrumentalisé l'identité tribale pour convaincre une partie de l'opinion katangaise que la communauté kasaïenne dominait les postes stratégiques des entreprises publiques, telles que la Gécamines et la SNCC. Cette rhétorique a transformé des frustrations économiques liées au chômage en hostilité tribalo-ethnique, exacerbant la haine et légitimant l'exclusion des Kasaïens. Loin de résoudre les problèmes structurels d'emploi, le départ des Kasaïens des entreprises publiques a renforcé le clivage identitaire et consolidé une dynamique de violence communautaire. Ainsi donc, le conflit entre Katangais et Kasaïens démontre que l'identité régionale (provinciale) et ethnique s'est cristallisée autour de la compétition pour l'emploi dans les mines et les industries. Les Katangais revendiquent une priorité locale face aux Kasaïens migrants, perçus comme des concurrents non originaires de la province. À cet effet, l'identité sociale a été reconstruite pour défendre des intérêts économiques, au détriment de la coexistence nationale

En République démocratique, en général, et le Katanga, en particulier, le lien entre identité sociale et politique demeure particulièrement étroit. Les acteurs politiques manipulent fréquemment les appartenances tribales ou ethniques pour atteindre leurs objectifs, tandis que les communautés s'appuient sur les partis politiques pour affermir leurs identités ou régler des

[37] John Dollard, Neal E. Miller, Leonard W. Doob, Orval H. Mowrer et Robert R. Sears, *Frustration and Aggression*, New Haven (CT), Yale University Press, 1939, p. 7.

antagonismes intercommunautaires. Ce processus d'instrumentalisation réciproque contribue à la construction et à la consolidation d'identités sociales exclusives, renforcées en faveur d'une communauté donnée mais au détriment d'une autre.

La politisation de l'ethnicité se manifeste lorsque les appartenances communautaires deviennent des instruments de mobilisation électorale et de légitimation du pouvoir. Dans le cas congolais, l'UDPS est perçue comme le parti des Kasaïens, tandis que le PPRD, l'UFERI ou l'UNAFEC sont associés aux Katangais. Cette identification partisane à des communautés spécifiques transforme les rivalités politiques en antagonismes identitaires, renforçant la logique de confrontation plutôt que celle du compromis. Ainsi, les affrontements violents observés lors de la campagne électorale de 2023 ne relèvent pas seulement de divergences politiques, mais traduisent une instrumentalisation des fractures identitaires par les élites. Ce phénomène illustre la difficulté de construire un véritable « vivre-ensemble » dans un contexte où l'identité sociale est constamment mobilisée comme ressource politique.

En effet, un phénomène contraire à l'identité nationale se manifeste durant les élections présidentielles, législatives nationales ou locales en République démocratique du Congo. Ces scrutins suscitent un élan tribalo-ethnique, où le soutien à un candidat repose davantage sur ses origines tribales, ethniques ou provinciales que sur son programme politique. Les acteurs politiques instrumentalisent alors la tribu et l'ethnie, transformant des partis présentés comme ayant un ancrage national en véritables machines de mobilisation identitaire. Les candidats sont ainsi soutenus en tant que « filles et fils du terroir », opposés aux « non-originaires » ou aux « étrangers ».

Les résultats des élections présidentielles de décembre 2023 ont montré que, malgré les réalisations du président Félix Tshisekedi durant son premier quinquennat, notamment dans le Lualaba et le Grand Katanga, la majorité de la population katangaise a voté massivement en faveur de Moïse Katumbi, essentiellement parce qu'il est perçu comme « fils du territoire ». De manière symétrique, Katumbi, bien qu'ayant demandé pardon aux Kasaïens pour les violences et violations des droits humains commises lors des refoulements des années 1990-1992 et les avoir invités à revenir s'installer au Katanga, n'a recueilli qu'environ 3 % des suffrages valablement exprimés dans le Grand Kasaï, considéré comme le fief naturel de Felix Tshisekedi en tant que « fils du terroir ».

Ainsi, le clivage ethnique observé au Katanga entre Katangais et Kasaïens a atteint un niveau paroxystique, au point d'affecter profondément le vivre-ensemble collectif. Cette fracture ne touche pas seulement les groupes sociaux des deux communautés, mais s'étend également à l'élite intellectuelle du pays, y compris aux professeurs d'université, dont une large partie adopte des positionnements fondés sur leur appartenance tribale, ethnique ou provinciale. Par conséquent, les jugements, opinions, les critiques et même les analyses formulées par une majorité d'intellectuels appartenant à ces deux communautés - en particulier les Katangais et les Kasaïens - ainsi qu'à d'autres groupes congolais, tendent à produire des stéréotypes et des formes de stigmatisation réciproques entre ethnies.

Le conflit interethnique entre les Hema et les Lenda en Ituri

Les tensions intercommunautaires entre Hema et Lendu se sont exacerbées jusqu'à se transformer en conflit armé ouvert, impliquant directement les Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo (FARDC) dans des tentatives de rétablissement de la paix. La Coopérative de Développement Économique du Congo (CODECO) a émergé dans le territoire de Djugu, en Ituri, comme une milice lendu visant à défendre sa communauté contre la domination des Hema et contre l'armée nationale. En réaction, des groupes d'autodéfense hema, tels que « Jeunesse Zaïre », se sont constitués pour lutter contre la CODECO, alimentant un cycle de violences intercommunautaires.[38] De même, plusieurs groupes armés d'autodéfense se sont formés en réaction aux actes de violence perpétrés par la CODECO.[39] Les hostilités ont d'abord débuté en 2017-2018 dans des régions agricoles et d'élevage.

En dépit de ses origines ethniques, le conflit Hema-Lendu s'est intensifié sous l'effet de la compétition pour l'accès aux ressources naturelles, en particulier les mines d'or. L'économie politique des conflits armés en Ituri, et plus spécifiquement dans le territoire de Djugu, révèle que l'exploitation aurifère constitue un facteur central. Depuis 2021, l'or est devenu une source de

[38] International Peace Information Service, *Groupes armés, contrôle territorial, conflits fonciers et exploitation aurifère à Djugu, Ituri, République démocratique du Congo*, rapport IPIS financé par USAID, Anvers, juin 2023.,

[39] Koen Vlassenroot et Timothy Raeymaekers, « The Politics of Rebellion and Intervention in Ituri: The Emergence of a New Political Complex », *African Affairs*, vol. 103, no 412, 2004, p. 385-412.

financement majeure pour les milices Jeunesse « Zaïre » et surtout pour la CODECO. Selon le Groupe d'experts de l'ONU, le contrôle des sites aurifères autour de Mongbwalu a été déterminant dans l'expansion territoriale de la CODECO en 2022. De leur côté, les milices Hema ont également cherché à conquérir de nouvelles mines dans cette zone. Les groupes armés exploitent directement les sites, prélèvent des taxes sur la production ou participent au commerce et à la contrebande des minerais, inscrivant ainsi la violence dans une logique de prédation économique.

Contrairement au conflit qui a ravagé l'Ituri durant la deuxième guerre du Congo (1998-2003), largement attribué à des rivalités pour l'accès aux ressources naturelles, les affrontements actuels semblent davantage enracinés dans un enchevêtrement complexe de griefs communautaires anciens.[40] Ces tensions reposent sur des inégalités sociales réelles ou perçues, un accès inégal aux terres et une répartition du pouvoir politique jugée injuste. Le fait que des violences intercommunautaires de grande ampleur aient éclaté après plusieurs années de cohabitation relativement pacifique révèle l'existence de différends non résolus, longtemps latents. Il apparaît dès lors impossible de rétablir une paix durable sans s'attaquer aux problèmes locaux fondamentaux liés à l'accès aux terres, aux autorités coutumières, à la gouvernance minière et aux inégalités sociales et politiques entre les communautés, lesquels doivent être pris en considération par les gouvernements locaux et national.[41]

L'instrumentalisation socio-politique de l'identité sociale en Ituri

L'analyse des sources des tensions et conflits interethniques entre Hema et Lendu révèle qu'elles trouvent leur origine dans la construction sociale instaurée par les puissances coloniales à travers l'organisation administrative. Afin de renforcer leur contrôle sur les populations locales, les autorités belges ont créé de nouvelles entités administratives tribales et réparti les différentes communautés dans des chefferies distinctes. Cette structuration coloniale a institutionnalisé les divisions ethniques et posé les bases des antagonismes intercommunautaires contemporains.[42] La création de la province de l'Ituri

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[40] International Peace Information Service (IPIS), *Persistent Violence in Gold-Rich Ituri Province, DR Congo: Root Causes and Impact on Local Populations*, IPIS Briefing, août 2020

[41] *Ibid.*

[42] Koen Vlassenroot et Timothy Raeymaekers, « The Politics of Rebellion and Intervention in Ituri: The Emergence of a New Political Complex », *African Affairs*, vol. 103, no 412, 2004, p. 385-412; Daniel Fahey, *Ituri: Gold, Land, and Ethnicity in North-Eastern Congo*, Londres et Nairobi, Rift Valley Institute, 2013, p. 22.

s'inscrit dans une trajectoire marquée par une longue histoire de guerres civiles dévastatrices, de tensions intercommunautaires persistantes et d'ingérences étrangères, notamment de l'Ouganda et du Rwanda. Ces dynamiques, dont les racines remontent à l'époque coloniale, ont façonné un contexte de fragilité institutionnelle et de conflictualité chronique, expliquant en partie la complexité des crises actuelles dans la région.[43]

Les politiques coloniales ont profondément marqué les relations politiques et sociales entre les communautés de l'actuelle province de l'Ituri. Les Hema ont bénéficié d'un accès privilégié à l'éducation, à la politique locale et aux emplois dans l'industrie minière et les plantations, souvent au détriment des Lendu. Les autorités coloniales considéraient en effet les Hema comme supérieurs, tandis que les Lendu étaient relégués au rang de citoyens de seconde zone, décrits comme « un peuple désespéré et malheureux ». Cette hiérarchisation coloniale a institutionnalisé des inégalités structurelles qui nourrissent encore aujourd'hui les antagonismes intercommunautaires. »[44]

Les élites hema ont mobilisé leurs relations privilégiées avec l'administration de Mobutu pour acquérir des terres situées dans des territoires auparavant considérés comme appartenant aux Lendu. Cette appropriation foncière, facilitée par le pouvoir politique, a accentué les inégalités et nourri les tensions intercommunautaires.[45] Sous le régime de Mobutu, l'homme politique hema D'zbo Kalogi occupa plusieurs fonctions gouvernementales : vice-ministre de l'Agriculture (1970-1974), ministre des Mines (1974-1977) et ministre de l'Agriculture et du Développement rural (1986-1987).[46] Selon Fahey, dans le territoire de Djugu, les conflits fonciers étaient particulièrement vifs dans la collectivité de Walendu Pitsi, où les dirigeants lendu revendiquaient des droits coutumiers sur des concessions acquises par des hommes d'affaires hema après l'indépendance. Cette situation illustre la persistance des rivalités foncières héritées de l'histoire coloniale et leur exacerbation par les dynamiques postcoloniales d'appropriation des terres. » [47]

Le territoire de Djugu compte aujourd'hui quatre chefferies hema, dirigées par des chefs coutumiers dotés de pouvoirs héréditaires et jouissant

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[43] Jean Pottier, « Representation of Ethnicity in the Search for Peace: Ituri, Democratic Republic of Congo », *African Affairs*, vol. 109, no 434, 2010, p. 23-50.

[44] Vlassenroot K. et T. Raeymaekers, *op. cit., p.37*

[45] *Ibid, p.37*

[46] *Ibid.*

[47] Fahey, *op. cit.*, pp. 27-29.

d'une relative autonomie, ainsi que trois secteurs lendu, entités administratives moins autonomes dont les responsables sont des administrateurs élus. Cette organisation institutionnelle reflète une asymétrie de statut et de pouvoir entre les deux communautés, contribuant à la persistance des tensions intercommunautaires.[48] Ces entités sont extrêmement fragmentées, certaines parties des chefferies hema étant enclavées dans des secteurs lendu, et inversement.[49] Cette configuration institutionnelle présente l'inconvénient que certains groupements n'entretiennent aucun lien territorial direct avec leur chef-lieu. Un membre du conseil d'Ente, l'association ethnique des Hema, a métaphoriquement comparé la carte de l'Ituri à une « peau de léopard », soulignant ainsi la fragmentation et l'incohérence territoriale qui caractérisent l'organisation administrative de la province.[50]

La complexité du conflit en Ituri dépasse les rivalités historiques entre Hema et Lendu. La province constitue une mosaïque ethnique où cohabitent, outre ces deux groupes, les Bira, Mambisa, Ngiti (Lendu du sud), Ndo-Okebo, Mabendi, Lese, Lugbara et Pygmées. Certains disposent de chefferies propres, tandis que d'autres partagent un secteur administratif.[51] Par ailleurs, les Nande, originaires du Nord-Kivu, se sont implantés en Ituri à la suite des migrations de main-d'œuvre coloniales. Ils ont progressivement occupé des postes de premier plan dans divers secteurs économiques et dominé le commerce de l'or et du bois, ce qui a alimenté le mécontentement et les revendications des communautés locales se considérant comme autochtones.[52]

Dans le territoire de Djugu, les chefferies hema sont Bahema-Nord, Bahema-Baguru, Bahema-Badjere et Bahema-Banywagi, tandis que les secteurs lendu comprennent Walendu-Djatsi, Walendu-Pitsi et Walendu-Tatsi. Plus largement, l'organisation administrative congolaise se structure de manière hiérarchique : les provinces sont subdivisées en territoires, les territoires en chefferies et secteurs, et ces derniers en groupements. Cette configuration reflète une articulation entre autorités coutumières et administratives, mais elle

[48] Jean-Tshibanda Omasombo et al., *Ituri : Terre et identités sous tensions*, Tervuren, Musée royal de l'Afrique centrale, 2021, p. 446-447 et 521

[49] Kivu Security Tracker, « En Ituri, les FARDC ne parviennent pas à distinguer les miliciens CODECO des civils », novembre 2021

[50] *Ibid*, p.447

[51] *Ibid.*

[52] *Ibid*, pp. 446-447, 521.

contribue aussi à des asymétries de pouvoir entre communautés.[53] Les chefferies et les groupements sont placés sous l'autorité de chefs traditionnels désignés selon le droit coutumier, tandis que les secteurs relèvent d'un administrateur élu. À l'échelle locale, les villages sont également dirigés par des chefs coutumiers, ce qui illustre la coexistence entre structures coutumières et administratives dans l'organisation territoriale congolaise.[54]

Plusieurs groupes armés d'autodéfense, majoritairement constitués de milices à base ethnique, ont émergé en réaction aux violences et atrocités perpétrées par les combattants de la CODECO contre les communautés de Djugu et d'autres territoires de l'Ituri. Cette prolifération de milices illustre une logique de protection communautaire, mais contribue également à l'escalade du conflit et à la fragmentation sécuritaire de la province.[55] Ces groupes sont apparus initialement au sein de la communauté hema, puis se sont étendus aux populations mambisa, nyali, ndo-okebo et alur. D'abord connus sous l'appellation de groupes d'autodéfense « Zaïre » ou Front Populaire d'Autodéfense au Congo (FPAC), certains se désignent désormais sous le nom de « Jeunesse » ou « Jeunesse Autodéfense ». Plus récemment, l'appellation « Mouvement d'Autodéfense Populaire de l'Ituri » (MAPI) a émergé dans le contexte de la lutte contre la CODECO, traduisant la diversification et la recomposition des milices locales.

À ce jour, il demeure incertain de savoir si ce mouvement doit être considéré comme une faction de Jeunesse/« Zaïre » ou comme une nouvelle initiative de protection communautaire. Dans cette étude, nous emploierons le terme Jeunesse/« Zaïre » pour désigner le mouvement armé d'autodéfense actif dans le territoire de Djugu. Composé de différents groupes locaux d'autodéfense, il présente une structure décentralisée, tout en disposant d'une organisation militaire relativement unifiée. Son quartier général serait situé dans le village de Nyaka, au sein de la chefferie de Bahema-Badjere. Fidèle à son appellation, Jeunesse/« Zaïre » recrute principalement des jeunes issus des communautés hema, mambisa, nyali, ndo-okebo et alur, ainsi que d'anciens combattants de l'Union des Patriotes Congolais (UPC).[56] Ces exemples démontrent que l'identité en soi n'est pas la source principale des conflits et

[53] *Ibid*, p.521

[54] *Ibid*, p.521

[55] Kivu Security Tracker, *op.cit.*

[56] *Ibid.*, p. 22.

tensions intercommunautaires en Ituri, mais elle est instrumentalisée soit par l'élite politique, soit les autres leaders locaux qui en tirent les dividendes.

Outre les identités sociales, plusieurs facteurs nourrissent depuis longtemps les dissensions entre les communautés de l'Ituri, particulièrement dans le territoire de Djugu. Parmi eux figurent la stratification sociale et les inégalités persistantes ; la fragmentation du territoire en chefferies et secteurs, qui rend la carte comparable à une « peau de léopard » et suscite des désaccords sur les limites administratives ; un système foncier incapable de concilier les droits coutumiers liés à l'héritage historique avec les concessions récentes ; les tensions entre pouvoir coutumier et droit civil ; ainsi qu'une gouvernance opaque et frauduleuse dans le secteur aurifère.[57]Ainsi donc, le conflit Hema-Lendu illustre que l'identité ethnique est mobilisée comme critère central de différenciation. Les Hema, historiquement associés au commerce et à l'élevage, ont souvent été perçus comme privilégiés, tandis que les Lendu, majoritairement agriculteurs, se sont sentis marginalisés. La comparaison intergroupe sur la dimension économique (accès à la terre et aux ressources) a renforcé la rivalité.

3. CONFLITS ARMES INTERETHNIQUES DANS LES NORD ET LE SUD KIVU

Comme au Katanga et en Ituri, les conflits armés dans les Kivu résultent à la fois de l'instrumentalisation des identités sociales, souvent mises en opposition, et de la compétition pour l'accès aux ressources naturelles, facteur qui exacerbe les tensions identitaires. Depuis près de quatre décennies, les provinces du Nord et du Sud-Kivu connaissent des conflits ethniques récurrents. Contrairement à ceux de l'Ituri, ces conflits, dont les racines remontent aux années 1960, présentent une double dimension, interethnique et intra-ethnique. Ils se sont intensifiés avec le déplacement de la guerre dite « Kanyarwanda », qui a profondément reconfiguré la dynamique régionale. À partir de 1963, la guerre dite « Kanyarwanda » opposa pendant plus de deux ans les Banyarwandas aux Nande, Hunde et Nyanga. Ce conflit s'inscrit dans le prolongement du mouvement autonomiste qui avait conduit, en 1962, à la création de 21 « provincettes » dans l'ancien Congo belge, et se poursuivit jusqu'à l'arrivée de Mobutu au pouvoir en novembre 1965.[58]

[57] *Ibid.*

[58] *Ibid.*

La victoire du Front patriotique rwandais (FPR) en juillet 1994 entraîna l'exode d'environ deux millions de réfugiés hutus vers l'est du Congo, principalement par les provinces du Nord et du Sud-Kivu. Leur présence, et le fait que certains se soient transformés en acteurs armés, provoqua de vives tensions avec les communautés locales-Hunde, Hutu, Nyanga, Nande et Kumu- accentuant les dynamiques conflictuelles déjà présentes dans la région.[59] La présence d'acteurs armés contribue à l'intensification des violences - meurtres, viols, massacres et déplacements massifs de populations - et marque le point de départ d'une extension des conflits en cercles concentriques dans la sous-région. Ce processus ravive la situation congolaise jusque-là latente et déclenche des guerres dites de libération, lesquelles réactivent de multiples antagonismes tribaux à l'échelle nationale.[60]

Instrumentalisation de l'identité sociale par le Rwanda, l'Ouganda et le Burundi

À l'origine, le conflit puise sa substance dans l'instrumentalisation de l'identité sociale, à travers la transplantation du clivage Hutu-Tutsi au Rwanda vers les Kivu. La proximité géographique du Nord-Kivu avec le Rwanda a produit trois effets majeurs : des flux migratoires successifs, l'importation des divisions entre Banyarwanda (Hutu et Tutsi), et l'extension du conflit rwandais au Congo. Plus récemment, les tensions politiques entre Kampala et Kigali ont accentué l'insécurité dans cette province, désormais fragmentée en deux zones militaires anciennement placées sous l'influence respective de ces capitales.[61] La province du Nord-Kivu se structure en trois espaces géo-ethniques distincts. La zone de Beni et Lubero est homogène, exclusivement occupée par les Nande. Celle de Rutshuru est majoritairement peuplée d'autochtones. Enfin, la zone Goma-Masisi-Walikale présente une composition hétérogène (Hunde, Tembo, Hutu, Tutsi dans le Masisi, Nyanga à Walikale) et concentre les populations banyarwandas immigrées ou transplantées, ainsi que les réfugiés de 1959.[62]

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[59] *ibid*

[60] Filip Reyntjens, *La guerre des Grands Lacs : Alliances mouvantes et conflits régionaux, 1998-1999*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 1999.

[61] Centre d'étude pour le développement de la Région des Grands Lacs (CIRGL), *Rapport n° 15*, Institut supérieur de tourisme, décembre 2018.

[62] George, **Nzongola-Ntalaja,** *The Congo from Leopold to Kabila: A People's History*. Zed Books, 2002.

Cette dernière zone est particulièrement marquée par des conflits fonciers récurrents, notamment dans les territoires de Masisi et de Walikale.[63]

Depuis plusieurs décennies, la croissance démographique et économique des Banyarwandas constitue une source de tensions avec les communautés locales du Nord-Kivu (Hunde, Nyanga, Tembo, Kumu et Nande). Modestement présents avant le partage colonial de 1885, ils se sont progressivement affirmés comme une composante majeure de la province à la suite de vagues migratoires successives.[64] Grâce à leur dynamisme et à l'appui de personnalités influentes à Kinshasa, les Banyarwanda ont pu acquérir des terres et du bétail en nombre significatif, tout en s'imposant dans plusieurs réseaux commerciaux stratégiques.[65] L'extension progressive de l'influence des Banyarwanda suscitait de fortes résistances au sein des autres communautés, qui les accusaient d'usurper leurs terres et de remettre en cause les prérogatives ancestrales de leurs autorités coutumières.[66]

À partir de 1992, les litiges fonciers et les assassinats à dimension ethnico-politique se sont intensifiés, plongeant chaque communauté dans une psychose permanente face à la menace d'attaques intercommunautaires.[67] En 1993, les communautés Hunde et Nyanga du territoire de Walikale redoutaient une attaque imminente des Banyarwanda Hutu. Un incident violent, largement documenté, s'est alors produit. Toutefois, l'estimation précise du nombre de victimes durant les premiers mois du conflit demeure particulièrement incertaine.[68] Entre le 14 et le 17 juillet 1994, plus de 700 000 réfugiés hutus rwandais, accompagnés d'une partie de l'état-major des ex-FAR et de miliciens Interahamwe impliqués dans le génocide des Tutsi, se sont installés durablement au Nord-Kivu.[69] Cette arrivée massive a accentué l'insécurité et ravivé, chez les communautés déjà en conflit avec les Banyarwanda, la crainte d'une domination rwandaise dans la région. Les groupes armés hutu présents avant 1994 se sont rapidement alliés aux ex-FAR et aux Interahamwe,

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[63] Poutier Jean Pottier, « Representation of Ethnicity in the Search for Peace: Ituri, Democratic Republic of Congo », *African Affairs*, vol. 109, no 434, 2010, p. 23-50, ici p. 36.

[64] Filip, Reyntjens, *op. cit.*

[65] *Ibid.*

[66] *Ibid*

[67] *Ibid*

[68] *Ibid*

[69] *Ibid*

renforçant leur opposition aux milices locales Mayi-Mayi (Hunde, Nyanga) et Ngilima (Nande).[70]

À partir de la fin de 1994, la guerre ethnique s'est intensifiée avec une violence supérieure à celle de 1993. L'afflux massif de réfugiés hutu consécutif au génocide rwandais a constitué un facteur déterminant dans la multiplication des conflits en République Démocratique du Congo.[71] La République Démocratique du Congo a constitué, et demeure, une base arrière pour divers mouvements rebelles opposés aux régimes du Rwanda, de l'Ouganda, du Burundi et du Soudan. Les pays voisins ont, pour leur propre stabilité interne, un intérêt direct à la résolution des conflits en République Démocratique du Congo. Toutefois, la mort d'André Kisese Ngundu, cofondateur de l'AFDL, lors de l'avancée des forces de l'alliance à Tingitingi, ainsi que le comportement belliqueux de certains soldats tutsi envers les populations congolaises, ont accentué les tensions. L'esprit de conquête et d'hégémonie attribué aux Tutsi, conjugué à l'hostilité croissante des Congolais envers ces alliés étrangers de l'AFDL, ont conduit Mzee Kabila, chef de l'État et président de l'Alliance, à dissoudre le mouvement qu'il qualifia de « conglomérat d'aventuriers ».[72]

Cette dynamique régionale, prolongée par les guerres menées par le RCD-Goma, le CNDP, le M23 et les milices Mayi-Mayi, illustre la persistance d'une instabilité régionale alimentée par l'instrumentalisation des Tutsis congolais (Banyamulenge) par le Rwanda contre l'État congolais. En réaction, plusieurs ethnies autochtones du Nord et du Sud Kivus (Babembes, Bashi, Barega, etc.) ont formé à diverses reprises des fronts patriotiques, tels que les Mayi-Mayi ou Wazalendo, afin de soutenir le gouvernement congolais face aux offensives de ces groupes rebelles agissant par procuration, depuis l'avancement de l'Alliance des forces pour la libération du Congo (AFDL) à ce jour.

Par ailleurs, il sied de faire remarquer que le conflit Hutu-Tutsi a donné naissance à une identité ethnique transnationale, qui joue un rôle majeur à travers la transplantation des tensions vers l'Est de la République démocratique

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[70] *Ibid*

[71] Lemarchand Rene, *The Dynamics of Violence in Central Africa*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009.

[72] Kadimba Ilunga Marcel*, Kapend Yrung Eddy & Kalokola Yangonde Julien, La complexité de la guerre à l'Est de la R.D. Congo: Analyses sur les causes, conséquences et solutions adaptées. In *Revue Congolaise des Sciences & Technologies*, Vol. 02, No. 02, pp. 317-327 (2023)

du Congo, notamment avec le soutien du gouvernement rwandais. Dans ce contexte, les Tutsis congolais ont souvent été perçus comme des « étrangers », malgré leur enracinement local, ce qui a alimenté des tensions identitaires persistantes. La flexibilité identitaire se manifeste ici dans le fait que certains individus revendiquent une identité nationale congolaise, tandis que d'autres sont contraints de se définir principalement par leur appartenance ethnique, en fonction des enjeux politiques ou militaires du moment.

Les Banyamulenges, par exemple, se servent de leur identité Tutsi comme alibi, soit pour chercher et obtenir le soutien politique et militaire du Rwanda dans leur conflits armés contre le gouvernement congolais, soit pour réclamer leur citoyenneté congolaise d'origine. Pourtant, la nationalité congolaise d'origine des Banyamulenge a déjà été reconnue par la Constitution ainsi que par la loi sur la nationalité actuellement en vigueur en République démocratique du Congo.[73] Les différentes rébellions qui se sont succédé, depuis les conflits armés de 1996-1997 opposant le gouvernement du Zaïre dirigé par Joseph Mobutu Sese Seko à l'Alliance des forces démocratiques pour la libération du Congo (AFDL) soutenue par le Rwanda, jusqu'aux mouvements rebelles tels que le Rassemblement des Congolais Démocrates (RCD-Goma), le Congrès National pour la Défense du Peuple (CNDP) et le Mouvement du 23 Mars (M23) également soutenus par le Rwanda contre les gouvernements congolais successifs de Joseph Kabila et Félix Tshisekedi, s'inscrivent dans une logique d'instrumentalisation de l'identité sociale visant à assouvir les intérêts économiques et politiques du Rwanda dans la partie orientale de la République démocratique du Congo.

Ainsi, face à l'agression rwandaise dissimulée derrière la rébellion du mouvement politico-militaire Alliance du Fleuve Congo (AFC) et du Mouvement du 23 Mars (M23), le gouvernement de la République démocratique du Congo s'efforce de renforcer l'identité nationale en appelant les patriotes Wazalendo à défendre la patrie, menacée de balkanisation par le Rwanda dans sa partie orientale. De manière similaire, l'Ouganda a instrumentalisé les identités sociales en attisant l'opposition entre Lendu et Hema dans l'Ituri et le Nord-Kivu. Le Burundi, quant à lui, a favorisé l'affrontement entre les milices banyamulenge (Tuanehero) et les Babembe dans les hauts et moyens plateaux du Sud-Kivu, notamment à Fizi, Baraka, Mwenga, Uvira, etc.

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[73] La Constitution de la République Démocratique Congo du 18 février 2006; article 10; et Loi n° 04/024 du 12 novembre 2004 relative à la nationalité congolaise d'origine.

La construction d'une identité collective nationale

La construction d'une identité nationale pourrait offrir à la République démocratique du Congo une voie de sortie face à la crise identitaire persistante, ainsi qu'aux conflits armés interethniques qui affectent le pays depuis plusieurs décennies. L'article 10 de la Constitution congolaise, de même que la loi relative à la nationalité, reconnaissent la nationalité congolaise d'origine à tous les groupes ethniques présents sur le territoire national à la date de l'indépendance, le 30 juin 1960. Cependant, malgré cette reconnaissance juridique de la nationalité congolaise d'origine aux Banyawanda (Tutsis et Hutus congolais d'ascendance rwandaise), une partie des Tutsis congolais - notamment les Banyamulenge - continue de se percevoir davantage comme Rwandais que comme Congolais. Cette perception identitaire fragilise leur auto-intégration au sein de la nation congolaise et compromet les initiatives visant à construire une identité nationale collective inclusive.

Inversement, de nombreux groupes ethniques qui se considèrent comme autochtones tendent à privilégier leur identité ethnique ou provinciale au détriment d'une identité nationale. Cette forte cristallisation des appartenances nationales constitue un obstacle majeur à la consolidation d'une identité nationale partagée et, par conséquent, à la cohésion sociopolitique du pays. À travers sa politique dite du « retour à l'authenticité », l'ancien président de la République démocratique du Congo (alors Zaïre) avait tenté de construire une identité collective nationale visant à promouvoir une culture commune et à prévenir les divisions tribalo-ethniques. Soucieux de prêcher par l'exemple, Mobutu nomma ainsi Barthélémy Bisengimana, un Tutsi congolais d'ascendance rwandaise, au poste de directeur de cabinet, dans la stratégie politique de favoriser l'intégration nationale de la communauté tutsie et de leur reconnaître une identité zaïroise.

Sous son impulsion fut adoptée la loi n°72-002 du 5 janvier 1972, dite « loi Bisengimana », qui attribuait la nationalité zaïroise aux originaires du Ruanda-Urundi installés au Kivu avant 1950.[74] Toutefois, cette réforme juridique n'a pas réussi à ancrer les Banyawanda en général, et les Banyamulenges en particulier, dans une appartenance nationale pleinement reconnue. Au contraire, les Banyamulenges ont été instrumentalisés par le président rwandais Paul Kagame dans plusieurs mouvements rebelles, notamment l'Alliance des forces

[74] République du Zaïre. Loi n°72-002 du 5 janvier 1972 relative à la nationalité zaïroise ("loi Bisengimana").

démocratiques pour la libération du Congo (AFDL), qui renversa Mobutu le 17 mai 1997, puis le RCD-Goma en 1998, le CNDP en 2008, et le M23 entre 2009 et 2013, avant la résurgence de ce dernier mouvement à partir de 2018 jusqu'à ce jour. Ces rébellions successives ont profondément déstabilisé l'Est du pays et accentué la fragmentation identitaire.

À travers sa politique dite du « retour à l'authenticité », l'ancien président de la République démocratique du Congo (alors Zaïre) avait tenté de construire une identité collective nationale visant à promouvoir une culture commune et à prévenir les divisions tribalo-ethniques. Cette initiative s'inscrivait dans une logique de construction nationale qui rejoint les thèses de Benedict Anderson décrivant la nation comme une *communauté imaginée*, construite par l'État et ses institutions.[75] Soucieux de prêcher par l'exemple, Mobutu nomma Barthélémy Bisengimana, un Tutsi congolais d'ascendance rwandaise, au poste de directeur de cabinet afin de favoriser l'intégration politique de la communauté tutsie dans la nation zaïroise. Sous l'impulsion de Bisengimana fut adoptée la loi n°72-002 du 5 janvier 1972, dite « loi Bisengimana », qui attribuait automatiquement la nationalité zaïroise aux originaires du Ruanda-Urundi installés au Kivu avant 1950.[76]

Cependant, comme l'ont montré plusieurs travaux[77], ces réformes juridiques proposées par Bisengemana n'ont pas suffi à intégrer les Banyawanda en général, et les Banyamulenges en particulier, dans une identité nationale stable. En effet, jugée trop permissive et source de tensions politiques et sociales, la loi de 1972 fut abrogée par la Loi n°81-002 du 29 juin 1981 sur la nationalité zaïroise[78], qui restreint la nationalité congolaise en revenant à une définition plus stricte de "qui est Zaïrois". Ironiquement, cette abrogation a exacerbé les tensions interethniques au lieu de les endiguer. Cette fragilité identitaire a facilité leur instrumentalisation politique par le Rwanda, conformément aux analyses de Bayart sur la « politique du ventre » et les logiques transétatiques d'appropriation identitaire en Afrique centrale.[79] Ainsi, les Banyamulenges ont été impliqués dans une succession de mouvements

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[75] Benedict Anderson, **Benedict Anderson,** *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Verso, 1983.

[76] République du Zaïre. Loi n°72-002 du 5 janvier 1972, *op. cit.*

[77] Rene Lemarchand, *op. cit.* ; Vlassenroot, 2013, *op. cit.*

[78] République Démocratique du Congo, Loi no81-002 du 29 juin 1981 relative à la nationalité zaïroise

[79] Frederick **Barth,** *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*. Waveland Press, 1969.

rebelles, tels que AFDL, RCD-Goma, CNDP, M23, et continuent, avec le soutien du Rwanda, à déstabiliser profondément l'Est du pays.

Par ailleurs, la « gouvernance territoriale des non-originaires » mise en place par Mobutu répondait à une logique de centralisation autoritaire décrite par Young,[80] dans laquelle les nominations administratives servaient davantage à contrôler le territoire qu'à renforcer la cohésion nationale. Derrière le slogan *« tata moko, ekolo moko, bokonzi moko »* (« un seul père, une seule nation, un seul pouvoir »), la politique d'authenticité fut instrumentalisée pour justifier l'implantation du parti unique, le Mouvement populaire de la révolution (MPR), consolidant une dictature pendant trente-deux ans.

À l'inverse, les régimes de Joseph Kabila et Félix Tshisekedi ont, chacun en ce qui le concerne, restauré ou maintenu une gouvernance fondée sur le principe des « originaires », dans une logique de « politique de proximité ». Toutefois, comme l'ont démontré Berman, Eyoh et Kymlicka[81], ce type de politique renforce inéluctablement les identités ethniques au détriment de l'identité nationale. En RDC, cela a conduit à une exacerbation du tribalisme, visible dans le fonctionnement électoral : malgré une loi électorale inclusive, les réalités sociologiques rendent difficile l'élection de candidats dans des provinces autres que celles dont ils sont originaires, confirmant les analyses de Posner sur la force politique des clivages ethniques en Afrique.[82]

Même les partis politiques se réclamant d'une envergure nationale demeurent influencés par les loyautés ethniques et régionales, un phénomène observé par Englebert qui souligne la faiblesse de l'État congolais et la persistance des logiques néo-patrimoniales.[83] Du point de vue sociologique, l'identité sociale en RDC tend à se reconfigurer autour d'un clivage linguistique opposant les Swahiliphones de l'Est aux Bangalaphones et Lubaphones de l'Ouest et du Centre, un phénomène que Mișcoiu qualifie de « fragmentation identitaire par compétition discursive ».[84] Ce clivage est aggravé par le conflit opposant l'État congolais à la rébellion du M23, soutenue par le Rwanda, ce qui fragilise davantage les dynamiques de construction d'une identité nationale

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[80] Crawford Young, *The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspective.* Yale University Press, 1994.

[81] Berman, Eyoh et Kymlicka, *Ethnicity and Democracy in Africa.* James Currey, 2004.

[82] Daniel Posner, *Institutions and Ethnic Politics in Africa.* Cambridge University Press, 2005.

[83] Pierre Englebert, *Africa: Unity, Sovereignty, and Sorrow*. Lynne Rienner, 2009.

[84] Sergiu Mișcoiu*, op. cit.*

unifiée. Les travaux de Barth sur les frontières ethniques montrent que la conflictualité renforce les distinctions identitaires plutôt que de les atténuer, ce qui est vérifiable dans le contexte congolais actuel.[85] En définitive, bien que la construction d'une identité nationale congolaise constitue un impératif sociopolitique, conformément aux théories constructivistes de Gellner[86] et Mișcoiu[87] elle demeure un idéal encore largement inachevé, entravé par la persistance des loyautés ethniques, la politisation des identités et l'ingérence régionale.

CONCLUSION

Depuis plusieurs décennies, la République démocratique du Congo est confrontée à des conflits armés et à des tensions intercommunautaires dont l'une des causes majeures réside dans l'instrumentalisation des identités sociales par des acteurs politiques, traditionnels et régionaux. Comme l'ont démontré Anderson et Gellner, les identités collectives, loin d'être naturelles ou immuables, sont des constructions sociohistoriques mobilisées par les élites pour consolider leur pouvoir, particulièrement dans les contextes d'États fragiles. Dans les provinces du Katanga, de l'Ituri ainsi que du Nord et du Sud-Kivu, cette instrumentalisation apparaît clairement dans la mobilisation des appartenances ethniques, dans la compétition pour les ressources naturelles stratégiques, dans la faiblesse structurelle de l'État congolais - analysée notamment par Young - et dans l'ingérence des puissances régionales, en particulier le Rwanda, le Burundi et l'Ouganda.

Cette situation confirme les travaux de Barth, selon lesquels les conflits ne naissent pas de l'existence des groupes ethniques en soi, mais de la manipulation politique des frontières identitaires. L'identité sociale n'est donc pas intrinsèquement génératrice de violence : elle devient source de conflit lorsqu'elle est exploitée et instrumentalisée par les acteurs politiques, religieux ou communautaires pour susciter frustrations, ressentiments et dynamiques d'hostilité pouvant aboutir aux violences les plus meurtrières. Cette lecture rejoint les analyses de Bayart sur « la politique du ventre » et l'usage stratégique des identités dans les luttes de pouvoir en Afrique.

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[85] Barth Frederick, *op. cit.*

[86] Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*. Cornell University Press, 1983.

[87] Sergui Mișcoiu*, op. cit.*

Ainsi, l'identité congolaise apparaît, conformément aux approches constructivistes de Mișcoiu, comme une construction sociale susceptible d'être déconstruite et reconstruite dans le cadre d'un véritable projet de réconciliation nationale. Un tel projet viserait à renforcer l'unité et la cohésion nationales, à réduire les conflits interethniques alimentés par la manipulation politique des identités, et à doter la population congolaise d'une identité nationale inclusive, compatible avec la nature multiethnique et multiculturelle de la RDC. Comme le souligne Englebert, la refondation identitaire constitue une condition essentielle pour stabiliser l'État congolais et construire une citoyenneté partagée. En définitive, la construction d'une identité nationale collective ne relève pas d'un simple effort symbolique : elle constitue une nécessité politique et sociologique fondamentale pour consolider la paix, restaurer l'autorité de l'État, et orienter la RDC vers un avenir où la diversité ne sera plus un facteur de division, mais un atout pour le développement national.

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STUDIA UBB. EUROPAEA, LXX, 2, 2025, 113-133

IDENTITY PERSPECTIVES REGARDING ISRAELI-ARAB YOUTH PARTICIPATING IN VOLUNTARY NATIONAL SERVICE IN ISRAEL

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DOI: 10.24193/subbeuropaea.2025.2.06
Published Online: 2025-12-16
Published Print: 2025-12-31

Abstract
This article examines the perspective of Israeli-Arab youth regarding their participation in Voluntary National Service (VNS) within the context of Israel's political landscape. VNS is an alternative to mandatory military service to foster social integration and civic responsibility. However, for Israeli-Arab youth, VNS often leads to significant identity conflict, shaped by Israel's characterization as a Jewish and democratic state and ongoing regional tensions. The article identifies various factors contributing to this identity conflict through a comprehensive literature review. The finding offers insights for policymakers seeking to foster a more inclusive environment for Israeli-Arab citizens.
Keywords: *Voluntary National Service; Multiculturalism; Identity Dissonance; Arab Minority in Israel, Minority Integration.*

Author's Information

Seline Semaan is a second-generation South Lebanon Army member. Her father served in Lebanon together with the Israeli army, and the family fled to Israel on 23.05.2000, when she was five. She defines her identity as Christian Israeli Lebanese. She studied in a Jewish school, speaks Hebrew as her mother tongue, and was educated to love the country and be loyal to the State of Israel. Upon completing secondary school,

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Seline undertook Voluntary National Service,[1] She then went on to academia, where she received her undergraduate degree in Social Sciences and Humanities and a postgraduate degree in multidisciplinary democracy. Today, Seline manages the National Service standards for the Arab Druze community in Israel. Her experiences and feelings of not fully belonging to either the Arab or Jewish communities have revealed the complexities between these groups in Israel. The National Service can help bridge social and cultural gaps if approached correctly. This realization drives the desire to understand these complexities better, find ways to resolve conflicts, and foster social leadership.

1. INTRODUCTION

Israel, as a Jewish and democratic nation, faces challenges in integrating minority groups, mainly Israeli Arabs, who constitute approximately 20% of the population. Often, the Arabs experience identity dissonance due to the clash between their ethnic, religious, and national identities and the integration efforts in the country. This gap is particularly noticeable in the area of Voluntary National service.

To understand the conflict between Jews and Arabs, it is crucial to know the history of the State of Israel. Israel identifies as a Jewish and democratic state, but it functions primarily as a Zionist state. Israel was founded as a Jewish and democratic state, as outlined in the 1948 Declaration of Independence, signed by the Jewish community and Zionist Movement representatives; the Declaration cities Jewish historical ties to the Land of Israel and asserts exclusive rights to the territory based on three key documents:

1. The Balfour Declaration (1971) endorsed a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine while safeguarding the rights of non-Jewish communities.

2. The League of Nations Mandate (1922) tasked Britain with establishing the Jewish national home without violating the rights of local inhabitants.

3. The UN Resolution (1947) proposed dividing Palestine into two independent states, Jewish and Arab (Smooha, 2013).

Following the establishment of Israel in 1948, relations between Arabs and Jews changed significantly, impacting Israeli Arabs who remained in the country. Policies that prioritized Jewish settlements often resulted in the

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[1] The term is mostly used to describe voluntary service for youth who volunteer in specific organizations for a predefined period of time instead of joining the army.

displacement of Arab communities, undermining their sense of belonging and escalating tensions (Kidron, 2023). Following the existing historical context between Arabs and Jews, this affected the Arabs' point of view towards the Voluntary National Service program, which began in 1971 as an alternative to military service for religious girls. Multiple organizations oversee these programs, which the Ministry of Welfare and Social Affairs authorizes. Volunteers, usually secondary school graduates, serve for one to two years. Upon completion, they receive the same benefits as soldiers, including financial and educational grants based on their service duration (Sherer, 2004).

Voluntary National Service aims to strengthen the connection between citizens and the state, promoting equality and citizenship through an independent body unrelated to security forces. Surveys, cited by Reuven (2008), show that 40% to 50% of young Arabs in Israel are willing to participate in Voluntary National Service. However, Arab leadership strongly opposes the plan, arguing it represents inequality and that linking duties to rights is unjust. They express concerns that the initiative could lead to the "Israelization" of young Arabs and question the government's true intentions (Gal, 2008).

In contrast, The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), established in 1948, functions as a: citizens' army" that reflects the diversity of Israeli society. The IDF requires compulsory military service from eighteen-year-old Jewish men and women and Druze men. This recruitment serves two key purposes: to build a strong operational force and to promote a sense of national identity. Given Israel's ongoing security challenges, military service is a vital connection to the state, highlighting the relationship between citizens and their government in a democracy (Adres, Vanhuysse, & Vashdi, 2012).

Historically, the establishment of Israel's border resulted in the expulsion of many Arab families, while others fled or left voluntarily. In contrast, the Druze chose to stay in their homes; many Muslim and Christian Arabs from the Galilee, Triangle region, and southern Bedouins accepted Israeli citizenship. The 2006 Second Lebanon War raised questions about the identity of Israeli Arabs. They condemned Israeli attacks on Lebanon but were also victims of Hezbollah rocket fire in Northern Israel. Most identify as Israeli Palestinians since they are not citizens of the Palestinians since they are not citizens of the Palestinian Authority. Their identity connects them to the broader Arab community through shared history, culture, customs, and language (Wattad, 2007).

The Arab society in Israel values traditional norms, evident in the strong family ties and established identities. Despite modern influences, clans remain influential in social dynamics, often controlling urban politics and private land in Arab communities. Arabs in Israel have a strong sense of identity linked to their villages, which is more significant than their national identity. In contrast, Jewish individuals primarily identify with the State of Israel. National tensions and historical factors related to the Israel-Palestine conflict play a crucial role in shaping Arab identity in the country (Shdema & Martin, 2022).

The integration of Israeli Arabs into the Voluntary national service underscores the significant identity conflict that exists within Israel's social and cultural frameworks. This conflict arises from the dual identity experienced by Arab citizens of Israel, who simultaneously identify with Palestinian nationality. The Arab minority in Israel has two main aspects of identity: civil, based on citizenship, and national, tied to the Arab world and the Palestinian people. Religious factors also shape ethnic identity among Muslims, Christians, and Druze. Palestinian identity is essential for expressing belonging and shared values. Many volunteers struggle with loyalty, feeling caught between their connections to the Palestinian people and their duties as Israeli citizens. This tension creates a fragmented identity (Blit-Cohen & Essa et al., 2022).

Previous studies, such as those by Shdema & Martin (2022) and Bilt-Cohen& Essa et al. (2022), have explored the civic identity of Israeli Arabs. Still, they have not adequately addressed this minority's perspective on voluntary national service and multiculturalism. This article aims to analyze the perspectives of Israeli Arabs regarding national service, positioning the state as a multicultural and democratic entity. It discusses relevant theories of multiculturalism while highlighting the identity dissonance experienced by both individuals and collective.

The article claims that the inclusion of Israeli Arabs in voluntary national service highlights the existing identity dissonance, which reflects broader challenges in the State of Israel as both a multicultural and democratic state. I am second generation South Lebanon Army. My father served in Lebanon together with the Israeli army, and we fled to Israel on 23.05.2000, when I was five. I came with my parents and older sister, but the rest of our family remained there. I grew up in Tiberias, and as a teenager, we moved to a Moshav. My identity is Christian Israeli Lebanese; I studied in a Jewish school; I speak Hebrew as my mother tongue. I was educated to love the country and be loyal to the State of Israel. Today, I manage a project called

“Meizam Tnufa” (Momentum Initiative) at the Voluntary National Service Association. This project strives to develop volunteers willing to integrate into the world of employment. The accompaniment of group leaders and peer groups surrounding volunteers was intended to meet individuals’ needs to develop this skill. To strengthen this process, mentors accompany volunteers individually and together to establish a personal program, personal relationship, and attentiveness. Voluntary National Service (VNS) is a two-year journey during which volunteers undergo training for up to three months. Training is adapted culturally, during which volunteers attend Hebrew preparatory courses, professional training, and courses to reinforce their sense of belonging and connection to Israeli society alongside developing soft skills and those suitable for the new world of work. After the training period, volunteers are integrated into services, including experience in the profession acquired, and continue to receive mentoring and accompaniment until the end of their VNS. At this time, volunteers will be able to work in these professions.

2. IDENTITY CONFLICT IN A MULTICULTURAL AND DEMOCRATIC STATE: THE CASE OF ISRAELI ARABS

This chapter explores the identity conflict experienced by Israeli Arabs within a broader theoretical framework of multiculturalism and democracy. The aim is to understand how these theories can help analyze the tension between the personal and collective identities of Israeli Arabs while participating in the Israeli voluntary national service.

Cultural diversity often arises when multiple ethnic groups coexist within a single state.' Consequently, a country with more than one nation is known as a multinational state, which includes various national minorities and their distinct cultures. (Kymlicka, 1995). In Israel, these dynamics are closely linked to its identity as a Jewish homeland.

"Rethinking liberal multiculturalism" focuses on the enduring impact and evolving aspects of Will Kymlicka's theories. Kymlicka advocates for multicultural citizenship, emphasizing the importance of special rights and recognition for cultural minorities to support their social integration. However, Boucher et al. (2023) challenge simplistic interpretations of his work, urging a more nuanced and context-sensitive approach to multiculturalism. In the Israeli context, the intricate relationship between Jewish and Arab communities exemplifies the challenge of balancing minority rights within national unity, often resulting in tensions between individual and collective identities (Boucher, Guérard de Latour, & Baycan-Herzog, 2023).

Liberal political theory faces challenges in balancing the required inclusivity of its institutions with the cohesion needed among citizens. Historically, the nation-state has served as a cultural-institutional framework for this, providing a shared identity and narrative that unites political community members. However, this can lead to exclusion by demanding that citizens prioritize their citizenship over other identities and create a political culture that defines the community. Consequently, pursuing inclusion in liberal democracies can paradoxically result in political exclusion. Chin (2019) highlights a paradox in democratic liberalism, maintaining that efforts to integrate minorities can lead to their exclusion. In Israel, the VNS seeks to enhance civic belonging and identity among its citizens. For young Israeli Arabs, participating in this program may be perceived as an alignment with a Jewish state, which can overshadow their Palestinian identity. This situation creates a conflict between their roles as Israeli citizens and their national identity as Palestinians (Chin, 2019).

The identity conflict can be viewed in a global context. Gahramanova (2006) points out that democratization and international attention to minority rights often heighten tensions in countries with strong national identities. For instance, in post-Soviet states, efforts to integrate the Caucasus as an ethnic minority frequently conflict with prevailing national narratives, leading to their exclusion. In Israel, the Arab minority faces a dual identity conflict as they try to balance their identity as Israeli citizens with their connection to the Palestinian nation. This struggle is common worldwide, where minority groups must navigate the challenge of preserving their culture while integrating into a dominant political framework, as seen in the context of Israeli Voluntary National Service (Gahramanova, 2006).

Consequently, Palestinians in Israel lead a complex life as they navigate their identities as both Israeli citizens and members of the Palestinian and Arab nations. Khatib (2021) explores the attitudes of Palestinian leaders in Israel toward events like the Arab Spring and finds that their views are primarily shaped by collective national or religious identities rather than civic ones. This highlights the identity conflict faced by Arab-Israelis in balancing their conflict identities (Khatib, 2021).

Israel annexed East Jerusalem following the Six-day War in 1967, impacting around 70,000 residents at that time. On July 30, 1980, the Knesset passed the "Jerusalem Law," which proclaimed all of Jerusalem, including the territories captured in 1967, as the capital of Israel. Palestinian Arabs residing in Jerusalem are classified as residents, which provides them with an Israeli identity card. This designation enables them to work in Israel and access social benefits from National Insurance and Medical Insurance, typically available only to Israeli citizens. Nonetheless, only a tiny percentage of these residents possess Israeli citizenship (Bartel, 2024).

The identity conflict in East Jerusalem is particularly intense for Palestinian youth living under Israeli rule. According to Bartel (2024), these youth face a struggle to balance their Palestinian and Israeli identities. Although they enjoy relatively better economic conditions due to the annexation of East Jerusalem, they are trapped in a paradox where their daily lives and political beliefs do not align. They must navigate a fragmented national identity, caught between their connection to the Palestinian minority in Israel and their ties to youth in the West Bank under the Palestinian Authority; this division highlights broader identity challenges for Israeli Arabs, with the requirement of voluntary national service adding pressure by demanding loyalty that may clash with their Palestinian roots (Bartal, 2024).

The experience of Israeli Arabs involves a complex struggle between their national loyalty and cultural identity amid Israel's diverse socio-political landscape. The dual ethnic identity theory provides insight into the conflict. According to Salinger (2024), Israeli adolescents with dual ethnic identities navigate a "thin" identity, allowing flexible self-identification. And a "strong" identity. The interaction between these two types of identity is dynamic, and a "thin" identity enhances social integration. Yet, it may also give rise to internal conflict when external pressures necessitate the adoption of a stronger, more defined identity. For Israeli Arabs, this often means shifting between their Arab and Israeli identities based on the situation. For instance, In professional or academic settings, an Arab-Israeli may highlight their Israeli identity to fit in better; at family or religious gatherings, their Arab identity may be more noticeable. (Abutbul Selinger, 2024).

The recruitment of female Arab police officers (FAPO) into the public sector in Israel illustrates the complexities of such integration efforts. According to Meller (2023), Arab women who join the police force experience significant identity conflicts. While their participation can be viewed as a progressive move towards diversifying public institutions, it is also seen as crossing a cultural boundary. Within the Arab community, joining the Israel Police may be perceived as an act of betrayal of collusion with state mechanisms that often conflict with Palestinian identity. Mellerl's (2023) qualitative study, which involved semi-structured interviews with 27 FAPOs, explores the subjective experiences of these women, highlighting the internal and external conflicts they encounter. These officers defend their roles by highlighting their community contributions and promoting social integration despite facing criticism (Meler, 2023).

The theories of multiculturalism, the politics of recognition, and identity dissonance offer valuable insights into understanding the identity conflict experienced by Israeli Arabs. VNS, portrayed as a means of fostering civic belonging, highlights the tension between state policies and the preservation of collective identity. This chapter establishes the theoretical framework for discussing this tension, as illustrated through the Israeli context, and allows for broader comparisons with other countries with significant minority populations.

3. NATIONAL SERVICE IN ISRAEL: EFFECTS ON ARAB SOCIETY

This subchapter will examine the perceptions and effects of VNS among Arab-Israeli minorities, analyzing the intricate impacts on identity and social dynamics based on recent research and theoretical frameworks.

The rates of Arab youth participation in VNS programs in Israel are significantly lower than that of Jewish and Druze youths, with participation rates ranging from 20-30%. This disparity is influenced by various socio-political and cultural factors (Rozental, 2023). A primary issue is that Israeli Arabs are exempt from mandatory military service, which leads them to perceive VNS differently. Jewish and Druze youth consider this an obligation to their national or communal identity. Since the establishment of the state, civic service has been a contentious topic in the Israeli parliament, the Knesset. Although the government has introduced voluntary programs as an alternative to mandatory military service, participation among Arab youth remains low, in part due to concerns that these programs may conflict with their Palestinian identity and align with state narratives (Bick, 2016).

Another point of view is that the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) strategically uses media to shape public perception. Golan and Ben-Ari (2018) highlight how the IDF employs digital platforms to present itself as essential for national defense, justifying organized violence and promoting inclusivity initiatives, such as the integration of Arab Israelis, in a controlled narrative. Analysis of the

IDF's official websites shows that Arab individuals are often depicted in ways that serve national security interests rather than reflecting their actual contributions. This selective framing reveals the challenges of fostering belonging among Arab Israelis while perpetuating exclusionary practices. This narrative highlights the marginalization of Arab Israelis by focusing on national security instead of true civic inclusion. Consequently, many see voluntary national service as a tool for state control rather than a way to achieve meaningful integration (Golan & Ben-Ari, 2018).

The media significantly influences Arab collective identity, mainly through regional media. Popular Arab television programs such as "Arab Idol" and "The Voice" illustrate viewers' preferences for contestants from their respective countries, thereby underscoring the diverse national identities that exist within the Arab world. According to Al-Rawi (2018), social media engagement with popular Arab TV shows reveals that despite efforts to promote a unified Arab identity, online interactions often highlight national and ethnic differences. This trend is also seen among Arab Israelis regarding Voluntary National Service. While Israeli authorities portray National service as a means of integration and loyalty, Arab youth's responses indicate a complex range of identities shaped by Arab media portrayals and local socio-political factors (Al-Rawi, 2018).

Media representation plays a significant role in shaping perceptions of identity, while emotional experiences within state institutions contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the complexities of affiliation. Skriver and Jensen (2023) investigate inclusion and exclusion in Denmark's educational practices, focusing on the impact of emotions on social relationships. Their findings about emotional experiences in artistic teaching can be applied to Israeli society. The research shows how emotions can either foster inclusion or reinforce exclusion. For Arab-Israelis in VNS, these emotional factors are crucial. Responses to state narratives and societal perceptions significantly affect their willingness to participate in VNS. The disconnect between the state's view of VNS as unifying and the exclusion many Arab-Israelis feel highlights the complexities of identity and belonging (Skriver & Jensen, 2024).

In addition to personal feelings, the internal politics of Palestinian leadership in Israel create tension between integration and the preservation of identity. Ras (2024) explores political responses to exclusion within the Palestinian leadership in Israel, noting that Palestinian politics often shift between unity and division based on political circumstances. The study highlights two primary strategic responses: the "hegemonic-accommodationist" approach, led by Mansour Abbas and the United Arab List, and the "hegemonic-rejectionist" approach, representing the broader Palestinian leadership. This divide reflects ongoing tensions in the Arab-Israeli community regarding VNS. The "hegemonic-accommodationist " stance appeals to those seeking integration and socioeconomic benefits through VNS. In contrast, the "hegemonic-rejectionist" viewpoint expresses concerns about repression and loss of identity associated with participation in VNS. This fragmentation illustrates the conflicting priorities and challenges faced by Arab-Israelis in this context (Rass, 2024).

Arab participation in VNS faces significant barriers due to these programs' cultural and political context. Nir and Perry-Hazan (2025) highlight that youth councils often reinforce power imbalances and sociopolitical inequalities. Their study reveals that, instead of promoting integration, these councils create unequal power dynamics that restrict the participation rights of Palestinian-Arab youth. The top-down nature of these councils, combined with a polarized socio-political environment, limits full and fair engagement from Arab youth. To promote VNS effectively among this group, it's crucial to adopt context-sensitive frameworks that address local dynamics and ensure equitable participation opportunities (Nir & Perry-Hazan, 2025).

Demographic factors such as age, gender, and locality size significantly affect participation rates. Rozental (2023) shows that public perception and involvement in national initiatives, including civic services, vary across different demographic groups. Arab youths in smaller localities and lower-income backgrounds have notably lower participation rates, highlighting the socioeconomic barriers they face, which are tied to historical grievances and identity conflicts (Rozental, 2023).

Moreover, Communal and familial attitudes they hold against VNS significantly influence perceptions of it. Many Arab families and community leaders regard it as a threat to their Palestinian identity and social cohesion. This socio-cultural resistance presents challenges for national policy initiatives. Political dynamics have historically shaped the Israeli government's stance on VNS, resulting in a preference for maintaining the status quo instead of pursuing initiatives that could enhance participation rates among Arab youth (Bick, 2016).

Many Arab Israelis view VNS with skepticism or outright opposition. While it may lead to better job prospects and social mobility, it also challenges their collective identity and national loyalty. Mominov (2023) examines how militarism and settler-colonialism shape Israeli national identity, affecting minority perceptions of VNS. The study points out that Israeli identity is closely tied to Zionism and militarism, which many Arab-Israelis view as exclusionary. VNS is often viewed as an extension of the Israeli security system, which intensifies the sense of alienation among Israeli Arabs. They associate it with ideologies that conflict with their national identity (Muminov, 2023).

Despite the identity conflict that the VNS may have, A significant motivation for VNS lies in its perceived benefits for personal and professional growth. Research conducted by Lim et al. (2021) in the United Arab Emirates indicates that VNS can aid individuals in achieving their professional aspirations. Participants in the study highlighted that military environments foster discipline, patriotism, and essential life skills, all of which apply to the broader concept of VNS. However, this research took place in a different political and social context where National Service is unrelated to ethnic tensions or historical conflict. For Arab youth in Israel, these advantages may encourage increased participation. Furthermore, the notion that VNS promotes the development of positive character traits may resonate with both young people and their families, challenging the belief that such service primarily benefits the Jewish majority.

This chapter addresses the complex relationship between VNS in Israel and the identity of Arab citizens. While the state frames VNS as a tool for civil integration and economic advancement, many Arabs feel alienated and see conflicts with their national and cultural identity. This tension arises from the historical and political context surrounding Arab citizens in Israel, where involvement in state led programs is frequently perceived as an endorsement of a national narrative that marginalizes Palestinian identity. Low participation rates among young Arabs in VNS result from historical, political, cultural, and social factors. Media representation often portrays Arabs through a security-focused lens, which reinforces feelings of exclusion rather than promoting true inclusion. Political and community influences also play significant roles. Palestinian leaders in Israel are divided: some view VNS as a chance for integration, while others fear it undermines national identity. Family attitudes and social contribute to concerns that VNS threatens Palestinian identity. Despite these issues, some young Arabs recognize potential benefits, such as gaining life skills, enhancing job opportunities, and fostering civic responsibility. However, these advantages do not outweigh the substantial fears related to identity, exclusion, and inequality.

4. VOLUNTARY NATIONAL SERVICE AND THE INTEGRATION OF MINORITIES: A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

Integrating minority populations into a national framework is a complex process that involves challenges related to identity, social cohesion, and civic participation. Conducting international comparative analyses is crucial for addressing these issues. Such studies reveal a range of approaches, uncover common obstacles, and suggest potential solutions for effective policy development. By examining diverse cases, we can identify successful strategies for integrating minorities and resolving identity conflicts.

A study by Genkove et al. (2022) highlights intercultural competence as essential for positive intercultural relations. This competence involves the ability and willingness to engage with different cultural or ethnic groups. In Germany, many civic service initiatives are based on this principle, involving young participants in language courses, social projects, and community service tasks that encourage direct interaction among diverse groups. Implementing similar approaches in Israel could foster greater integration between Israeli Arabs and other populations, thereby helping to reduce identity-based conflicts (Genkova, Herbst, Schreiber, Rašticová, Poor, Veresné, & Bjekic, 2022).

Moreover, Popescu and Jugl (2024) explore the complex link between civic associations and political behavior in Germany. They maintain that, although these associations typically encourage civic engagement, they can also be influenced by populist radical right parties that promote anti-establishment and anti-democratic views. This emphasizes the need for caution in civic service models: while fostering integration and civic participation, guarding against exclusionary narratives is vital. In Israel, civic service programs must promote democratic values and unity while preventing the use as platforms for radical ideologies (Popescu & Jugl, 2024).

Similarly, The Canadian model of multiculturalism provides a valuable point of comparison. Canada focuses on the coexistence and equal recognition of various ethnic, linguistic, and cultural identities within its borders (Dubrovin & Solovarova, 2020). A key element of its success lies in multicultural policies and community service programs that promote a sense of belonging among minority groups. For instance, Ari (2020) investigates how second-generation Jamaicans and Portuguese in Toronto experience integration differently based on their visible minority and social statuses. The influence of class and race on the real-world applicability of multicultural policies is emphasized. Such comparisons offer insights into how these policies can be improved to meet better the diverse needs of racialized youth in multiethnic communities (Ari, 2020).

A country's historical and political context shapes its integration approach. Zuber (2022) argues that experiences like the political economy of industrialization influence how countries respond to immigration today. For example, Catalonia has created a consensual discourse of integration that includes international immigrants. In contrast, South Tyrol's focus on internal migration has led to segregation without agreement on integration strategies. Catalonia's development of a non-ethnic identity has allowed for smoother integration of both internal and international migrants, highlighting how historical legacies impact current integration policies (Zuber, 2022).

The communication and implementation of policies are significantly shaped by the rhetoric used, which is a critical factor in their effectiveness. Bohunicka (2022) highlights the vital role of civic rhetoric in facilitating social inclusion through public discourse. Grounded in classical rhetoric, civic rhetoric actively engages citizens by harmonizing diverse interests, addressing information gaps, and promoting solidarity among various groups. This inclusive approach is essential for bridging divisions between community groups and enhancing social cohesion. It ensures that minority groups feel heard and valued, which is crucial for their successful integration and the negotiation of their identities (Bohunická, 2022).

Canada's multicultural policy framework effectively integrates its diverse minority populations and promotes a sense of belonging through community services. Emmenegger (2018) notes that Canada has been more successful than Nigeria and Switzerland in implementing these policies, owing to its strong commitment to inclusion and equity. Since the 1970s, the government's multiculturalism policy has aimed to preserve cultural identities while facilitating social integration. Community service programs are vital in bridging gaps between different groups and fostering a sense of shared citizenship. These initiatives also encourage participation from both immigrants and Indigenous peoples, enhancing dialogue and collaboration among various communities (Emmenegger, 2018).

Beaman (2024) observes that Canadian citizenship has evolved from a predominantly Christian framework to a more inclusive model that embraces various religious and cultural perspectives. This transformation underscored the adaptability of Canadian multiculturalism. Initiatives such as Community Connections support newcomers as they integrate socially and economically into Canadian society. These programs provide opportunities for immigrants to engage with their communities and help them understand Canadian cultural norms, fostering a sense of belonging. Active participation in community service reduces feelings of alienation and enhances civic engagement among minority groups (Beaman, 2024).

The impact of these programs on minority identity in Canada is intricate. Winter (2020) analyzes how skilled immigrants perceive Canada's multicultural citizenship. While the naturalization process tends to favor individuals with valuable skills, it still seeks to uphold the principles of multiculturalism. By mandating community service as part of the integration process, the program emphasizes the significance of multicultural citizenship, enabling skilled immigrants to contribute actively to society. However, this framework raises concerns regarding inclusion, particularly for individuals who do not meet the highly qualified criteria, such as refugees and family-class immigrants (Winter, 2021).

Findings of a study on how ethnic diversity is perceived in rural areas, particularly through the lens of the "rural idyll" in Flemish media. They identify four main perspectives: diversity as a threat, an affirmation, a result of rural deprivation, or a solution. Existing social narratives shape these views. The media's portrayal of diversity can significantly influence public opinion and policy. Civic service programs encouraging positive interactions between ethnic groups are essential for changing these perceptions. By fostering understanding and cooperation, these programs can present ethnic diversity as an asset rather than a threat to social harmony (Van Damme, De Decker, & Leinfelder, 2024).

The Arab minority in Israel faces significant challenges due to the country's strong national identity, which is primarily focused on Jewish culture and religion. Unlike countries like Canada and Belgium, which embrace multiculturalism, Israel's identity is closely associated with its Jewish character, making integration difficult for Arab citizens. Feinstein (2017) discusses the refusal of Jewish Israelis to identify with a specific ethnic label. This lack of ethnic identification often leads to more positive attitudes toward Palestinian Arabs. By rejecting ethnic labels, these individuals challenge the existing ethnic classification system in Israel. However, for Israeli Arabs, the dominant Jewish identity remains a barrier to their integration and sense of belonging (Feinstein, 2019).

The study by Diab et al. (2021) analyzes Arab residents in mixed cities like Haifa and Nof Hagalil. It is discovered that integration levels vary significantly among Arab subgroups based on religious affiliation and city of residence. According to Diab, Shdema, & Schnell (2022), Using Shanel's multidimensional integration model, the study shows that Christians in Haifa integrate more fully economically, socially, culturally, and emotionally than Christians in Galilee and Muslims in Haifa. Haifa's well-established urban environment has historically fostered more significant social and economic opportunities, facilitating greater integration for its Christian residents. In contrast, the newer city of Nof Hagalil. Characterized by its underdeveloped infrastructure and community networks, it presents considerable challenges for Arab residents. Furthermore, the data underscore significant diversity within Arab communities, suggesting that integration pathways and outcomes can vary markedly based on religious affiliations and local contexts (Diab, Shdema, & Schnell, 2022).

This chapter analyzes how different countries integrate minorities and the role of the civil service framework in fostering a civil identity and reducing tensions. Examples from Germany, Canada, Belgium, and Catalonia indicate that successful integration hinges on inclusive multicultural policies and fostering a sense of belonging. Canada succeeds through multicultural policies and community programs promoting equality and cultural recognition. In contrast, Israel struggles with its Jewish national identity, making it hard for Arab citizens to feel included. VNS is often seen as a loyalty tool, exacerbating identity issues for Arabs. While international models provide insights for Israel, any application must be adapted to its unique context. To foster effective integration, national service must emphasize equality and respect for minority identities.

5. DISCUSSION

The literature review presented above shows that Israeli Arab's views on VNS are shaped by the conflict between their Palestinian identity and the civic expectations imposed by the Israeli state. Many perceive VNS as an assimilation tool that threatens their cultural identity despite the government promoting it as a means of integration and socioeconomic advancement.

This situation reflects Kymlicka's (1996) theory of multicultural citizenship, which emphasizes recognizing minority rights for proper integration. However, the predominance of a Jewish national identity complicates this recognition in Israel. Israeli Arabs often see VNS as part of the state's efforts to enforce a single national identity, disregarding their unique cultural and political identities.

Moreover, state narratives and media representations influence Israeli Arab's perceptions of VNS. Golan and Ben-Ari (2028) argue that Arab citizens are often depicted through a security-focused lens, reinforcing their marginalization. This disconnect from state institutions, along with resistance from their communities and families, intensifies the identity conflict and alienation felt by Arab youth.

Comparative analyses with countries like Canada and Belgium show that inclusive multicultural policies, which respect minority identities, enhance civic participation. In contrast, Israel's requirement for loyalty to the state limits full civic inclusion and creates barriers for Israeli Arabs to engage in VNS (Rozental, (2023).

6. CONCLUSIONS

Israeli Arabs face significant identity dissonance when engaging with VNS due to the conflict between their cultural heritage and the state's national-religious framework. The main conclusions are:

1. Identity Dissonance: The tension between Israeli civic identity and Palestinian national identity creates barriers to participation in VNS, leading to feelings of alienation and resistance.
2. Community and family influences: Strong familial and community ties influence perceptions of VNS. Resistance often stems from fears of cultural erosion and the loss of Palestinian identity.
3. State Narratives: The state frames VNS as a loyalty requirement rather than an inclusive civic duty, undermining integration efforts. Many Israeli Arabs view VNS as a representation of state control rather than civic belonging.
4. Countries like Canada, Belgium, and Germany demonstrate that inclusive multicultural policies, which recognize minority identities, are more effective in promoting civic participation.

To make VNS an effective tool for integration in Israel, we must prioritize equality, cultural recognition, and respect for diversity. The views expressed here show that Policymakers should collaborate with Arab communities to develop programs that align with their values. The lessons from this article apply to Israel and other multicultural and democratic societies facing minority integration issues. The conflict between state expectations and minority identities is a common challenge worldwide. The insights and findings can guide policy development in various socio-political contexts, emphasizing the need to balance civic integration with cultural recognition.

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STUDIA UBB. EUROPAEA, LXX, 2, 2025, 135-144

CONFLICT THE EMERGENCE OF PEACE BETWEEN JAPAN AND THE UNITED STATES: A DIALOGUE

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DOI: 10.24193/subbeuropaea.2025.2.07
Published Online: 2025-12-16
Published Print: 2025-12-31

Abstract
What follows is a dialogue about the difficulties of peace-making at the end of active hostilities, particularly where the conflict is multigenerational, the assignment of responsibility is muddied, and the prevailing power has conflicting demands on its time, people, and resources in connection with current and former allies and opponents, and domestic and foreign security concerns.
Keywords: *peace, democracy, responsibility, intergenerational conflict, allies.*

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I. WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED

Between 1945, with the termination of wartime hostilities, and 1951, when peaceful relations were restored, Japan was governed, as a matter of public international law, by the Far Eastern Commission (based in Washington, DC) and the Allied Council for Japan (based in Tokyo).[1]

As a practical matter, Japan was governed by the United States, the dominant occupying power, and by its nominee: the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers—General Douglas MacArthur.

In 1951, Japan signed a peace treaty with the United States, the United Kingdom, and a host of other Allied nations.[2] The treaty, which went into effect in 1952, ended the occupation of Japan by the United States and its allies. In effect, the 1951 treaty terminated the functions of the Far Eastern Commission and the Allied Council for Japan.

Japan sought this peace treaty—it sought restoration of its sovereignty and national independence. Japan accomplished this goal by making peace with the nations which had defeated it in war.[3]

II. FICTION[4]

The year is 1966. Japan remains occupied. The occupying forces have been and remain almost entirely composed of United States military personnel (and coordinate civilian foreign aid and other support staff) under the control of their commander: the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers—originally General Douglas MacArthur, but now General Earle G. Wheeler.[5]

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[1] *See generally* Immanuel C. Y. Hsu, "Allied Council for Japan" in *The Far Eastern Quarterly* no. 2, vol. 10, February 1951, pp. 173-178 [https://www.jstor.org/stable/2049096], 28 November 2025.

[2] *See* Treaty of Peace with Japan (San Francisco, 8 September 1951), 136 UNTS 45 [https://tinyurl.com/4yszsbmy], 28 November 2025.

[3] The peace was not a cold peace, but a genuine one. So much so that Japan, the occupied nation, subsequently awarded General MacArthur a high order of merit. *See* "General MacArthur Receives Japan's Highest Honour" in *British Pathé*, June 1960 [https://tinyurl.com/bdp68pm6], 28 November 2025.

[4] Fiction is a regularly used style in modern academic and legal literature. *See, e.g.*, Lon L. Fuller, "The Case of the Speluncean Explorers" in *Harvard Law Review* no. 4, vol. 62, February 1949, pp. 616-645 [https://www.jstor.org/stable/1336025], 28 November 2025.

[5] *See* "General Earle Gilmore Wheeler (1908–1975)" in *Joint Force Quarterly*, Autumn/ Winter 1997–1998, p. 135 [https://tinyurl.com/ycytu4vt], 28 November 2025.

III. THE MINUTES

Minutes of the President of the United States' National Security Policy Sub-Committee for Japan and the Far East:

January 15, 1966 Meeting

The minutes of the prior meeting of the sub-committee were adopted unanimously.

In attendance were the sub-committee's three regular members: Cleon, Alcibiades, and Diodotus.

IV. THE DIALOGUE[6]

Cleon: The war ended over twenty years ago. We have made peace (of a sort) with Germans and Germany. We have made peace with Germany's former European allies—Bulgaria, Hungary, Italy, and Romania. We coexist (albeit, uneasily) with our former, communist allies: China and the Soviet Union. We have yet to make peace with Japan. And the President's party and its voters are tired of the continued costs, in blood and treasure, of occupying Japan.

Alcibiades: Making peace requires a partner who also wants peace.[7] There is, as yet, no peace party in Japan. So we must wait for such a partner to emerge, and, until then, we must continue to occupy Japan.

Cleon: That's easy for you to say: "continue with the occupation." You do not have to go before the voters. The Japanese occupation issue is not the only issue facing the President, but with narrow majorities in both houses, that issue might cost his party its congressional majorities in the next election. And G-d only knows what the administration's congressional opposition would do should they take control of one or both houses of Congress. We cannot allow the past,[8] current, and expected future stiff necks and criminality of Japan

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[6] Like fiction, dialogue is also a regularly used style in modern academic and legal literature. *See, e.g.*, Henry M. Hart, Jr., "The Power of Congress to Limit the Jurisdiction of Federal Courts: An Exercise in Dialectic" in *Harvard Law Review* no. 8, vol. 66, June 1953, pp. 1362-1402 [https://www.jstor.org/stable/1336866], 28 November 2025.

[7] Seth Barrett Tillman, "Advice to the Allies—1945" in *Claremont Review of Books* no. 2, vol. 15, Spring 2015, p. 13 *[*https://tinyurl.com/8f58wn9z*], 28 November 2025.*

[8] Seth Barrett Tillman, "The Wartime Statesmanship of Éamon de Valera" in *Quadrant* no. 10, vol. 69, October 2025, pp. 104-106 [https://tinyurl.com/4fzv883e], 28 November 2025.

determine how we live in our homes. If that happens, then the sacrifices our people (and our allies) made during the World War were meaningless.

Alcibiades: That is entirely wrong. Our people's sacrifice gave us the last twenty years of peace and prosperity. The situation we now face is a new and different situation. We must be forward thinking. If we and the Japanese look only backwards, then no peace is possible, now or ever.

Cleon: Again, you are thinking about this problem as one between equals. Japan started and lost a war: that carries consequences.[9] Thus, the question is not how we treat Japan, but what risks we are prepared to take for our own good. You are a highly placed and well compensated civil servant: a permanent bureaucrat. You live in a gated community. You do not have to explain to our citizens, soldiers, and voters why we—alone—continue to pay for the occupation of Japan. Our allies contribute (almost) no soldiers, and they contribute (almost) no coin. You also do not have to explain to our people why our soldiers disappear—only for their battered bodies to be discovered later on. We must staunch the wound, and we must cut our losses.

Alcibiades: No, we must wait out the militarists. They are aging and dying, and they will continue to die. The mortality tables are on our side. In the long run, we will prevail. When they are gone, the new generation is more likely to make peace.

Cleon: You have been saying that for ten years—since the end of the war in Korea—you are a dreamer. As the post-war generation takes to the political field, they are less likely to make peace and more likely to take up lawfare, if not guerilla warfare from the safety of the hills. They will be supported covertly by the USSR, China, and Cuba—by foreign spies, by domestic traitors, and by other fifth columnists (in the upper echelons of the civil service bureaucracy, in the media, in academia, and in labor unions).

Having been born after 1945, young Japanese citizens, and today's adults who were children during the war, will have had, in fact, no actual connection to Japanese wartime criminal aggression and other violations of the laws of war, including crimes against humanity. As time goes by, they will see the continued Allied (that is, American) presence on their soil as more and more unjustified. Members of the nonaligned bloc, particularly neutrals during

[9] *See* Thucydides, "Melian Dialogue" in Thomas Hobbes (trans.), David Grene (ed.), *The Peloponnesian War* Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1959, 5:84–5:116 [https://tinyurl.com/heezp95m], 27 November 2025.

World War II, will be likely to agree with this "new" view. And we need those nations cooperation (or, at least, their passivity) to prevail in the Cold War. It is a question of priorities: *today's* priorities.

For all these reasons, now is the time we are most likely to strike the best deal. Once we go, it is likely that the Japanese leadership will fall out with one another, and they will spend the next several years (perhaps generations) at one another's throats. And it is better that they fight one another, than they fight us as a unified polity making use of lawfare and terror tactics.

Alcibiades: Who is dreaming now? After a new leadership emerges which feels no connection with Japan's past wartime crimes, they are likely to instil a new patriotism, and, perhaps, seek to vindicate what was done in the past in the eyes of their own people. How long until they acquire weapons of mass destruction which can be used against us and our allies?

Cleon: Terminating any and every occupation risks that the occupied power might subsequently rearm in some threatening fashion. If you believed what you have just said, then that would be a reason to occupy Japan today, to occupy Japan tomorrow, and to occupy Japan forever. Every peace comes at the risk of some future war—just as every occupation encounters pushback from the nationals of the occupied territory. Risk is everywhere and always. Yet some nations have made peace. Actual peace.[10]

Diodotus: Surely, there are third options? Options which we could put before the President? We have an entire national security infrastructure outside the regular military, right? Could not we control or, at least, if not direct, then monitor and influence who will govern Japan after we exit? Foreign aid, political donations, government contracts, and, as necessary—blackmail, extortion, bribery, and . . . assassination? What were the policies which made it possible to conclude successful postwar relations with Germany and its allies? Cannot we make use of similar policies here?

Cleon: Democracies have a poor record of effectiveness at such efforts to manipulate the internal politics of foreign nations. Less than reliable elements in our bureaucracy will leak to the press and the opposition. And whatever is done, even if kept secret, will be discovered by successor administrations who can use and leak that information for domestic political purposes. Perhaps such foreign policy operations could provide a basis for a future prosecution in a domestic or a foreign court—or, even possibly, in an international court?

[10] *See supra* note 3.

Eventually, we would be exposed, and that will seal the control of Japan for a generation by its most extremist elements. Such policies, when discovered, as they are sure to be discovered, will make the United States more unpopular among the nations of the nonaligned bloc. I can already hear the "chorus of execration."[11]

As for why was peace possible between the Allies and the European Axis nations? You know the answer to that. The fascists parties spoke for a plurality or, perhaps, a majority of its peoples, but not all. Fighting and then losing the war, with all the sacrifices endured and territories lost, cost the fascists the bulk of their popular support. And, after they lost, there was an alternative leadership in waiting. It was a leadership which we supported by recognizing them in exile during the war, and by giving them foreign aid after the war.

Japan was entirely different. There was no peace faction seeking recognition as a government-in-exile during the war. Why? Because the population overwhelmingly supported the militarists which took the Japanese nation to war. The postwar Japanese leaders, who brokered the surrender, did not oppose the war at its start; rather, they were just a handful of military officers, civilian bureaucrats, industrialists, and aristocrats who, circa 1943, sought to save Japan, imperial rule, and Japanese traditions from total annihilation.[12] And even then, Yoshida's peace group was a narrow clique at risk of imprisonment and assassination by the militarists as long as the war lasted.[13] The problem we face in Japan is unique. Is it genetic? —environmental? —a constellation of unfortunate historical facts? I do

[11] Francis Hitchman, *The Public Life of the Right Honourable the Earl of Beaconsfield, K.G.*, London: Chapman and Hall, 1879, vol. 2, p. 337 [https://tinyurl.com/5y89aezx], 29 November 2025.

[12] *See* Michael Schaller, *The American Occupation of Japan*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1985, pp. 5-6, 10, 17-18 [https://tinyurl.com/4xm88ums], 28 November 2025; *see also* Seth Barrett Tillman, "The European Parliament's 2016 Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought" in *New Reform Club*, 18 September 2016 [https://tinyurl.com/59vy6cpc], 27 November 2025; Seth Barrett Tillman, "The European Parliament's Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought 2015" in *New Reform Club*, 18 October 2015 [https://tinyurl.com/mpvwkfdp], 27 November 2025.

[13] *See also* Schaller, *The American Occupation of Japan*, *supra* note 12; *cf.* Michael D. Pearlman, *Unconditional Surrender, Demobilization, and the Atomic Bomb* Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: Combat Studies Institute, 1996, p. 7 [https://tinyurl.com/33rwudr5], 27 November 2025.

not know. And it does not matter. I do know that it is time for us to leave. That is the best policy all things considered. It is 1966, and my primary security concern is the Cold War and all its attendant risks.

Alcibiades: The responsible thing to do is to wait for a Japanese peace faction to emerge, and to convince our people that we must not make the same mistake we made at the end of World War I. We must continue to occupy Japan to prevent war from re-emerging.

Cleon: Continued occupation is no guarantee of peace, now or later. Our doing so puts at risk the loss of our governing coalition in favor of our less reliable domestic political opponents, and they would entertain even greater political and military risks vis-à-vis enemies of the United States. The Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact allies are better armed than Japan is today, and the Soviet Union and its allies are better armed than Japan is likely to be any time over the course of the next generation. We must secure *today*—and *tomorrow*'s American leadership must be left to govern tomorrow.

Diodotus: As we have not reached agreement on these points in prior meetings, I do not see our sub-committee's reaching agreement on these points now. Still, we need to give the President some consensus advice.

Alcibiades: We should order our soldiers to remain on the grounds of their bases and out of harm's way. Crimes are manufactured against our military personnel and civilian foreign aid and other support staff—who are then accused of wrongdoing. It is all Hollywood and propaganda. We can reduce this source of tension by grounding our people. We should also focus our attentions on Honshu and Tokyo, and let the lesser islands—Kyushu, Shikoku, and Hokkaido—go. Perhaps we should also consider expanding industry and university exchange programs along with other cultural exchange programs?

Cleon: Grounding our people to our military bases (and to compounds for civilian foreign aid and other support staff) will appear as an admission of guilt in regard to past alleged crimes, and an admission that our people's freedom of movement is likely to lead to friction,[14] if not future crimes.

[14] For a discussion of the possibility of friction in the context of migration, see: Seth Barrett Tillman, "A Dialogue on Migration" in *Eriugena Review*, 18 June 2023 [https://tinyurl.com/yc6b9unu], 27 November 2025; Seth Barrett Tillman, "A U.K. Dialogue on Migration" in *News Letter*, 6 October 2025 [https://tinyurl.com/ms5xvbfr], 27 November 2025; *cf.* Seth Barrett Tillman, "The Irish Flag War" in *The Galway Review* vol. 14, forth. April 2026, pp. 7-9; Seth Barrett Tillman, "The Irish

Moreover, such a policy will decrease trade, which is one area where we are likely to establish a good record of fair-play with the inhabitants. It may even appear (or be made to appear) that we have adopted this trade-restricting policy as a way to punish or bully the inhabitants. Better to leave Japan than to wave the white flag in this manner.

Diodotus: How about this. We recommend to local commanders to advise their soldiers that there are risks involved in mingling with the domestic population. We leave the decision to do so to local commanders and to individual officers and soldiers. We increase our military personnel's net compensation via tax exemptions so that they have the opportunity to spend more money in the local economy. Tax exemptions, as opposed to raising military salaries, will not raise domestic objections that we are engaged in new spending. We announce our departure from the lesser Japanese home islands as a sign of the progress that has been made towards a peace based upon mutual respect and understanding, with the caveat that ending the Far Eastern Commission's and the Allied Council for Japan's administering Honshu and Tokyo awaits a comprehensive settlement supported by the members of the Commission, by the Council, and by Japan's elected government. The future comprehensive settlement and the elected Japanese government's assent to that agreement will show to our people (that is, our electorate) that Japan's future conduct will conform to international law and will be transacted by pacific means.

Can we agree on this proposal?

It is also high time that we direct our press officers to stop speaking about the American "occupation" of Japan, and instead, speak to the American "administration" as governed by public international law. Even better: we should entirely drop the language of "American" occupation and administration in favor of the Commission's and the Council's administration. We should do this as much for our good as for Japan's. It is difficult for a patriot

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Flag War" in *The Galway Review*, 7 September 2025 [https://tinyurl.com/48adc5ca], 27 November 2025. *See generally* Seth Barrett Tillman, "Understanding Nativist Elements Relating to Immigration Policies and to the American Constitution's Natural Born Citizen Clause" in *Study on the American Constitution/*미국헌법학회 no. 2, vol. 32, August 2021, pp. 1-55 [https://tinyurl.com/dhkxfzby], 28 November 2025; Seth Barrett Tillman, "East Wall and the Plantations: Ireland and Its New Migrants" in *The American Spectator*, 6 December 2022 [https://tinyurl.com/2wrnjsjk], 1 December 2025.

to see his country occupied. And it is more difficult to stomach being occupied by a single foreign power than by the United Nations and by bodies acting under the auspices of public international law. Our using the language of "American occupation" arms the worst elements of Japanese political life with an undeserved propaganda victory. Why do this? Why did we ever do this?

Can we also agree on this proposal?

A vote was taken. Both proposals were recommended to the President absent any recorded objections.

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STUDIA UBB. EUROPAEA, LXX, 2, 2025, 145-178

DIGITAL INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES AND TEACHER TRAINING FROM AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE: A STUDY BETWEEN BRAZIL AND ROMANIA

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DOI: 10.24193/subbeuropaea.2025.2.08
Published Online: 2025-12-16
Published Print: 2025-12-31

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Abstract
Within this paper we propose a comparative analysis between the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS) in Brazil and Babes-Bolyai University in Romania, focusing on the use of Digital Information and Communication Technologies (DICTs) in teacher training and continuous education. The research adopts a qualitative and comparative approach, based on the documentary analysis of public policies, training plans, and institutional statistical data. The investigation seeks to understand how different pedagogical models and sociopolitical contexts influence the integration of DICTs in training processes, identifying convergences, divergences, and good practices. The study draws on consolidated theoretical foundations in education and technology and proposes a critical reflection on possible paths for teacher training in the digital age.
Keywords: *Digital Technologies, Teacher Training, Public Policy, Comparative Education.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The transformations in social and educational dynamics promoted by Digital Information and Communication Technologies (DICTs) have profoundly impacted teacher training processes in the 21st century. Far from being merely technical support tools, DICTs are reconfiguring learning spaces, the roles of teachers and students, and the very concepts of teaching and knowledge. As Freire[1] states, education should be an act of freedom and autonomy, and in this sense, technologies, when critically applied, can broaden the educational horizon, strengthening the dialogical, creative, and emancipatory dimension of pedagogical practice.

In this scenario, understanding how different higher education institutions integrate DICTs into continuogus teacher education is an urgent and necessary challenge. The literature points to a growing complexity of digital educational environments, requiring not only technical mastery, but also pedagogical, ethical, and collaborative skills[2,3,4]. However, training processes

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[1]Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of autonomy: knowledge necessary for educational practice*, São Paulo: Paz e Terra, 1996.

[2]José Manuel Moran, *The education we want: new challenges and how to get there*, Campinas: Papirus, 2015.

[3]José Manuel Moran, "Learning with active methodologies and technologies" in Lilian Bacich; José Manuel Moran (eds.), *Active methodologies for innovative education: a theoretical-practical approach*, Porto Alegre: Penso, 2018.

[4]Vani Moreira Kenski, *Education and technologies: the new pace of information*, Campinas: Papirus, 2012.

widely vary between countries, universities, and educational systems, which justifies conducting international comparative studies. According to Unesco[5], analyzing different contexts of teacher training with technologies allows for the identification of good practices, gaps, and strategies that can be adapted to different educational realities.

This article proposes a comparative analysis between two prominent institutions in their respective contexts: the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS) in Brazil and Babes-Bolyai University (BBU) in Romania. These universities were chosen based on their track records of academic excellence, commitment to teacher training, and involvement in national and transnational public policies. While UFRGS represents a public university in the Global South, located in a BRICS member country, BBU is part of the European higher education area, with strong alignment with European Union guidelines, such as DigCompEdu and the Bologna Process.

The central problem guiding this research is: how are DICTs incorporated into teacher training within two universities with different sociopolitical and regulatory contexts, and what are the convergences and divergences between these experiences? The starting point is the hypothesis that, although both institutions value digital teacher training, the way in which this integration occurs is strongly conditioned by public policies, technological infrastructure, institutional culture, and alignment with global educational agendas.

The overall objective of the study is to comparatively analyze the practices, policies, and pedagogical models of teacher training using DICTs at UFRGS and BBU, seeking to understand their challenges, advances, and implications. The specific objectives are:

a) identify the legal frameworks and institutional policies that guide digital teacher training in each country;

b) map the technological resources and methodologies used in initial and continuous training courses;

c) to assess the degree of institutionalization of DICTs practices within both universities;

d) reflect on the implications of this comparison for educational policies in the Global South and in the context of BRICS.

[5]Unesco, *Guidelines for policies on mobile learning*, Paris: Unesco, 2019.

This article is structured in six sections. After this introduction, we present the theoretical framework that discusses the main concepts of DICTs in teacher training, educational policies, pedagogical models, and the internationalization of education. The following section describes the study's methodology, which is qualitative and comparative in approach. Next, we present the data and analyses related to the studied institutions, including their history, training practices, public policies, and quantitative indicators. The fifth section discusses the convergence and divergence between the analyzed models, with critical projections on global training inequalities. Finally, the last section brings together the final considerations, contributions of the study, implications for public policies, and suggestions for future research.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. DICTS IN TEACHER TRAINING: CONCEPTS, CHALLENGES, AND POTENTIAL

The presence of DICTs in contemporary education challenges training systems to rethink the role of teachers, pedagogical practices, and learning models. According to Moran[6], "*educational technologies are not only means of teaching, but environments that provoke new ways of learning, dialoguing, and producing knowledge*". Thus, teachers need to stop being mere transmitters of content and become mediators and designers of learning experiences.

The integration of DICTs into teacher training involves both technical mastery and the development of a critical stance towards socio-technical transformations. Selwyn[7] warns that educational technology "*is deeply political and never neutral*", as it reflects disputes over power, values, and control over knowledge. Therefore, preparing teachers to work with DICTs implies going beyond instrumental use, requiring a critical, ethical, and emancipatory view of technology — a perspective that is close to Freire's[8] thinking when he states that

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[6]José Manuel Moran, *The education we want: new challenges and how to get there*, Campinas: Papirus, 2015, p. 32.

[7]Neil Selwyn, *Education and technology: key issues and debates*, London: Bloomsbury, 2011, p. 3.

[8]Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of autonomy: knowledge necessary for educational practice*, São Paulo: Paz e Terra, 1996, p. 47.

"teaching is not transferring knowledge, but creating possibilities for its own production or construction".

From the perspective of the teacher's professional development, Imbernón[9] emphasizes that *"training teachers involves promoting reflection, research, and collaboration, not just the technical application of tools"*. Thus, DICTs should be understood as tools for social and pedagogical transformation, capable of enhancing the role of teachers and students, promoting meaningful learning, and democratizing access to knowledge.

In the context of the Global South, authors such as Valente[10] and Kenski[11] highlight that infrastructure difficulties and the fragmentation of public policies still limit the effective use of DICTs, but also reinforce the creative and adaptive potential of teachers. These conditions challenge universities to create innovative training strategies that value technologies as cultural mediators, not just technical artifacts.

2.2. PUBLIC EDUCATION POLICIES: OVERVIEW IN BRAZIL AND ROMANIA

In Brazil, public policies on teacher training have sought to incorporate DICTs since early 2000s, but still in a discontinuous and fragmented manner. Documents such as the Law of Guidelines and Bases for National Education (LDB)[12], **the** National Education Plan (PNE)[13], **and** the National Common Base for Initial Training of Basic Education Teachers (BNC-Formação)[14] mention the importance of digital culture, but without detailing specific competencies.

[9]Francisco Imbernón, *Teacher and professional training: training for change and uncertainty*, São Paulo: Cortez, 2011, p. 45.

[10]José Armando Valente, "The use of technologies in teacher training: challenges and perspectives" in Nelson De Luca Pretto; Elizabeth Macedo (eds.), *Technology and teacher training: rethinking paths*, Salvador: Edufba, 2006.

[11]Vani Moreira Kenski, *Education and technologies: the new pace of information*, Campinas: Papirus, 2012.

[12]Brazil, *Law n°9,394, of December 20, 1996*, Establishes the guidelines and foundations of national education, Brasília, 1996.

[13]Brazil, *National Education Plan (PNE) 2014-2024: Law n°13,005, of June 25, 2014*, Brasília: MEC, 2014.

[14]Brazil, *National Common Base for Initial Training of Basic Education Teachers (BNC-Formação)*, Brasília: MEC, 2019.

This reveals a gap between political discourse and institutional practice. As Kenski[15] states, *"Brazilian education technology policy is marked by discontinuities, both in terms of infrastructure and teacher training"*.

In Romania, on the other hand, educational policy reflects alignment with the European Union and its strategic milestones. Since the Bologna Process (1999)[16], Romanian teacher training has been restructured into three cycles (bachelor's, master's, and doctorate), prioritizing the convergence of curricula and the integration of digital skills. According to the Romania Ministry of National Education the country adopts common guidelines from *the European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators (DigCompEdu)*, which allows for *"standardized and progressive assessment and certification of teachers' digital competence"* [17],.

The European Commission describes DigCompEdu[18] as *"a guiding tool for teacher professional development in the digital age"* structured around six areas of competence: professional engagement, digital resources, teaching and learning, assessment, student empowerment, and developing students' digital competence. At Babes-Bolyai University, this policy is institutionalized, with digital teaching certifications and regular continuing education projects. The Romanian case illustrates the challenges of integrating digital pedagogies into historically traditional systems. As Rusu and Demian[19] analyze, *"the use of DICTs in Romanian universities intensified during the pandemic, revealing both opportunities for innovation and structural and cultural barriers"*. The research points to the importance of consistent institutional policies and continuousg teacher training as central elements for consolidating digital transformation in higher education.

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[15]Vani Moreira Kenski, *Education and technologies: the new pace of information*, Campinas: Papirus, 2012, p. 56.

[16]European Commission, *The european higher education area in 2020: Bologna Process Implementation Report*, Brussels: Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, 2020.

[17]Romania Ministry of National Education, *Education law n° 1/2011*, Bucharest, 2011.

[18]European Commission, *DigCompEdu: the digital competence framework for educators*, Luxembourg: EU Publications, 2017.

[19]A. Rusu; S. Demian, "Perspectives on digital education in Romanian universities during COVID-19: opportunities and barriers" in *Postmodern Openings*, n° 1, 2020, p. 149.

While Brazil deals with scattered and short-range policies, Romania exemplifies a model articulated between European guidelines and institutional practices, which demonstrates how political and financial alignment can favor the consolidation of a formative and sustainable digital culture.

2.3. CONTEMPORARY PEDAGOGICAL MODELS: FACE-TO-FACE, HYBRID, ONLINE, AND COLLABORATIVE

The emergence of DICTs has driven a reconfiguration of contemporary pedagogical models. Traditional face-to-face teaching has been complemented by hybrid and collaborative approaches, which increase autonomy and interaction between subjects. Moran[20] argues that *“hybrid teaching combines the best of face-to-face teaching with the interactive and flexible potential of digital technology, bringing school closer to students’ everyday lives”*.

In the same vein, Kenski[21] points out that the pedagogical use of technologies *"changes the pace of information and learning, requiring teachers to develop new skills in managing time and educational space"*. Online and collaborative models enhance networking and peer learning, providing alternatives for continuous teacher training.

Unesco[22] emphasizes that the adoption of innovative pedagogical models must consider three principles: equity of access, social relevance, and pedagogical quality. For Imbernón[23], collaborative learning with the use of technologies *“requires a new teaching role — that of facilitator of the collective construction of knowledge”*.

At universities such as UFRGS, there is a growing adoption of hybrid teaching through the UFRGS Virtual platform, while at Babes-Bolyai University, *blended learning* and *e-learning* models prevail, institutionalized in curricula and digital certification programs. This difference expresses the degree of consolidation of digital policies in each context, but also reflects the underlying pedagogical concepts: in Brazil, teaching leadership still depends

[20]José Manuel Moran, *The education we want: new challenges and how to get there*, Campinas: Papirus, 2015, p. 41.

[21]Vani Moreira Kenski, *Education and technologies: the new pace of information*, Campinas: Papirus, 2012, p. 22.

[22]Unesco, *Guidelines for policies on mobile learning*, Paris: Unesco, 2019.

[23]Francisco Imbernón, *Teacher and professional training: training for change and uncertainty*, São Paulo: Cortez, 2011.

heavily on individual initiative; in Romania, it is integrated into collective institutional policies and guidelines.

2.4. INTERNATIONALIZATION OF EDUCATION: GLOBAL CONTEXTS AND INFLUENCES

The internationalization of higher education has intensified in recent decades, redefining the paradigms of quality, mobility, and academic cooperation. However, this process is not neutral: it is permeated by power relations and inequalities between the Global North and South. According to Santos[24], *“the globalization of knowledge tends to reproduce epistemic coloniality, in which peripheral knowledge is subordinated to dominant models of rationality”*.

From a European perspective, the Bologna Process and **Erasmus+**[25] have driven curriculum standardization and the creation of common assessment systems, as is the case in Romania. However, this standardization also creates tensions with local contexts. As Bhatt, Badwan and Madiba[26] argue, *“the quest for global recognition can distance universities from their cultural and linguistic realities”*.

In the Latin American and BRICS context, internationalization is still marked by structural asymmetries. According to Nóvoa[27], *“international cooperation should not mean submission to external models, but rather the strengthening of horizontal networks of knowledge production”*. Thus, rethinking the internationalization of teacher training implies building an intercultural dialogue capable of promoting fair exchanges between educational systems, respecting epistemic and pedagogical diversity.

The comparison between UFRGS and BBU, in this sense, allows us to understand internationalization as a multifaceted phenomenon: while BBU is integrated into a European network of coordinated digital policies, UFRGS seeks autonomous paths, but faces restrictions in terms of funding and strategic

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[24]Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Beyond abyssal thinking: from global lines to an ecology of knowledge*, São Paulo: Cortez, 2010, p. 43.
[25]Erasmus+, *Projects and policies*, European Union [https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu], 01 November 2025.
[26]Ibrar Bhatt; Khawla Badwan; Mbulugeni Madiba, “Critical perspectives on teaching in the multilingual university” in *Teaching in Higher Education*, nº 4, 2022.
[27]António Nóvoa, *Teachers and their training*, Lisbon: Dom Quixote, 2009, p. 21.

alignment. This contrast highlights the need for solidarity-based and critical internationalization, based on principles of South-South cooperation and the valorization of local epistemologies.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative approach, with a comparative design, based on the principles of comparative education as proposed by Brooke[28]. The choice of this approach is justified by the intention to understand institutional practices and public policies in different contexts — Brazil and Romania — through a critical and contextualized analysis.

Three main techniques were used for data collection and analysis:

a) documentary analysis, focusing on institutional development plans, curriculum guidelines, national legislation, and digital frameworks;

b) institutional statistical survey, involving data on teacher training courses, enrollment, technological resources, and continuous education;

c) critical interpretive analysis, guided by the articulation between empirical data and the theoretical references adopted.

The sources consulted included official documents from UFRGS and *Babes-Bolyai University,* educational legislation from Brazil and Romania, public educational data platforms, as well as academic publications and institutional reports. The criteria for comparison between institutions were defined based on five axes:

1. educational objectives;
2. teaching methodologies;
3. available technological resources;
4. continuous education for teachers;
5. assessment models related to digital skills.

This analytical matrix allowed us to identify significant convergences and divergences between the two contexts, as well as to understand the relationships between public policy, institutional culture, and pedagogical practice in teacher training with DICTs. Below we provide the tables with the axes of comparison and the results.

[28]N. Brooke, “O futuro das políticas de responsabilização educacional no Brasil” em *Cadernos de Pesquisa*, nº 128, 2006.

Table 1. Axis of Comparison

N°	Axis	What was compared?
1	**Educational Objectives**	Curricular focus: digital skills, innovation, pedagogical criticism
2	**Teaching Methodologies**	Models adopted: in-person, hybrid, online, collaborative
3	**Technological Resources**	Platforms, OERs, infrastructure, access
4	**Continuing Education**	Institutional offerings, certifications, and regular teacher training programs
5	**Teacher Evaluation**	Criteria used: performance, digital innovation, competency frameworks

Table 2. Initial Comparative Table

Criterion	**UFRGS (Brazil)**	**Babes-Bolyai University (Romania)**
Historical context	Teacher training marked by national public policies (PNE, LDB) with a focus on digital inclusion since the 2000s	Post-Communist legacy, integration with European Union guidelines, focus on educational modernization since 2007
Public policies	CAPES guidelines, MEC, National Common Base for Initial Training of Basic Education Teachers (BNC-Formação)	Influence of EU educational policies (Bologna Process, Erasmus+, DigCompEdu), national guidelines
Pedagogical models	Hybrid, face-to-face with technological mediation (AVA Moodle, REUNI Digital)	Strong presence of digital platforms, blended learning, use of international LMS; moodle is also presently used
Technological infrastructure	Varying availability between courses; advances in laboratories and digital libraries	Strong investment in educational technology, digitized campus
Use of DICTs in initial training	Present in specific subjects and extension/innovation projects	Integrated into the pedagogical curriculum with a focus on digital teaching skills
Continuous education	Projects such as UFRGS Virtual, workshops, and courses for active teachers	Ongoing professional development programs with digital certifications

Criterion	UFRGS (Brazil)	Babes-Bolyai University (Romania)
Theoretical references adopted	Freire, Moran, Kenski, Valente, Nóvoa	Vygotsky, Laurillard, European Frameworks (DigCompEdu)
Challenges faced	Unequal access, teacher resistance, unstable policies	Cultural adaptation, funding, technological overload
Good practices identified	Interdisciplinary projects, production of digital educational objects, encouragement of innovation	Cross-disciplinary digital training, use of open resources, integration with European networks, EUTOPIA and GUILD memberships

This overview is expanded and detailed in the analysis sections of the article.

4. INSTITUTIONAL AND HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS), founded in 1934 and federalized in 1950, is one of the most traditional higher education institutions in Brazil. Nationally recognized for its academic excellence and leadership in inclusion and innovation policies, UFRGS is heavily involved in the initial and continuous teachers' training, especially through its undergraduate, extension, and graduate programs in the field of education. The university is part of the Brazilian public policy framework for teacher training and is governed by legal milestones such as the Law of Guidelines and Bases for National Education (LDB)[29], **the** National Education Plan (PNE)[30], and, more recently, the National Common Base for Initial Training of Basic Education Teachers (BNC-Formação)[31]. These documents guide the curriculum organization, supervised internships, and the incorporation of Digital Information and Communication Technologies (DICTs) into the training

[29]Brazil, *Law n° 9,394, of December 20, 1996*, Establishes the guidelines and foundations of national education, Brasília, 1996.

[30]Brazil, *National Education Plan (PNE) 2014-2024: Law n° 13,005, of June 25, 2014*, Brasília: MEC, 2014.

[31]Brazil, *National Common Base for Initial Training of Basic Education Teachers (BNC-Formação)*, Brasília: MEC, 2019.

process. UFRGS also stands out for its virtual learning environment[32], which promotes technological mediation in face-to-face teaching and offers hybrid and distance learning courses.

Babes-Bolyai University (BBU)[33], located in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, is one of the largest and most influential universities in Central and Eastern Europe. Its origins date back to the 16th century, but its current configuration was consolidated in 1959 as a result of the merger between the Romanian and Hungarian universities. The multicultural profile of the university was reinforced since 1990, with full studies in Romanian, Hungarian, German and as well English, reflecting the multiculturalism of the Transylvanian region. With Romania's accession to the European Union in 2007, BBU aligned its educational policies with the EU guidelines, especially in the field of teacher training. Noteworthy in this process are the Bologna Process[34], which established the harmonization of European higher education, and the guiding documents of *the European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators (DigCompEdu)*, which offer guidelines for the development of digital teaching skills. BBU develops initial training programs structured in three cycles (bachelor's, master's, and doctorate) and invests heavily in continuous education through digital certifications and credentialing, academic mobility, and transnational projects such as the ones funded by the **Erasmus+**[35] program**.** Institutionally, it adopts a pedagogical approach that values teacher autonomy, curricular innovation, and the integration of educational technologies into university teaching.

Therefore, although inserted in different geopolitical contexts, both UFRGS and BBU show structured efforts to improve teacher training, anchored in national public policies and international educational modernization frameworks. The analysis of their institutional and normative histories allows us to understand the bases on which technology-mediated training practices are built in each institutional framework.

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[32]UFRGS, *UFRGS virtual – virtual learning environment* [https://www.ufrgs.br/ufrgsvirtual/], 01 November 2025.

[33]Babes-Bolyai University, *Institutional presentation and history*, Cluj-Napoca: UBB, 2022 [https://www.ubbcluj.ro/en/despre/prezentare/], 01 November 2025.

[34]European Commission, *The european higher education area in 2020: Bologna Process Implementation Report*, Brussels: Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, 2020.

[35]Erasmus+, *Projects and policies*, European Union [https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu], 01 November 2025.

4.1. PEDAGOGICAL MODELS AND TRAINING PRACTICES WITH DICTS

The incorporation of DICTs into teacher training has promoted significant changes in the pedagogical models adopted by higher education institutions, while revealing tensions between innovation and traditional structures. At the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS), a hybrid approach predominates, combining face-to-face and technology-mediated activities. The use of the **UFRGS Virtual** environment**,** based on platforms such as Moodle, allows the usage of forums, assignment submission, and the development of digital educational objects, increasing student autonomy and enabling collaborative learning experiences.

This practice alignes with what Moran[36] defines as an *"interactive hybrid model"* in which the use of technology does not replace the teacher but expands the possibilities for teaching, making it more personalized and student-centered. According to the author, *"technologies can transform teaching when incorporated reflectively and articulated with clear pedagogical objectives"*[37]. At UFRGS, however, the effectiveness of this integration thdepends on the engagement of teachers, who still demonstrate varying levels of familiarity and mastery of digital tools, which corroborates the analysis of Valente[38], who states that *"the use of technologies in teacher training should not be separate content, but rather linked to the teacher's concrete pedagogical practice, promoting real changes in their performance"*. At Babes-Bolyai University (BBU), the scenario reveals a more structured and systemic level of integration of DICTs, driven by institutional policies aligned with the European Union guidelines, such as the DigCompEdu Framework. Initial teacher training programs adopt *blended learning* as a standard model, with courses taught on digital platforms and asynchronous activities that favor the development of specific digital skills. In

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[36]José Manuel Moran, *The education we want: new challenges and how to get there*, Campinas: Papirus, 2015.

[37]José Manuel Moran, *The education we want: new challenges and how to get there*, Campinas: Papirus, 2015, p. 42.

[38]José Armando Valente, "The use of technologies in teacher training: challenges and perspectives" in Nelson De Luca Pretto; Elizabeth Macedo (eds.), *Technology and teacher training: rethinking paths*, Salvador: Edufba, 2006, p. 27.

addition, the university invests in digital certifications for teachers, regular workshops on pedagogical innovation, and incentives for the use of open educational resources (OER), which brings training practices closer to international trends in digital education.

As Laurillard[39] points out**,** an effective pedagogical model for the use of digital technologies must be based on processes of dialogue, feedback, and personalization of learning. At BBU, this model has institutional support, but it also faces challenges related to teacher overload and resistance from more traditional faculty members, who still value expository and transmissive practices. In addition, even in a European context, Selwyn[40] warns against the illusion of technological neutrality, noting that the use of DICTs is conditioned by political, cultural, and economic factors, which also applies to Romania.

Among the innovative practices common to both institutions, the following stand out: the use of virtual learning platforms, the production of digital educational objects, the encouragement of faculty authorship in digital contexts, and the valorization of active and collaborative learning. However, potential limitations could range from structural issues such as connectivity for all the actors of the educational process, technical training, and infrastructure to more complex pedagogical aspects such as resistance to paradigm shifts and the challenge of integrating technologies into the curriculum in a critical and meaningful way.

Thus, both UFRGS and BBU make efforts to reformulate their pedagogical models in light of digital technologies integration, but they still face the challenge of consolidating teacher training that goes beyond the instrumental use of DICTs, effectively promoting teacher leadership, critical autonomy, and didactic innovation in the contemporary context.

We further evaluate the studied aspects of UFRGS and BBU on a scale 1- (very weak) to 5 (very strong).

[39]Diana Laurillard, *Teaching as a Design Science: building pedagogical patterns for learning and technology*, Routledge, 2012.

[40]Neil Selwyn, *Education and technology: key issues and debates*, London: Bloomsbury, 2011.

Table 3. Comparison of TDIC Integration in Teacher Training: UFRGS vs. BBU

Criterion	**UFRGS**	**BBU**
Structured virtual platforms	4	5
Continuing education focused on DICTs	3	5
Use of OERs	2	4
Digital teacher certifications	2	5
Institutionalized hybrid model	3	5
Interdisciplinary projects with DICTs	4	3
Encouraging faculty authorship	3	4
Alignment with international policies	3	5

Key: Scale from 1 (very weak) to 5 (very strong)

Table 4. Innovative Practices with DICTs – UFRGS x BBU

Innovative Practice	**UFRGS**	**BBU**
Use of institutional Virtual Learning Environments VLE (Moodle)	√	√
Production of digital educational objects	√	√
Internal digital certifications	❌	√
Regular continuing education focused on DICTs	√ Partial	√
Projects with Open Educational Resources	√ Initial	√ Consolidated
Participation in international networks	√ Occasional	√ Structured
Use of frameworks such as DigCompEdu	❌	√

Estimated data based on document review and literature

✔ = Implemented

⚠️ = Partial/in development

❌ = Not implemented or not a priority

4.2. ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC EDUCATION POLICIES

Technology-mediated teacher training is deeply linked to the public education policies that guide higher education institutions. In Brazil and the European Union, these guidelines take different forms, revealing not only different conceptions of the role of Digital Information and Communication Technologies (DICTs), but also specific priorities regarding teacher professionalization.

In the Brazilian context, public policies for teacher training have undergone significant revisions in recent decades. One of the most recent milestones is the National Common Base for Initial Training of Basic Education Teachers (BNC-Formação), established by Resolution CNE/CP n° 2/2019, which defines essential competencies, content, and methodologies for teacher training courses. Although the document recognizes the importance of DICTs, its approach is often generic and focused on instrumental aspects, leaving room for institutional interpretations. As Imbernón[41] observes**,** overly prescriptive training policies tend to disregard the diversity of educational contexts and the multiple dimensions of the teaching process. In addition, the implementation of BNC-Training has been criticized for its verticalization and the risk of standardizing pedagogical practice[42].

As a federal public university, UFRGS follows the guidelines of BNC-Formação, the National Education Plan (PNE)[43], and CAPES programs, but also maintains a certain institutional autonomy to propose training projects that expand the use of DICTs, such as the UFRGS Virtual program and extension initiatives focused on pedagogical innovation. However, the absence of a robust and coordinated national policy for digital teacher training has led to uneven progress between courses and departments, as well as hindering the consolidation of an institutional digital culture.

In contrast, the European Union has adopted a more systematic and forward-looking approach. One of the main contemporary references is DigCompEdu – *Digital Competence Framework for Educators*, published by the European Commission[44], which defines six areas of digital teaching skills and progressive levels of proficiency. This document serves as the basis for the development of national policies on training and continuous performance evaluation, and professional development of teachers in the member countries, thus in Romania as well, being therefore applied at Babes-Bolyai University (BBU).

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[41]Francisco Imbernón, *Teacher and professional training: training for change and uncertainty*, São Paulo: Cortez, 2011.

[42]António Nóvoa, “Firmar a posição como professor, afirmar a profissão docente” em *Cadernos de Pesquisa*, nº 166, 2017.

[43]Brazil, *National Education Plan (PNE) 2014-2024: Law n° 13,005, of June 25, 2014*, Brasília: MEC, 2014.

[44]European Commission, *DigCompEdu: the digital competence framework for educators*, Luxembourg: EU Publications, 2017.

DigCompEdu is used as a tool for planning and monitoring teachers' digital competencies, directly influencing the curriculum design of undergraduate courses and institutional digital certification programs.

Another important element is BBU's alignment with the Bologna Process, which structures European higher education into three cycles (bachelor's, master's, and doctorate) and promotes internationalization, academic mobility, and quality assurance. These guidelines favor a perspective of continuous teacher training integrated with the demands of the 21st century, in which the use of technologies is not treated as an accessory, but as a structuring component of pedagogical action.

A comparison between the two contexts reveals that, while Brazil is still moving towards a more effective integration of DICTs into public teacher training policies, with particular advances and isolated efforts, the European Union operates with more consolidated frameworks, clear digital goals, and strong coordination between levels of governance. As Selwyn[45] states, *"educational policies reflect power struggles over what should be taught, how, and by whom"* and, in this sense, European digital policies express a training project that is more integrated with the dynamics of the knowledge-based society.

However, it is necessary to recognize that the mere existence of legal frameworks and digital frameworks does not, in itself, guarantee the effectiveness of educational practices. In both Brazil and Romania, challenges persist related to infrastructure, poor or unequal initial training in technology, teacher resistance, and the discontinuity of educational policies in scenarios of political changes. The comparative analysis, therefore, points to the need for public policies that are not only prescriptive but also formative, reflective, and sensitive to the complexity of teaching work.

Table 5. Expanded Comparative Table – Public Policies for Teacher Training with DICTs

Axis of Analysis	**Brazil (UFRGS)**	**European Union (BBU/Romania)**
National Legal Framework	LDB (Law n° 9,394/1996); PNE (2014-2024); BNC-Training (2019)	Romanian National Education Law (2011); European processes (Bologna, Lisbon, etc.)
Guidelines for Digital Competence in Teaching	Indirect and generic references in national policies	DigCompEdu (2017) with 6 areas of competence and progressive levels

[45] Neil Selwyn, *Education and technology: key issues and debates*, London: Bloomsbury, 2011.

Axis of Analysis	Brazil (UFRGS)	European Union (BBU/Romania)
Teacher Training Model	Predominance of face-to-face learning with hybrid institutional experiences (e.g., UFRGS Virtual)	Blended learning model formalized and structured by EU guidelines
Continuing Teacher Education	Specific actions via extension and projects; little national coordination	Continuous digital certifications; national policies aligned with DigCompEdu
Integration between Policy and Practice	University autonomy; lack of central coordination	Multilevel coordination: EU → Ministry → University
Internationalization and Cooperation	Occasional participation in international projects	Active participation in networks (Erasmus+, ENQA, EUA) with faculty mobility and structured exchanges
Promotion of innovation with DICTs	Institutional projects (e.g., Open Educational Resources, workshops, UFRGS Virtual)	Institutional culture focused on digital pedagogical innovation with continuous support
Axis of Analysis	**Brazil (UFRGS)**	**European Union (BBU/Romania)**
Funding for training with DICTs	Variable and unstable resources, dependent on specific calls for proposals or policies	Systematic funding via European programs (Erasmus+, Horizon Europe, structural funds)
Teacher evaluation with a digital focus	Evaluation based on traditional criteria; few digital metrics	Assessment based on digital skills and pedagogical innovation (tools like SELFIE)
Institutional impact of policies	Internal variations between courses; relevant but scattered initiatives	Standardization of practices, monitoring of results, and digital goals
Main challenges	Political discontinuity, digital inequality, resistance to change	Bureaucratization of reports, adaptation to local diversity, balance between innovation and standardization

4.3 INDICATORS AND QUANTITATIVE DATA ON DICTS IN TEACHER TRAINING

A quantitative analysis of institutional indicators available on the institutional websites provides insights into the extent to which Digital Information and Communication Technologies (DICTs) are implemented in teacher training, as well as their relationship with the curriculum, technological infrastructure, and the scope of training policies. Below are comparative data between the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS) in Brazil and Babes-Bolyai University (BBU) in Romania.

Table 6. Number of Courses and Enrollments in Teacher Training

Indicator	**UFRGS (2023)**	**BBU (2023)**
On-site Bachelor's Degree Courses	17 courses	23 courses
Enrollments in teacher training courses	5,450 (undergraduate + postgraduate)[1]	7,800 (undergraduate + postgraduate)[2]
Continuing education courses focused on DICTs	12 courses per year (extension and distance learning)[3]	+40 certified courses annually[4]
Stricto sensu graduate programs in the area of Education/Technology	3 programs (PPGEDU, PPGIE, PPGEP)	5 master's/doctoral programs in digital and pedagogical education

Source: https://www.ufrgs.br/site/ , https://www.ubbcluj.ro/ro/

Table 7. Digital Platforms Used

Platform/Resource	**UFRGS**	**BBU**
Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)	Moodle (UFRGS Virtual)	Moodle, MS Teams
Digital Library	BDTD + LUME Repository	Central Library + eLIBRARY.ro
Synchronous Tools	Webconf, Zoom, MConf	Microsoft Teams, Zoom
Production of OER (Open Educational Resources)	Yes, via isolated projects	Yes, with institutional guidelines and own repositories
Digital certification platforms	Not institutionalized	Yes – internal platform based on DigCompEdu

Table 8. Technology and Infrastructure Indicators

Indicator	**UFRGS**	**BBU**
Educational computer labs	7 in operation in education/teaching degree programs	+15 digital teaching centers on various campuses
Teachers with specific training in DICTs	39%	68%

Indicator	UFRGS	BBU
Average annual investment in digital infrastructure (last 3 years)	R$ 3.2 million (estimated)[7]	€1.5 million[8]
Access to devices for students (institutional loan)	Yes, but limited to projects and public notices	Yes, with permanent loan programs for low-income students

Sources and Notes
1. Data extracted from the UFRGS Institutional Development Plan (2022-2026)[46]
2. BBU Annual Report (2023)
3. Data from PROREXT and SEAD/UFRGS
4. BBU Continuing Professional Development Program (institutional website)
5. Internal PPGIE/UFRGS survey (2022)
6. BBU institutional survey based on DigCompEdu Selfie (2023)
7. Estimate based on PROPLAN/UFRGS data (2021-2023)
8. Data from the Erasmus+ Report and EU funding for BBU

Although both universities have evolved in the adoption of digital platforms and teacher training focused on DICTs, the results reveal significant differences in capillarity**,** institutional investment, **and** systemic integration. BBU stands out for the number of courses with digital certification, the consistency of platforms, and alignment with European policies, while UFRGS, despite being a national reference, still depends on decentralized initiatives and faces challenges in funding and faculty adherence. Based on the same data sources, we provide the comparison tables below:

Table 9. Teacher Training – Courses and Enrollments

Indicator	BR UFRGS	EU BBU
Bachelor's Degree Courses	17	23
Enrollments in Teacher Training	5,450	7,800
Continuing education courses focused on DICTs	12/year	40+/year

[46]Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, *Institutional Development Plan (PDI) 2022-2026*, Porto Alegre: UFRGS, 2021 [https://www.ufrgs.br/proplan/pdi/], 01 November 2025.

Table 10. Platforms and Technologies

Resource	**UFRGS**	**BBU**
AVA Platform	Moodle (UFRGS Virtual)	Moodle, MS Teams
Digital Teaching Certification	❌ Absent	✅ Institutionalized
Production of REAs	✅ Occasional	✅ Systematized
Synchronous tools	Webconf, MConf, Zoom	Teams, Zoom

Table 11. Infrastructure and Investment

Indicator	**UFRGS**	**BBU**
Digital Laboratories	7	15
Teachers trained in DICTs	39	68
Annual digital investment	R$ 3.2 million	€1.5 million
Device loan program	Partial	Permanent

Icon legend (for visual design):
✅ Established practice ; ❌ Absent ; ⚠️ Under development

4.4. CONVERGENCES AND DIVERGENCES: UFRGS (BRAZIL) AND BABES-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY (ROMANIA)

A comparative analysis between the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS) in Brazil and Babes-Bolyai University (BBU) in Romania reveals both significant similarities and differences in terms of teacher training mediated by DICTs. These institutions operate under different legal frameworks and respond to different political and economic contexts, but they share the common challenge of preparing teachers to work in a complex and constantly changing digital educational reality.

Below we providea comparative table with key elements that highlight these convergences and divergences, based on institutional documents, curriculum guidelines, and observed practices.

Table 12. Comparison – Convergences and Divergences

Element	**UFRGS (Brazil)**	**BBU (Romania)**	**Comparison**
Educational Objectives	Develop teaching and pedagogical skills with specific technological mediation	Develop integrated and certified digital teaching skills	✅ Partial convergence

Element	UFRGS (Brazil)	BBU (Romania)	Comparison
Teaching Methodologies	Face-to-face classes with increasing use of AVA and hybrid activities	Blended learning model with systematic curriculum integration	☐ Moderate divergence
Technological Resources	Moodle (UFRGS Virtual), Webconf, educational computer labs	Moodle, Teams, institutional Open Educational Resources, curated digital repositories	✅ Convergence
Continuing Education	Extension projects and individual courses on DICTs; no unified national policy	Regular digital certifications based on DigCompEdu	❌ Significant divergence
Teacher Evaluation	Traditional criteria: performance evaluation with a pedagogical focus	Assessment based on digital skills and innovation (SELFIE, DigCompEdu)	❌ Significant divergence
Production of OER	Encouraged by specific projects, but without a formal policy	Institutionalized, with its own platform and encouragement of authorship	☐ Moderate divergence
Technological Infrastructure	Expanding, with inequalities between units	Extensive, standardized, funded by EU programs	❌ Significant divergence
Alignment with external policies	Follows national guidelines (BNC-Training, PNE); little international coordination	Aligned with DigCompEdu and the Bologna Process, with clear digital goals	❌ Significant divergence
Teaching autonomy	High, but with no unified digital policy	High, within a well-defined digital regulatory framework	✅ Convergence
Digital institutional culture	Consolidating, with resistance from part of the teaching staff	Strongly established, with incentives for innovation and continuous training	❌ Significant divergence

We can observe that the convergences are concentrated on the used technological resources and on the teachers' autonomy for innovation, although this autonomy occurs in very different normative contexts. The divergences, on the other hand, are accentuated in the continuous education policies, teacher evaluation practices, alignment with digital frameworks, and the degree of institutionalization of digital culture.

While UFRGS advances through decentralized projects, with an increased use of virtual environments and production of educational components, it still lacks a structured national model of digital teaching competencies. In contrast, BBU stands out for articulating its training practices with the goals of the European Union, operating with greater cohesion between policy, curriculum, and evaluation.

These findings reinforce the importance of considering not only the available resources but also the pedagogical models and policies that support the integration of DICTs, which is the critical issue for the consolidation of innovative and effective teacher training.

4.5. EXPANDED ANALYSIS: DICTS IN TEACHER TRAINING IN THE CONTEXT OF THE GLOBAL SOUTH AND THE BRICS

The analysis of quantitative and qualitative data on teacher training using Digital Information and Communication Technologies (DICTs), based on the experiences of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS) and Babes-Bolyai University (BBU), allows us to establish connections with broader debates on global educational asymmetries, especially between countries in the Global North and Global South**,** as well as between geopolitical blocks such as **BRICS** (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) and the **European Union**.

Located in the Global South, UFRGS represents the advances and limitations of Brazilian public universities in contexts of budgetary constraints, political instability, and structural socioeconomic inequalities. Even though it is an institution of academic excellence, UFRGS faces the same challenges as other BRICS universities: irregular funding, dependence on public notices, lack of consolidated digital public policies, and poor coordination between national guidelines and pedagogical innovation with DICTs.

This reality alignes with the analysis of Altbach and Marginson[47], according to which universities in the Global South have technical and scientific capacity but operate under asymmetrical conditions of funding, infrastructure,

[47]Philip G. Altbach; Simon Marginson, “The global asymmetries of higher education” in *International Higher Education*, 2014.

and normative influence, which limit their strategic performance in facing the demands of the knowledge-based society. The lack of a common reference framework for digital skills, such as the European DigCompEdu, accentuates these inequalities, hindering international mobility, the recognition of knowledge, and full integration into the geopolitics of knowledge.

Within the BRICS, countries such as China and India have made significant progress in digital education policies in recent years, especially through massive platforms (MOOCs, educational AI, large-scale e-learning), often with strong support from the state and large corporations. Brazil, on the other hand, has made localized technical and institutional advances, such as the ones observed at UFRGS, but lacks continuity and national coordination. At this point, a paradoxical situation becomes obvious: even with high human and academic potential, digital training actions remain fragmented and vulnerable to political fluctuations, as Diniz-Pereira[48] already warned when discussing the structural crisis of teacher training in Brazil.

In contrast, Babes-Bolyai University, located in Romania, is part of an educational system marked by the alignment with European digital integration goals, receiving continuous funding from the European Union and operating within transnational frameworks such as DigCompEdu, the Bologna Process and the ERASMUS+ program. This gives the institution normative stability, incentives for innovation, and standardization in teacher evaluation, elements that are absent or fragile in BRICS universities.

This comparison reinforces a dynamic of structural dependence in the Global South, in which Latin American, African, and some Asian countries not only import pedagogical and technological models from the North, but do so without necessarily adapting them to their socio-educational realities. As Santos[49] argues, there is a process of "*coloniality of knowledge*" that also manifests itself in educational technologies, when digital training policies are adopted without critical contextualization.

Therefore, comparative data show that the absence of a national framework for digital teaching skills in Brazil, the lack of stable funding, and the fragmentation of institutional practices limit the strategic advancement of universities in the Global South**,** even in the framework of relevant initiatives

[48]Júlio Diniz-Pereira, "Teacher training in Brazil: limits and possibilities" in *Revista Brasileira de Educação,* n° 68, 2017.

[49]Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Beyond abyssal thinking: from global lines to an ecology of knowledge*, São Paulo: Cortez, 2010.

such as the ones developed by UFRGS. In contrast, universities in the Global North — including the ones in Eastern Europe aligned with the EU — operate with more integrated, predictable, and assessable policies, leading to a global scenario of asymmetries in teacher training for the digital age.

Overcoming this situation requires not only technical investment on the part of the BRICS countries and the Global South, but above all an autonomous political-pedagogical project that recognizes technologies as a field of cultural, epistemological, and educational advancement. The valorization of local references, the development of proprietary frameworks, the strengthening of regional networks, and sustainable public financing are strategic elements for reversing this logic of digital and curricular subordination.

Table 13. Comparison – Teacher Training Indicators with DICTs: BRICS vs. Global North (EU)

Indicator	**Brazil / BRICS**	**Global North (EU)**
National policy on digital teaching skills	❌ Absent or incipient (except China and India)	✅ Consolidated (e.g., **DigCompEdu**, **TET-SAT**, **SELFIE**)
Structured and continuous funding	☐ Unstable and dependent on calls for proposals/political cycles	✅ Permanent programs (Erasmus+, Horizon Europe, national and regional education funds)
Continuous education for teachers with DICTs	☐ Predominantly isolated actions, workshops, and institutional projects	✅ National policy with **mandatory and progressive digital certifications**
Digital infrastructure in universities	☐ Expanding, with regional and institutional inequalities	✅ High coverage, institutional standardization and permanent technical support
Teacher evaluation with a digital focus	❌ Based on traditional pedagogical criteria; rarely considers digital skills	✅ Integrated with digital frameworks, with systems such as DigCompEdu and regular self-assessments
Curricular references on DICTs	☐ Present across the board, but not systematized (e.g., BNC-Training mentions DICTs occasionally)	✅ DICTs structured in matrices of skills, content, and innovative methodologies
Production and use of Open Educational Resources OER	☐ Encouraged occasionally; no consolidated national repositories	✅ Institutional OER policies, with dedicated funding and platforms

Indicator	**Brazil / BRICS**	**Global North (EU)**
University autonomy for innovation	✅ High, but without coordination with coherent national public policies	✅ High, with strong alignment between public policies, educational goals, and pedagogical autonomy
Participation in international networks	☐ Occasional, via bilateral projects or specific calls for proposals	✅ Extensive and structured via mobility and transnational cooperation programs (Erasmus+, USA, ENQA)

Visual legend for use in infographics

Symbol	**Meaning**
✅	Consolidated practice
☐	Under development / partially present
❌	Absent or weak

4.6. INTERNATIONALIZATION OF EDUCATION AND DIGITAL TEACHING CULTURE

The internationalization of higher education has expanded through strategies that do not necessarily involve physical mobility. In this context, the concept of internationalization at home (IaH) stands out, which, according to Stallivieri[50], "*seeks to ensure that all students, including those who do not participate in exchange programs, have access to internationalization experiences in their institutional environment*". In this scenario, DICTs play a fundamental role in enabling transnational interactions, multilingual resources, and intercultural pedagogical practices.

The author also warns of the importance that this internationalization "*should not be restricted to symbolic or showcase activities*", but rather be integrated into the curriculum, the institutional pedagogical plan, and teacher training policies[51]. By promoting the critical and contextualized use of DICTs in teacher training, institutions contribute to a more equitable, democratic, and inclusive internationalization.

[50]L. Stallivieri, "Internationalization at home: challenges and possibilities for Brazilian HEIs" in Maria Beatriz Lima; Carla Regina Maranhão (eds.), *Internationalization of higher education: challenges and perspectives*, Belo Horizonte: UFMG, 2017, p. 51.
[51]L. Stallivieri, "Internationalization at home: challenges and possibilities for Brazilian HEIs" in Maria Beatriz Lima; Carla Regina Maranhão (eds.), *Internationalization of higher education: challenges and perspectives*, Belo Horizonte: UFMG, 2017, p. 54.

DICTs play a central role in this process by enabling synchronous and asynchronous activities, collaborations between institutions, access to multilingual learning objects, and participation in transnational research and teacher training networks. According to Altbach and Knight[52], *"the internationalization of higher education is shaped by historical, cultural, and economic asymmetries, in which countries in the Global South often assume subordinate roles in networks of knowledge production and circulation"*.

These authors warn that, although internationalization brings benefits, it can deepen inequalities between academic centers and peripheries if it is not accompanied by policies of equity and horizontal cooperation.

From the perspective of the Global South, digital teaching culture should be understood as a field of dispute between hegemonic training models — often centered in the Global North — and alternative, more contextualized, and pluralistic proposals. As Diniz-Pereira[53] points out, *"teacher training needs to incorporate the epistemologies of the South, valuing local knowledge and transformative educational practices that dialogue with the historical and cultural realities of educators"*. This critical view proposes a digital teaching culture that is not limited to technological adaptation, but promotes the intellectual and pedagogical autonomy of teachers.

In the European context, Romanian authors have contributed to the understanding of the effects of digitization on teacher training and its relationship with the internationalization of education. Amid the rapid changes brought about by the pandemic, Romanian universities were challenged to develop digital training practices for teachers very rapidly. According to Vlad and Gheorghe[54], *"the success of digitization in higher education depended directly on the implementation of continuous teacher training programs adapted to the pedagogical challenges of virtual platforms"*. The good practices identified in this process reveal possible paths for more structured policies for a digital teaching culture.

[52]Philip G. Altbach; Jane Knight, "The internationalization of higher education: motivations and realities" in *Journal of Studies in International Education*, n° 3-4, 2007, p. 290.
[53]Júlio Diniz-Pereira, "Teacher training in Brazil: limits and possibilities" in *Revista Brasileira de Educação*, n° 68, 2017, p. 84.
[54]S. Vlad; A. Gheorghe, "Digital transformation of Romanian higher education during the COVID-19 pandemic: the role of teacher training" in *Postmodern Openings*, n° 3, 2020, p. 32.

Babes-Bolyai University has invested in digital teacher training strategies aligned with European guidelines, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic.

As Dumitraşcu and Ciornei[55] analyze, *"Romanian universities faced the challenge of quickly adapting to digital pedagogical practices, revealing a gap in teacher training focused on the critical and creative use of technologies"*. These authors highlight the need to institutionalize digital culture policies for teachers in Romanian higher education. The comparison between UFRGS and BBU, therefore, highlights different stages and strategies of digital internationalization. While UFRGS has advanced in internationalization through specific projects and the use of platforms such as UFRGS Virtual, its performance still lacks a clear institutional policy for teacher training focused on internationalization at home. On the other hand, BBU operates within a framework of structured European cooperation, with stable funding, standardized frameworks, and strategic digital training actions with transnational reach.

Within this scenario, it is essential to rethink the role of DICTs in building critical and non-hegemonic internationalization, especially in countries of the Global South. This requires, as Jordão and Martines[56] point out**,** the strengthening of an internationalized curricula based on cognitive justice and respect for linguistic and cultural diversity. Far from being mere means, DICTs become political and pedagogical instruments for reinventing internationalization, with the potential to connect knowledge, territories, and plural teaching experiences.

5. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The comparative analysis between the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS) in Brazil and Babes-Bolyai University (BBU) in Romania identified specific convergences and significant divergences in the use of Digital Information and Communication Technologies (DICTs) in teacher training. Both institutions recognize the strategic importance of digital technologies for

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[55]L. Dumitraşcu; S. Ciornei, "Digital pedagogy in romanian universities: adaptation and challenges" in *Journal of Educational Sciences & Psychology*, n° 2, 2022, p. 40.

[56]Clarissa M. Jordão; Juliana Z. Martines, "Between the quotation marks of borders: internationalization as an agonistic practice" in Cláudia Hilsdorf Rocha *et al.* (eds.), *Perspectives on internationalization and political crisis scenarios: brazilian experiences in focus*, Campinas: Pontes, 2021.

contemporary education, but operate under different political, economic, and regulatory realities.

While BBU benefits from the educational policies integrated into the European Union space, such as DigCompEdu, with stable infrastructure, continuous funding, and systematized evaluation mechanisms, UFRGS — despite its academic excellence — operates in a context of political instability, discontinuity of public policies, and fragmentation in digital teacher training. The absence of a national framework for digital skills in Brazil compromises the coherence between curriculum, assessment, and professional development, requiring universities to assume, autonomously and in isolation, responsibilities that should be shared with the state.

This asymmetry reflects a geopolitical division in the field of education, where countries in **the Global North** consolidate digital policies with strong supranational coordination, while countries in **the Global South**, including those in the **BRICS** block, face structural challenges in integrating technologies into teacher training in a critical and sustainable manner. The analysis indicates that Brazil, like other BRICS countries, has relevant technical capacity and institutional experience, but still lacks stable public policies, continuous funding, and regulatory frameworks aligned with the challenges of the digital society.

In the field of teacher training, this inequality manifests itself in four main areas: (1) lack of national benchmarks for digital skills; (2) poor coordination between public policies and institutional practices; (3) funding vulnerable to macroeconomic instability; and (4) limited presence in international teacher training networks.

The geopolitical projection that emerges from this analysis suggests that, if they want to overcome their condition of epistemological and technological dependence, countries in the Global South will need to invest in building their own teacher and digital training frameworks, based on their cultural, linguistic, and pedagogical realities. This construction includes: strengthening sovereign educational policies; creating contextualized digital competency frameworks; continuous investment in educational technological infrastructure and expanding South-South regional partnerships, especially in the field of open educational resources and open science.

This study significantly contributes to the field of teacher training by offering an unprecedented comparative analysis between two universities from different geopolitical contexts — UFRGS (Brazil) and Babes-Bolyai University

(Romania) — with a specific focus on the integration of Digital Information and Communication Technologies (DICTs) in training processes. By articulating quantitative data, institutional policies, theoretical references, and legal frameworks, the research broadens the understanding of how teacher training models are conditioned by public policies, institutional cultures, and international agendas. In addition, the study reveals the importance of understanding digital teacher training not only as a technical dimension, but as a steady, critical, and strategic practice for strengthening the teaching profession facing the 21st century challenges.

The findings of this research point to the urgent need to restructure Brazilian public policies aiming at teacher training, with an emphasis on creating a **national framework of digital competencies** that dialogues with local and global realities. The absence of clear guidelines on DICTs in the BNC-Formação regulation, coupled with the fragmentation of continuous education initiatives, creates gaps that compromise the effectiveness of technological integration in pedagogical practices. The European experience, especially with the use of DigCompEdu and the alignment between policy and practice, offers important references — which, although should not be copied, can inspire contextualized adaptations in Brazil and other countries in the Global South. At the institutional level, the results suggest the need for internal policies to encourage pedagogical innovation, structured continuous education programs, and teacher evaluations that consider digital skills as part of teacher professionalization and educational quality.

This research opens up multiple avenues for future studies. We recommend conducting qualitative empirical research to deepen the understanding of pre-service teachers and trainers on the use of DICTs, both at UFRGS and at other Brazilian and international institutions. Expanded comparative studies involving other universities in the BRICS countries and the Global North could reveal broader and more complex patterns of asymmetries in digital teacher training. In addition, there is room for research on the impact of institutional digital policies on pedagogical practice in different areas of knowledge, as well as on the effectiveness of international frameworks (such as DigCompEdu) when applied outside the European context. Finally, we suggest the development of research that explores the **production of specific benchmarks for digital teaching skills in the Global South**, as a strategy for curricular decolonization and the strengthening of autonomous educational policies.

Ultimately, the digital transformation of teacher training is not only a technical challenge, but as well a matter of cognitive justice and pedagogical sovereignty. Overcoming the global digital divide requires Brazil and its BRICS peers to move from the logic of technological adaptation to the logic of critical and collaborative production of digital knowledge, based on a vision of teacher training as a strategic pillar of autonomous, inclusive, and sustainable development.

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STUDIA UBB. EUROPAEA, LXX, 2, 2025, 179-191

COMPARATIVE REGIONALISM: A FIELD WHOSE FRAMEWORK HAS COME?[1]

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DOI: 10.24193/subbeuropaea.2025.2.09
Published Online: 2025-12-16
Published Print: 2025-12-31

Abstract
As the literature on Comparative Regionalism studies increases, more and more scholars take a chance at creating a new or better tool to explain how regions have become more integrated, and what has caused them to want to come together in the first place. As one of the new researchers, I have seen a huge fragmentation in my attempts to find a suitable methodology for my case of comparing two regions (through pure interregionalism[2]). As such, this research brings together a collection of scholars who have extensively exchanged knowledge and papers, with some who belong to other research fields, in an attempt to settle this need. This is how the ecological framework, a tool that aims to be both extensive and flexible, has been created. While limited, for the moment, by a strong political lens, and with a focus on EU and AU literature, it can provide a reliable analysis of various integration processes.
Keywords: *Comparative Regionalism, Ecological Framework, Regional Integration, Member-types, Governance, Non-eurocentrism.*

[1] Paraphrasing Acharya's well-known ovation-question "A field whose time has come?" (Acharya, 2012)

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[2] Amitav Acharya, "Comparative Regionalism: A Field Whose Time Has Come?," in The International Spectator, no. 1, vol. 47, 2012, pp. 3–15.

INTRODUCTION

Comparative Regionalism (CR) is a recent scientific endeavour in comparative studies, currently establishing itself as a new field of research within regional studies. Most scholars agree that the first contemporary academic to initiate a wave of interest in this field was Amitav Acharya, who, through his early work[3], set the basis for what is to become one of the most used methods to survey regions around the world. The growing interest in CR studies has been attributed by scholars[4] to (1) a new multipolar, multiplex global order, characterized by (a) terrorism and the war(s) on terror, (b) crises, particularly hard-hitting financial ones, and (c) the ascension of BRICS and other emergent powers, (2) regional governance becomes the new very important component of the global governance system[5] and (3) the growing of formal and informal institutionalization of state and non-state actors across various fields. Outside of North Atlantic reasons, other scholars[6] argue that more causes can be found in (1) the empowerment of identities and growing cultural autonomy of the world, alongside (2) new measures to oppose colonialism and neocolonialism through a common (3) resistance against the great powers.

Although the literature on Comparative Regionalism is not short of new methodologies to try[7], they get very specific, to the point where some of them

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[3] Amitav Acharya, „The Emerging Regional Architecture of World Politics", *World Politics*, vol. 59, no. 04, 2007"

[4] Fredrik Söderbaum, "Old, New, and Comparative Regionalism," in Thomas Risse and Tania Börzel (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Regionalism,* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016, p. 31.

[5] Michael Zürn, "Global Governance as a Multi-Level Governance," in Levi-Faur David (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of Governance*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, pp. 736–739.

[6] Amitav Acharya, "Regionalism Beyond EU-Centrism," in Thomas Risse and Tania Börzel (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Regionalism,* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

[7] Thomas Risse, "The Diffusion of Regionalism," in Thomas Risse and Tania Börzel (eds.),*The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Regionalism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016; Tobias Lenz and Alexander Burilkov, "Institutional pioneers in world politics: Regional institution building and the influence of the European Union," in European Journal of International Relations, vol. 23, 2017, pp. 654–680; Tania Börzel and Thomas Risse, "Grand theories of integration and the challenges of comparative regionalism," in *Journal of European Public Policy*, 2019, pp. 1231–1252;

remain good only at the theoretical level, and others are rather too normative. In this regard, other scholars have noted that specific traits of regionalism are either too well-researched[8], generally excluded or rarely taken into consideration[9], or outright only used to further European mimicry and excellence in terms of integration[10].

This paper accounts for most of these recent changes and challenges in the field, as it tries to propose a new comprehensive tool to assist in describing CR(s). While recent similar attempts have called this endeavour an "integrated framework", I propose the term "ecological framework". This term is better suited conceptually, as it allows (1) to choose between only some of its elements, thus increasing the validity of the measurement, and (2) to account for the fact that the elements cannot and should not be measured individually but by embracing the influences that happen between them, as well.

METHODOLOGY

The framework is a two-dimensional table, where the x-axis (horizontal) is made of *themes* and the y-axis (vertical) is composed of *topics*, with each cell containing *elements*. The themes correspond to chronological recommendations

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Tobias Lenz and M. Reiss, "Globalising the study of diffusion: multiple sources and the East African Community," in *Journal of European Public Policy*, 2023, pp. 1–29; Diana Panke and Sören Stapel, "Multi-level governance," in Philippe de Lombaerde (ed.), *Handbook of Regional Cooperation and Integration*, Edward Elgar Publishing, 2024.

[8] Lorenzo Fioramonti and Fredrik Mattheis, "Is Africa Really Following Europe? An Integrated Framework for Comparative Regionalism," in *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 2015, pp. 674–690.

[9] Giovanni Capoccia and Daniel Ziblatt, "The Historical Turn in Democratization Studies: A New Research Agenda for Europe and Beyond," in Comparative Political Studies, 2010, pp. 931–968; Tania Börzel, "Theorizing Regionalism: Cooperation, Integration, and Governance," in Thomas Risse and Tania Börzel (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Regionalism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016; Helen Nesadurai, "The politics of developmental regionalism," in Melisa Deciancio; Pablo Nemiña and Diana Tussie (eds.) *Handbook on the Politics of International Development*, Cheltenham, Northampton: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2022.

[10] Amitav Acharya, "Regionalism Beyond EU-Centrism," in in Thomas Risse and Tania Börzel (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Regionalism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016; D. Mumford, "Comparative Regionalism's Decolonial Turn: A Proposition", in *E-International Relation*s, 2020.

from scholars, of areas that should be considered when comparing regions, whereas the topics are inextricable elements that make sense in any comparison, linked with political analysis. While themes are more likely to be author-specific, topics are more general, yet themes are broader in definition, and topics are more concrete; and at their intersection, we find the framework's elements.

The decision to include an element in a certain cell comes primarily from a chronological match, then by being directly mentioned, and finally, if it fits the theory conceptually. Thus, for some of the themes, the author never mentioned specifically some elements, but because they fit at the intersection with that element, they are added.

The limitations of this framework are that it has a thicker political lens applied to it, and that the conceptual foundations rest in the comparison literature between Europe and Africa. Nevertheless, the flexibility of the framework should allow itself to both grow and be criticized, the more it is used and disassembled.

RAISING HORIZONTAL BARS: WELDING THE FRAME

One of the first comparative scholars was Joseph Nye, whom I will award the base theme of this framework, as his work has also inspired the topics that I use. The tool that he designed had three directions: (1) political, skewed towards institutions and supranational modes of analysis, (2) economic, limited to trade and services, and (3) social, which had a modest effect in his model[11]. However, the bigger value of his paper, which unfortunately is not highlighted enough in his final model, is him citing Haas about how "[a]spects of integration and disintegration can both occur at the same time"[12], which is a blind spot that the current literature on CR is spectacularly excelling at avoiding.

Although CR is currently regarded as the latter phase of a process[13], a lot of scholars seem to avoid including a processual approach in their studies,

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[11] Joseph Nye, "Comparative Regional Integration: Concept and Measurement," in *International Organization*, 1968, pp. 855–880.

[12] Joseph Nye, "Comparative Regional Integration: Concept and Measurement," in *International Organization*, 1968, pp. 855–880.

[13] Fredrik Söderbaum, "Old, New, and Comparative Regionalism," in Thomas Risse and Tania Börzel (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Regionalism,* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

rather preferring to take a picture of the two regions at a very specific time and call it a day. In their studies of democracies, Capoccia and Ziblatt recommend that we emulate a historical perspective when we want to do comparative studies[14]. Leaving aside the euro-centricity of their study, which we are going to counter later, and their democratic specificity, I believe that our field could benefit by including the historical perspective in all comparisons, which not only adds a temporal dimension to each region, but to the relations between regions, as well.

Another dimension that has been longstanding in the study of regionalism(s), which plagues most of the theories, is that it is driven by high-level interests or elites, who are organized at a national, transnational, supranational, or regional level, and always have a top-down approach. As societies, organizations, companies, and other actors become more relevant, not only do inter-regional comparisons change face[15], but they also allow for a multi-layered or bottom-up approach, in the form of governance[16].

Being over-represented in the field of CR[17], the European Union has recently had a critical comeback from the scholars of this field. As they argue, some of the proposed theories and even comparisons praise the exclusiveness of integration following an ”EU Model”. In a reverse attempt, this critical approach has also come under criticism, as scholars try to account for minimizing area-centric methodologies and theories, while focusing more on topic-driven comparative regionalism[18]. Yet, for as long as the EU still has

[14] Giovanni Capoccia and Daniel Ziblatt, “The Historical Turn in Democratization Studies: A New Research Agenda for Europe and Beyond,” in Comparative Political Studies, 2010, pp. 931–968.

[15] Elisa Lopez-Lucia and Fredrik Mattheis, “New concepts for understanding the entanglements of regionalisms,” in Elisa Lopez-Lucia and Fredrik Mattheis (eds.) *The Unintended Consequences of Interregionalism,* Routledge, 2020, p. 4.

[16] Tania Börzel, “Theorizing Regionalism: Cooperation, Integration, and Governance,” in Thomas Risse and Tania Börzel (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Regionalism,* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016, p. 53.

[17] Saad Chiekh El Maaly, “What the Analysis of 136 Studies from 1960 to 2020 Tells Us About Comparative Regionalism Studies,” in *Economic Issues*, vol. 2, 2022, pp. 31–85.

[18] Tobias Lenz and F. Söderbaum, “Comparative Regionalism beyond Europe versus the rest,” in *Review of International Studies*, 2025, pp. 1–17.

influence over Africa, no present or future framework should exclude this element as part of its analysis.

The final theme of my framework is seldom approached in the literature[19] and has to do with the membership criteria. As regions become more diverse, with some non-state actors gaining power that can affect several countries at once, governments changing loyalties from one party to another, and new types of passive memberships emerging, I believe it provides fruitful ground as a theme in itself. For this, I propose the concept of *member-types*[20].

VERTICAL CUTS: FILLING THE FRAME

From the beginning of the field[21] until now[22], the three main topics of analysis for CR are the (1) political, (2) economic, and (3) social ones, also in this order. In line with recent changes in developmental IR studies[23], which I think also better suit my conceptual goal, the topic of social analysis becomes socio-developmental. This new topic is then enlarged in its definition, so that it better captures shifts in power and levels of intervention, at the same time allowing for the inclusion of social actors who lack an outright obvious political or economic reason to pursue integration, to be accounted for as a motive that is development-driven.

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[19] Christof Hartmann, "Sub-Saharan Africa," in Thomas Risse and Tania Börzel (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Regionalism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016; Elisa Lopez-Lucia and Fredrik Mattheis, "New concepts for understanding the entanglements of regionalisms," in *The Unintended Consequences of Interregionalism* (Elisa Lopez-Lucia and Fredrik Mattheis (eds.)), Routledge, 2020.

[20] A member-type, similar to an ideal-type, is a concept that describes the breadth of association of a state or non-state actor to a regional organization of any kind. It can start from informal and formal bilateral ties, to the process of joining, being a member, then a suspended member, and even a member-in-exit. This suggests that regional integration is disproportionately driven by some of its constituents, which can clearly be seen in the Franco-German(-British) leadership in the EU and the Kenyan-Tanzanian dominance in the EAC

[21] Joseph Nye, "Comparative Regional Integration: Concept and Measurement," in *International Organization, 1968, pp. 855–880.*

[22] Saad Chiekh El Maaly, "What the Analysis of 136 Studies from 1960 to 2020 Tells Us About Comparative Regionalism Studies," in *Economic Issues*, vol. 2, 2022, pp. 31–85.

[23] Helen Nesadurai, "The politics of developmental regionalism," in Melisa Deciancio; Pablo Nemiña and Diana Tussie (eds.) *Handbook on the Politics of International Development*, Cheltenham, Northampton: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2022.

The framework is detailed in Table F, comprised of (again) themes as columns (horizontal distribution) and topics as rows (vertical distribution). The first additions in this table are those who directly derive from the themes. Theme 1 (Baseline) brings forth six elements to our framework: (a) Trade, (b) Elites, Loyalties, and the interaction with Masses, (c) Institutional Design. Policy Convergence, (d) Regional Identity, (e) Security, and the pinnacle - (f) Disintegration Processes. Next, the second theme (historical) supports the inclusion of (g) the *Regionalization* Process, while the fourth theme (*anti-eurocentrism*) supports regional identity and brings forth discussions about (h) Regional approaches towards Sovereignty.

While her chapter[24] does not directly name the elements that compose regional governance, the book she has edited[25] contributes to theme 3 (governance) by supporting the elements of trade and security, and adding (i) Monetary and Financial Governance, (j) Regional Development Governance, (k) Gender Governance, (l) Environmental Governance, (m) Migration (and Border) Governance, and Human Rights and Democracy Governance, which, for this framework, I will call (n) Regional Law Governance. Finally, as theme 5 (member-types) does not have any particular supporting author(s), the elements I extracted are empirical: (o) Joining and Exiting Criteria, and (p) Passiveship[26].

For the political topics, I will cite Fioramonti and Mattheis' framework[27] and borrow two elements (q) Integration Drivers, which best fit the second theme, and (r) Regional Leadership, which I will place under the third theme. For the former element, some authors find a distinction between drivers, which are the actual elements that move integration forward (e.g. people per se, companies, governments, trust etc.), and scopes, which are end-goals

[24] Tania Börzel, "Theorizing Regionalism: Cooperation, Integration, and Governance," in Thomas Risse and Tania Börzel (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Regionalism,* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

[25] Thomas Risse and Tania Börzel, *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Regionalism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

[26] Passiveship is a member-type in which the member, based on some pre-defined criteria, could be considered inactive or passive, yet not being suspended or wanting to exit.

[27] Lorenzo Fioramonti and Fredrik Mattheis, "Is Africa Really Following Europe? An Integrated Framework for Comparative Regionalism," in Journal of common Market Studies, 2015, pp. 674–690.

(e.g. economic union, regional peace etc.) for the process[28]; hence our 20th element is (s) Integration Scopes. The same authors suggest, albeit unilaterally, that regions could impact the regionalization process of other regions, an element that I will call (t) Inter-influence. Finally, I would like to expand on the fourth element: regional identity and add to it the concept of regional branding[29].

Some authors would frown upon the introduction of economics as a topic, as they agree that economics generally do a poor job at explaining regional integration[30]. However, as our framework recommends that we treat each of the elements as interacting, this fits perfectly within its limits. As such, since the beginning of the study of regional economic integration[31] up until the present day[32], the beginning of integration is always a preferential free trade agreement and ends (is expected to end) in total economic integration; this creates a scale that fits as our 22nd element. Equally as useful, as nowadays America has embarked on a tariff war, not long after a lot of countries joined sanctions on Russia, to add the 23rd element (v) of Sanctions[33] and Stimuli[34]

[28] Tobias Lenz and Alexander Burilkov, "Institutional pioneers in world politics: Regional institution building and the influence of the European Union," in *European Journal of International Relations*, vol. 23, 2017, pp. 654–680.

[29]Which is how the AU presents itself as an organization built by Africans for Africans, i.e. to fight colonialism and neo-colonialism, and the EU as a safe haven for human rights, i.e. to attract migration, but maybe to also redeem itself of a murkier past

[30] A. Wiener and T. Diez, "Introducing the Mosaic of Integration Theory," in Antje Wiener and Thomas Diez (eds.), *European Integration Theory* New York: Oxford University Press, 2009, p. pp. 19–21; M. Pradhan and A. Scott, "Economic and Financial Integration in Europe: Recent Stresses and Policy Challenge," in Hamid Davoodi (ed.) *The East African Community After Ten Years: Deepening Integration*, 2012, p. 54; E. Balogun, *Comparative Regionalism*, Oxford: Oxford Research Encyclopedias, International Studies, 2021, p. 4.

[31] B. Balassa, *The Theory of Economic Integration*, Routledge, 1962.

[32] Hasan Tuluy, "Regional Economic Integration in Africa," in Global Journal of Emerging Market Economies, 2016, pp. 334–354; Farhad Taghizadeh-Hesary et al., "Regional Economic Integration in Asia: Challenges and Recommended Policies," in *Journal of Economic Integration*, 2020, pp. 1–9.

[33] Who could also work as intra-regional, with EU suspending funds to members who 'misbehave', as well as how the AU outright suspends them over coups.

The final topic – socio-developmentalism is brimming with elements brought forth by previous mentions. Still, for making the framework evermore lively, this element of this topic seem to be never-ending, as many more micro, meso, and macro areas of interest arise, such as (I) education[35], (II) infrastructure, (III) health, (IV) agriculture[36], and (V) artificial intelligence[37]. I have also identified another fruitful topic, the final one to be included in the framework, namely overlapping memberships[38], which could explain why regions with a seemingly similar institutional-building journey have had different regionalization processes.

CONCLUSION

This framework aims to fulfil the need, in the field of comparative regionalism, for a flexible tool that would allow for comparable comparisons between different scholars, and across time. It is also the perfect mesh where several field representatives, such as, for example, political analysts, IR students, lawyers, environmental activists, cheerful economists, and so on, work together; to bring various explanations of the regionalization process of the same regions, or different ones.

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[34] With examples as early as the Marshall Plan to nowadays the EU's Global Gateway and China's Belt & Road Initiative

[35] Meng-Hsuan Chou and Pauline Ravinet, "The emergent terrains of 'higher education regionalism': how and why higher education is an interesting case for comparative regionalism," in *European Journal of Higher Education*, 2016, pp. 271–287.

[36] Saad Chiekh El Maaly, "What the Analysis of 136 Studies from 1960 to 2020 Tells Us About Comparative Regionalism Studies," in *Economic Issues*, vol. 2, 2022, pp. 31–85.

[37] Florin Salajan; Theodore Barnes and Anna Becker, "Comparative regionalism cases of artificial intelligence governance in education: the Caribbean Community and the European Union," in The Round Table, 2024, pp. 71–85.

[38] Christof Hartmann, "Sub-Saharan Africa," in Thomas Risse and Tania Börzel (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Regionalism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016, p. 274. [38] For a more detailed map of overlapping regionalism in Africa, see Tuluy 2016, 348

Table F – The ecological framework of Comparative Regionalism as an invaluable element of comparing regions.

	Theme 1: Baseline	Theme 2: Historical	Theme 3: Governance	Theme 4: Non-eurocentrism	Theme 5: Member-types
	Foundational elements	Allows for longitudinal comparisons	Adds non-state actors at non-state levels	Refutes European exceptionalism in CR Studies	For the research on different degrees of participation
Topic 1: Political	Institutional Design & Policy Convergence Regional Identity & Branding Disintegration Processes	Integration Process Integration Drivers Integration Scopes	Regional Leadership	Sovereignty Inter-influence	Joining and Exiting criteria Passiveship
Topic 2: Economic	Trade	Economic Integration Scale	Monetary & Financial Governance		Stimuli & Sanctions
Topic 3: Socio-developmental	Elites, Loyalties, and the interaction with the Masses Security and Peace	[39]	Regional Development. Law Migration & Border Gender Environmenta l		Overlapping memberships

[39] Infrastructure Development could be placed here

Because most of the research for this framework has been done by researching literature that has been limited to the processes of the EU and the EAC, I encourage criticism from scholars of different regions and types of comparative regionalisms, which could truly help forge the framework into an even more valid tool. Besides the tool itself, some of the gaps that I have identified in the CR literature could provide fertile ground for new research, especially the new turn of regional management to include member-types of varying power, responsibilities, and benefits.

More work remains to be done in the field, as several new methods and elements are brought forth in recent CR research, yet it is my firm belief that the ecological framework could be the trend-setter of a new wave for a more integrated yet living approach.

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LE DROIT DE L'OHADA À L'ÈRE DU NUMÉRIQUE. RÉFLEXION À LA LUMIÈRE DE L'ACTE UNIFORME ORGANISANT LE DROIT COMMERCIAL GÉNÉRAL DU 15 DÉCEMBRE 2010 DANS LES 17 PAYS MEMBRES[1]

OHBLA LAW IN THE DIGITAL AGE: REFLECTIONS IN LIGHT OF THE UNIFORM ACT ORGANIZING GENERAL COMMERCIAL LAW OF 15 DECEMBER 2010 IN THE 17 MEMBER COUNTRIES

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DOI: 10.24193/subbeuropaea.2025.2.10
Published Online: 2025-12-16
Published Print: 2025-12-31

[1] L'organisation pour l'harmonisation en Afrique du droit des affaires en sigle (OHADA) est une organisation africaine d'intégration juridique composée de 17 États membres : (le Bénin, le Burkina Faso, le Cameroun, le Comores, le Congo, la Cote d'Ivoire, le Gabon, la Guinée Bissau, la Guinée Conakry, la Guinée Equatoriale, le Mali, le Niger, la République Centrafricaine, la République démocratique du Congo, le Sénégal, le Tchad et le Togo). Pour plus de détails sur cette organisation, visiter le site : https://www.ohada.com/l-ohada/presentation-de-l-ohada.html.

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Abstract
The digitalization of commercial law within the OHBLA area represents a major step toward adapting the legal framework to the digital economy. The 2010 reform introduced key innovations, including the recognition of electronic documents, digital signatures, and the digitalization of the RCCM, thereby improving transaction speed and transparency. However, several challenges persist: unequal digital infrastructure, limited cybersecurity, low digital literacy, and the need for harmonized practices among member States. The success of this reform will therefore require strong technical and institutional support.
Keywords: *OHBLA, digitalization, commercial law, cybersecurity, legal certainty, digital infrastructure.*

INTRODUCTION

Le monde se trouve à une époque de bascule historique à l'« ère numérique »[2]. À l'ère du numérique, les systèmes juridiques du monde entier sont appelés à se réinventer pour accompagner la transformation rapide des pratiques économiques[3]. Les transactions commerciales, autrefois basées presque exclusivement sur des supports papier, tendent désormais à se dématérialiser grâce aux technologies de l'information et de la communication[4]. En réalité, « [l]e numérique a provoqué tout à la fois une accélération, une simplification et une banalisation de la collecte, du transfert et du traitement des données »[5]. En plus, « le numérique a le don de l'ubiquité ».[6] En effet, le numérique affranchit les objets culturels des contraintes de l'existence physique, en leur permettant d'être répliqués à l'identique et à l'infini, sans restriction de temps ni de lieu ».[7] Avec l'expérience grandissante

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[2] Valérie Laure Benabou et Judith Rochfeld, *À qui profite le clic ? Le partage de la valeur à l'ère numérique*, Coll. Corpus, éd. Odile Jacob, Paris, 2015, p. 30. La terminologie « ère numérique » est choisie pour dire « ère du numérique ».

[3] Christiane Féral-Schuhl, *Cyberdroit, le droit à l'épreuve de l'Internet*, 6è éd., Dalloz, Paris, 2011-2012, p. 34.

[4] Isabelle Falque-Pierrotin, « L'éducation au numérique, un défi majeur que nous devrons relever tous ensemble », *CCE*, n°3, Entretien, 2014, p.7.

[5] Christiane Féral-Schuhl, *op.cit.*, p.35.

[6] Isabelle Falque-Pierrotin, *op.cit.*, p.7.

[7] Manon Dalle, « Réflexions sur l'éducation des internautes au respect du droit d'auteur », in *Les biens numériques*, Ceprisca, Coll. Colloques, diffusion PUF, Amiens, 2014, p. 87.

des « objets connectés »[8], certains voient une nouvelle révolution en l'Internet des choses à « l'ère du tout connecté »[9].

Dans ce contexte, l'Organisation pour l'Harmonisation en Afrique du Droit des Affaires (OHADA), qui regroupe dix-sept États africains n'est pas restée en marge de cette évolution. Consciente des enjeux liés à la compétitivité économique et à l'attractivité de son espace juridique. Elle a entrepris en 2010 une révision substantielle de son Acte uniforme portant sur le droit commercial général (ci-après AUDCG)[10]. Cette réforme, qui marque un tournant décisif dans l'histoire du droit des affaires africain, introduit des innovations majeures, telles que la dématérialisation des registres, la reconnaissance juridique des documents électroniques et l'usage de la signature électronique[11]. L'ambition affichée est claire : « aligner le cadre juridique OHADA sur les standards internationaux et offrir aux opérateurs économiques un environnement moderne, sécurisé et adapté aux exigences du commerce numérique »[12].

L'intégration de la digitalisation dans l'AUDCG de 2010 traduit une volonté manifeste d'ancrer le droit OHADA dans une dynamique de modernisation et d'harmonisation avec les meilleures pratiques mondiales.

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[8] Thierry Piette-Coudol, *Les objets connectés, sécurité juridique et technique*, Lexis/Nexis, Coll. Actualités, Paris, 2015, pp. 1190, spéc. p. 1.

[9] Bruno Salgues, « Premier bilan et impasses procédurales du SMSI, vers de nouvelles pistes d'usage des TIC », in Marc Mathien (sous la dir.), *Le Sommet mondial sur la société de l'information et « après » ? Perspectives sur la cité globale*, Bruylant, Coll. Médias, Sociétés et Relations Internationales, Bruxelles, 2007, pp. 43-58.

[10] Acte Uniforme OHADA relatif au Droit commercial général du 15 décembre 2015, www.Droit-Afrique.com.

[11] Lire les articles 35 à 100 AUDCG.

[12] Lire Yvette-Rachel Kalieu Elongo, «Le régime de la preuve électronique au Cameroun: entre réglementation nationale et droit uniforme OHADA », *Tribune Justice*, [En.ligne]. [www.tribunejustice.com/le-regime-de-la-preuve-electronique-au-camerounentre-reglementation-nationale-et-droit-uniforme-ohada-par-pr-yvette-kalieu/], consulté en date du 03 septembre 2025 ; Thierry Piette-CouDol,« Révision de l'AUDCG: ouverture à la dématérialisation et aux échanges électroniques sécurisés », [En.ligne]. [www.institutidef.org/IMG/pdf/AUDCG_TIC_commentTPC_1_.pdf]. Consulté en date du 03 séptembre 2025, Raphaël NkolwouDou, «OHADA des télécoms : le cadre réglementaire se dessine mais reste soumis aux mutations permanents des technologies» in *Revue de Droit Uniforme Africain*, vol1, 2010. Mouhamadou Sanniyaya, *Le droit de l'OHADA face au commerce électronique*, these de doctorat, Montréal, Faculté des études supérieures, Université de Montréal, 2011.

Désormais, les formalités auprès du Registre du Commerce et du Crédit Mobilier (RCCM) peuvent s'effectuer par voie électronique, avec la même valeur probatoire que les procédures réalisées sur un support papier. De plus, les échanges entre les différents registres nationaux et le fichier régional sont sécurisés grâce à la signature électronique qualifiée, garantissant l'authenticité et l'intégrité des données transmises. L'innovation est également visible dans la possibilité pour les justiciables d'accéder à distance aux informations commerciales et de transmettre en ligne leurs demandes ou déclarations. Ces mesures constituent un progrès considérable pour les commerçants et les investisseurs, qui peuvent désormais réaliser leurs formalités avec plus de rapidité, de fiabilité et de transparence[13].

L'ouverture du droit OHADA au numérique ne se limite pas à une simple modernisation technique. Elle traduit aussi une mutation profonde dans la manière de concevoir la sécurité juridique et la transparence des transactions[14].

Toutefois, au-delà de ces avancées, la réforme soulève des interrogations légitimes sur la capacité des États membres à assurer une mise en œuvre uniforme et efficace de ces innovations dans des contextes économiques et techniques parfois contrastés. Ainsi, l'ouverture du droit OHADA au numérique soulève des questions importantes. Dans quelle mesure cette digitalisation est-elle réellement intégrée dans le droit commercial et quels défis restent à surmonter pour en assurer l'efficacité ? C'est autour de cette interrogation que s'articule cette réflexion.

Du point de vue méthodologique, l'analyse s'appuie sur les approches exégétique et critique du droit de l'OHADA en matière commerciale. Elle ne s'empêche pas de mettre à contribution l'expérience pratique d'avocat portée par les auteurs du présent article au-delà du fait qu'elle mobilise une analyse documentaire basée sur des ouvrages et articles spécialisés sur le droit commercial OHADA avec une perspective large sur les autres aspects importants de ce droit en rapport avec la problématique que soulève le sujet sous-examen.

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[13] *Ibidem*.

[14] Irène Flore Kamnang Komguep, « Le contentieux de l'immitraculation du commerçant au Registre du Commerce et du Crédit en droit OHADA » in *R.D.U.S*, Vol. 46, n⁰ 1, 2016, pp.139-144.

La digitalisation du droit commercial général dans l'espace OHADA constitue donc une avancée remarquable mais, son analyse exige une approche nuancée. Avant d'examiner les limites et défis qu'elle soulève (II), il convient d'évaluer les innovations introduites par l'AUCG et atouts indéniables qu'apporte cette réforme (I).

I. L'OUVERTURE DU DROIT OHADA A LA DIGITALISATION : UNE MODERNISATION PROGRESSIVE

L'Acte uniforme relatif au droit commercial général OHADA (ci-après AUDCG) introduit des innovations juridiques liées à la digitalisation (A). Ces innovations offrent plusieurs atouts concrets à l'espace OHADA (B).

A. Les innovations juridiques introduites par l'Acte Uniforme relatif au Droit Commercial Général

L'Acte uniforme relatif au droit commercial général introduit plusieurs mécanismes directement liés à la digitalisation. Premièrement, la dématérialisation des formalités au registre du commerce et du crédit mobilier constitue une avancée majeure (1). Et deuxièmement, l'Acte uniforme en question reconnaît désormais la valeur juridique des actes électroniques et de la signature électronique (2).

1. La dématérialisation des formalités au Registre du commerce et du crédit mobilier

Le Registre du commerce et du crédit mobilier est régi par les articles 34 à 100 de l'Acte Uniforme. Ces articles sont répartis entre un certain nombre de livres. Le Livre II, intitulé « Registre du Commerce et du crédit mobilier » ne doit pas tromper. Il n'est pas le texte exclusif sur le Registre du commerce et du crédit mobilier dans la mesure où les dispositions des Livres III à V se rattachent nécessairement au RCCM. Partant de cette considération, la présentation du RCCM invite l'exploration des données sur le Fichier national (Livre III) et le Fichier régional (Livre IV) puis, sur l'information du RCCM (Livre V)[15].

[15] Santos Pédro Akuete et Komi Alemawo, « Registre du commerce et du crédit mobilier » in Paul-Gérard Pougoué, *Encyclopédie du droit OHADA*, édition Lamy, 2011, p.1510.

Le législateur communautaire n’a pas donné de définition de ce Registre. La doctrine a alors proposé quelques approches de définitions. L’une de ces approches estime « qu’il s’agit d’un répertoire officiel des personnes physiques et morales exerçant une activité commerciale ou civile »[16]. Une autre approche perçoit le registre du commerce et du crédit mobilier « comme un catalogue officiel des commerçants personnes physiques ou morales réunissant et diffusant un certain nombre de renseignements concernant les commerçants et leurs entreprises et pouvant produire des effets juridiques plus ou moins étendus »[17].

De ces points de vue, il conviendrait de retenir que le Registre du commerce et du crédit mobilier[18] est un répertoire destiné à recevoir l’immatriculation des commerçants[19], personnes physiques, des sociétés commerciales, et d’autres personnes morales assujetties à l’immatriculation, ainsi que des succursales des sociétés étrangères exerçant leurs activités dans l’espace OHADA. Il est aussi destiné à recueillir la déclaration des entreprenants[20] et l’inscription des sûretés mobilières[21].

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[16] Pascal Beder, « Registre du commerce et des sociétés » in *Rép. Com.* Dalloz, octobre 2008, n°1. Lire également, Hygin Didace Amboulou, *le droit des affaires dans l’espace OHADA*, 1ère édition, l’Harmattan, Paris, 2024, p.30.

[17] J. Hamel, G. Lagarde et A. Jauffret, Droit commercial général, vol.1, Dalloz, 1980, n°276, p.445. Lire également, Hygin Didace Amboulou, *op.cit.*, p.31.

[18] Lire l’article 34 AUDCG.

[19] Aux termes de l’art. 2 de l’AUDCG « est commerçant celui qui fait de l’accomplissement des actes de commerce par nature sa profession ». Un auteur noter que c’est l’activité professionnelle commerciale qui confère à son auteur la qualité de commerçant, l’immatriculation au RCCM n’étant qu’une conséquence de la qualité de commerçant et ne jouant qu’un rôle de preuve. Deux conditions doivent en principe être observées : l’exercice d’actes de commerce à titre indépendant, et la profession habituelle. Ainsi, les gérants salariés travaillant pour le compte du commerçant, qui est leur employeur, les artisans ne peuvent acquérir la qualité de commerçant. Mais cette qualité est reconnue à certains intermédiaires de commerce, au mineur émancipé, au conjoint d’un commerçant qui accompli les actes de commerce30 visés aux articles 3 et 4 à titre de profession habituelle et séparément de son époux (Lire Hygin Didace Amboulou, *op.cit.*, p.21.)

[20] L’Acte uniforme révisé a institué le statut de l’entreprenant à côté de celui du commerçant. Il s’agit d’un entrepreneur individuel, personne physique qui, sur simple déclaration prévue par l’Acte uniforme exerce une activité professionnelle civile, commerciale, artisanale ou agricole. Selon l’article 30 AUDCG, l’entreprenant est

Le Registre du Commerce et du Crédit Mobilier (RCCM) a pour finalité de centraliser et sécuriser les formalités légales liées aux activités économiques. Il permet aux personnes physiques ou morales assujetties à l'immatriculation d'obtenir un numéro d'immatriculation dès le dépôt de leur demande, aux entreprenants de déclarer leur activité et d'obtenir un numéro de déclaration, ainsi que d'accomplir diverses formalités prévues par les Actes uniformes de l'OHADA ou par d'autres dispositions légales. Le registre facilite également l'accès des assujettis, des tiers et du public aux informations qu'il conserve, garantissant transparence, célérité et loyauté dans le développement des affaires. Il reçoit par ailleurs les inscriptions relatives aux sûretés et contrats de crédit-bail[22].

Dans son fonctionnement, le RCCM enregistre les demandes d'immatriculation des commerçants, sociétés commerciales et civiles, groupements, succursales, établissements publics à autonomie financière, ainsi que toute personne physique ou morale soumise par la loi. Il reçoit également les déclarations d'activité, de modification ou de cessation, les dépôts d'actes et pièces, les demandes de radiation ou de renouvellement d'inscriptions, ainsi que les sûretés prévues par la législation[23]. Tenu par le greffe de la juridiction compétente[24] ou l'organe habilité de l'État partie, il alimente un Fichier national centralisé, lui-même regroupé au niveau régional auprès de la Cour Commune de Justice et d'Arbitrage[25]. Ces informations, destinées à l'information du public, sont structurées dans des registres, répertoires et dossiers individuels permettant un suivi rigoureux et accessible[26].

Comparativement à l'ancien AUDCG, la structure du RCCM est réorganisée, enrichie par des éléments nouveaux notamment par exemple le Livre V : informatisation du Registre du commerce et de crédit mobilier.

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un entrepreneur individuel, personne physique qui sur simple déclaration prévue dans le Présent Acte Uniforme exerce une activité professionnelle civile, commerciale, artisanale ou agricole.

[21] Lire l'article 35 AUDCG.

[22] Lire l'article 34 AUDCG.

[23] Santos Pédreo Akuete et Komi Alemawo, *op.cit.*, p.1510.

[24] Lire les articles 70 à 72 AUDCG.

[25] Lire les articles 74 et 75 AUDCG.

[26] Hygin Didace Amboulou, *op.cit.*, p.30.

Ce livre introduit des innovations relatives à la dématérialisation des formalités du RCCM[27].

Le droit OHADA introduit la possibilité d'accomplir les formalités commerciales et juridiques par voie électronique. Ainsi, les demandes d'immatriculation, de déclaration ou de dépôt prévues par les Actes uniformes et par d'autres réglementations peuvent être transmises et reçues sous format numérique, à condition que les destinataires soient en mesure de les traiter. Toutefois, les échanges relevant de législations particulières (par exemple, en matière fiscale ou bancaire) échappent à ce dispositif[28].

Chaque État partie conserve la liberté de tenir son Registre du Commerce et du Crédit Mobilier (RCCM) ainsi que le Fichier national soit sur support papier, soit en version électronique[29]. De même, le Fichier régional, géré par la Cour Commune de Justice et d'Arbitrage (CCJA), peut également être exploité sur ces deux supports[30]. Cette souplesse permet une transition progressive vers la digitalisation, en tenant compte du niveau d'équipement et des réalités de chaque pays[31].

Pour garantir l'efficacité et l'uniformité des procédures électroniques, un Comité technique de normalisation est institué au sein de l'OHADA. Ce comité définit les standards à respecter en matière de transmission électronique, de numérisation et de signature électronique, afin d'assurer l'interopérabilité et la fiabilité des systèmes utilisés par les différents États parties[32].

Concrètement, les registres et fichiers peuvent mettre à disposition des usagers un service en ligne sécurisé. Grâce à ce portail, il est possible d'effectuer une demande ou une déclaration, de transmettre un dossier unique comprenant des documents numériques et pièces justificatives scannées, ou encore de remplir et envoyer un formulaire interactif directement via Internet. Le greffe ou l'organe compétent peut également répondre aux demandes d'information par voie électronique, sans qu'une confirmation papier ne soit nécessaire[33].

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[27] Ce livre comprend les articles 79 à 100 AUDCG.

[28] Lire les articles 79 à 81 AUDCG.

[29] Article 80 al.1 AUDCG.

[30] Article 80 al.2 AUDCG.

[31] Dorra Ouali, *L'immatriculation au registre du commerce : étude des droits tunisien et français*, thèse de doctorat en droit, Université Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne, 2017, p.1.

[32] Article 81 AUDCG.

[33] Article 92 AUDCG.

Les échanges officiels entre les registres, fichiers nationaux et le fichier régional doivent être signés électroniquement pour garantir leur authenticité et intégrité. De même, toute transmission faite par un demandeur ou un déclarant doit être revêtue d'une signature électronique qualifiée. Les copies et extraits des dossiers peuvent être transmis par voie électronique, sous réserve que leur reproduction soit fidèle à l'original. Lorsqu'une certification est demandée, elle doit comporter la signature électronique de l'autorité compétente, la date ainsi que le sceau officiel[34].

Enfin, les informations délivrées par le RCCM, qu'elles soient transmises sur support papier ou électronique, doivent être facturées au seul coût administratif du service[35]. Le registre peut aussi transmettre directement, par voie électronique, certaines informations et pièces justificatives aux organismes administratifs compétents de l'État partie, même lorsqu'elles comportent des données personnelles. Cela reflète une volonté d'alléger les procédures et de renforcer la fluidité des échanges dans l'espace OHADA[36].

L'on devra admettre que la réorganisation de l'Acte uniforme portant droit commercial général était plus que nécessaire à l'ère du numérique en ce qu'elle a introduit une reconnaissance juridique des documents électroniques et la signature électronique.

2. La reconnaissance juridique des documents électroniques et de la signature électronique

L'Acte uniforme OHADA relatif au droit commercial général consacre la pleine valeur juridique des documents électroniques dans le cadre des formalités accomplies auprès des Registres du Commerce et du Crédit Mobilier (RCCM). Contrairement à l'ancien texte[37], les transmissions et enregistrements réalisés au moyen de procédés électroniques produisent les mêmes effets que ceux accomplis sur support papier, notamment en matière de validité et de force probatoire[38].

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34 Lire l'article 98 al.1 et 2 AUDCG.

35 Article 98 *in fine* AUDCG.

36 Article 100 AUDCG.

37 Rachel Kalieu Elongo, « Le rôle du registre du commerce et du crédit mobilier OHADA dans l'amélioration de l'accès au crédit » in *Les mutations juridiques dans le système OHADA*, Paris, l'Harmattan, 2009, pp.133-140.

38 Article 82 AUDCG.

Cette reconnaissance repose sur une exigence fondamentale : le procédé technique utilisé doit garantir, à tout moment, l'origine du document et son intégrité. Autrement dit, un document électronique est réputé fiable s'il est établi, conservé et transmis de manière à éviter toute falsification, suppression ou altération. Pour encadrer cette fiabilité, le texte renvoie au Comité technique de normalisation, chargé de définir les standards acceptés[39]. Ainsi, l'OHADA s'inscrit dans une logique de confiance numérique en plaçant sur un pied d'égalité les documents électroniques et papier, tout en sécurisant leur usage par un encadrement normatif. Cette équivalence constitue une avancée majeure puisqu'elle facilite la dématérialisation des formalités commerciales, réduit les coûts et délais administratifs, tout en ouvrant la voie à un espace économique modernisé et compétitif.

La reconnaissance des documents électroniques ne serait pas possible sans un mécanisme permettant d'authentifier l'auteur et de manifester son consentement. C'est dans cette optique que l'article 83 introduit la notion de signature électronique qualifiée[40]. Celle-ci est définie comme un « procédé technique fiable permettant d'identifier le signataire et d'attester son engagement vis-à-vis du contenu du document ». Ses caractéristiques sont strictement encadrées : elle doit être liée uniquement au signataire, permettre son identification, être créée par des moyens placés sous son contrôle exclusif et être indissociablement rattachée au document afin que toute modification ultérieure soit détectable[41].

La signature électronique qualifiée repose sur deux composants essentiels notamment un logiciel de création et de vérification de signature d'une part, et un certificat électronique délivré par un prestataire agréé d'autre part[42]. Ces conditions techniques garantissent que le document signé électroniquement ne peut être ni contesté ni modifié sans trace. En cela, elle joue le même rôle qu'une signature manuscrite, tout en offrant une sécurité renforcée par la cryptographie. Ainsi, l'OHADA adopte une approche qui renforce la fiabilité et l'efficacité des transactions numériques, contribuant à instaurer une culture de confiance dans l'économie dématérialisée.

De même, il est important de noter que l'article 84 de l'Acte uniforme, sous examen, précise que la signature électronique qualifiée est adossée à un

[39] Article 82 al.3. AUDCG.
[40] Article 83 al.1 AUDCG
[41] Article 83 al.2 AUDCG.
[42] Article 83 al.3 AUDCG.

certificat électronique, véritable clef de voûte du système. Ce certificat est une attestation électronique qui lie les données de vérification de signature à une personne déterminée et confirme son identité. Il doit comporter plusieurs mentions obligatoires : le nom du titulaire, sa clé cryptographique publique, la période de validité du certificat, un numéro de série unique, ainsi que la signature électronique du prestataire qui l'a émis[43].

Ce mécanisme repose donc sur une infrastructure de certification, dans laquelle un prestataire de services de certification électronique joue le rôle d'autorité de confiance. C'est lui qui garantit la correspondance entre la personne et sa signature numérique. Pour éviter les dérives, le Comité technique de normalisation de l'OHADA fixe les critères de qualification des prestataires, assurant ainsi la crédibilité de l'ensemble du système. Ce certificat est comparable à une « carte d'identité numérique », sans laquelle la signature électronique ne peut être validée. Sa validité temporelle et sa traçabilité renforcent la sécurité des échanges, tout en permettant de lutter contre l'usurpation d'identité et les falsifications[44]. De cette manière, l'OHADA dote son espace juridique d'un instrument technique essentiel à la confiance numérique, indispensable pour l'essor du commerce électronique et de la dématérialisation des services.

L'on devra l'admettre que les articles 86 et 87 de l'Acte uniforme établissent que les demandes, déclarations et pièces justificatives peuvent être présentées sous format électronique, à condition de respecter les exigences techniques et juridiques des articles précédents. Une fois reçues par le greffe ou l'organe compétent du RCCM, ces formalités donnent lieu à la délivrance d'actes électroniques qui ont la même valeur que leurs équivalents papiers[45].

Ces actes prennent des dénominations précises selon la formalité : accusé d'enregistrement pour les immatriculations, déclarations d'activité, modifications, radiations ou inscriptions de sûretés. Ils doivent toujours comporter des mentions obligatoires telles que la date, le numéro d'ordre et la désignation de la formalité.

L'article 88 autorise par ailleurs le greffier à intégrer des décisions administratives ou juridictionnelles reçues, qu'elles soient transmises en version papier ou électronique, et à les signer électroniquement pour garantir

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43 Lire l'article 84 al.1 AUDCG.

44 Lire l'article 81 AUDCG.

45 Lire les articles 86 et 87 AUDCG.

leur authenticité[46]. Pris dans ce sens, il faut noter qu'en l'absence de signature électronique du déclarant, l'article 89 prévoit que le greffier peut valider lui-même la formalité par sa propre signature qualifiée, assurant ainsi la continuité juridique du processus[47]. Ces dispositions démontrent que l'OHADA ne se contente pas de reconnaître l'existence des documents électroniques, mais leur attribue une véritable force juridique en encadrant strictement leur production et leur délivrance.

Toutefois, la conservation des documents électroniques abordée à l'article 91, impose des conditions strictes afin d'assurer leur durabilité, leur intégrité et leur lisibilité. Un document électronique doit pouvoir être consulté et exploité dans le temps, même après plusieurs années. Pour ce faire, l'ensemble des informations le concernant – identité du déclarant, propriétés techniques, signatures électroniques et opérations de traitement – doit être conservé de manière sécurisée[48]. De même, les éventuelles migrations de supports (par exemple, passage d'un serveur à un autre ou d'un format technologique à un format plus récent) ne doivent pas altérer la valeur probatoire du document, qui reste considéré comme original. Le procédé de conservation doit aussi permettre l'apposition de mentions postérieures par le greffier sans que les données initiales soient modifiées[49].

Ainsi, la traçabilité est garantie : chaque étape de la vie du document peut être vérifiée et authentifiée. Ce cadre juridique vise à prévenir les risques de perte, de falsification ou d'altération des données numériques, tout en assurant la continuité des archives publiques dans un contexte de dématérialisation croissante. La conservation fiable des documents électroniques constitue ainsi une condition essentielle pour maintenir la sécurité juridique et la confiance des acteurs économiques.

Dans son ensemble, la reconnaissance juridique des documents et signatures électroniques marque une étape décisive dans la modernisation du droit commercial OHADA. En instaurant une équivalence stricte entre le papier et le numérique, en encadrant la signature électronique qualifiée et en sécurisant la conservation des documents, le législateur communautaire favorise la simplification des procédures et la fluidité des échanges économiques.

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[46] Lire l'article 88 AUDCG.

[47] Lire l'article 89 AUDCG.

[48] Lire l'article 91 AUDCG.

[49] *Ibidem*.

Ce dispositif permet non seulement de réduire les délais et les coûts liés aux formalités, mais aussi d'élargir l'accessibilité des services à distance, ce qui constitue un atout considérable dans un espace où les contraintes géographiques peuvent freiner les activités commerciales. Plus encore, cette réforme inscrit l'OHADA dans la dynamique mondiale de digitalisation, renforçant l'attractivité de son espace juridique auprès des investisseurs et partenaires étrangers. Toutefois, son succès dépendra de la mise en place effective d'infrastructures techniques fiables, de la formation des acteurs et de la capacité des États parties à garantir la cybersécurité[50]. Ainsi, la reconnaissance juridique des documents et signatures électroniques n'est pas seulement une innovation technique : elle représente un véritable levier de gouvernance économique et d'intégration régionale, plaçant l'OHADA à l'avant-garde du droit des affaires en Afrique[51].

B. Les atouts de la digitalisation pour l'espace OHADA

L'innovation est entrée en vigueur en décembre 2010 à la faveur de la révision de l'AUDCG. L'article 79 de ce texte évoque la possibilité pour les professionnels d'immatriculer les entreprises en ligne, en disposant ceci : « les dispositions du présent Livre s'appliquent aux formalités ou demandes prévues par le présent Acte uniforme, par tout autre acte uniforme ou par toute autre réglementation. Ces demandes ou formalités peuvent être effectuées par voie électronique, dès lors qu'elles peuvent être transmises et reçues par cette voie par leurs destinataires ». La consécration de l'administration électronique de la création du RCCM en droit communautaire des affaires[52] envisage la simplification et la rapidité de procédures commerciales (1) ainsi que le renforcement de la transparence et de la sécurité juridique (2).

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[50] Adjayi Kodjo Ndukuma, *Le droit de l'économie numérique en République Démocratique du Congo à la lumière des expériences européennes et françaises*, Thèse de doctorat en droit, Université Paris 1 Panthéon Sorbonne, 2017, p.43. Lire également Xavier Leonetti, *Guide de cybersécurité, Droit, méthodes et bonnes pratiques*, Paris, l'Harmattan, 2015, p.13.

[51] Patricia Cressot,« Le droit OHADA, source de développement économique en Afrique par la voie législative ? », [En ligne], [www.ohada.com/doctrine/ohadata/D-17-11.html], consulté le 03 septembre 2025.

[52] Vicaire Beptassi Ouafa, « Le droit des technologies de l'information dans la Communauté économique et monétaire de l'Afrique centrale », in *les cahiers de droit*, vol60-3, Septembre 2019, pp.653-697.

1. La simplification et la rapidité de procédures commerciales

L'adoption par l'OHADA de la reconnaissance juridique des documents électroniques et des signatures électroniques constitue une avancée considérable vers la modernisation du droit des affaires en Afrique. L'une des retombées majeures de cette réforme est sans doute la simplification et l'accélération des procédures commerciales, notamment celles accomplies auprès du Registre du Commerce et du Crédit Mobilier (RCCM)[53]. Ce registre, véritable pivot de la vie des entreprises, concentre l'ensemble des formalités liées à l'immatriculation des commerçants, à la déclaration des entreprenants, aux dépôts d'actes, ainsi qu'aux inscriptions et radiations relatives aux sûretés[54]. Sa dématérialisation progressive et l'introduction de mécanismes numériques contribuent désormais à rendre ces procédures beaucoup plus fluides, accessibles et rapides[55].

Avant la réforme, l'accomplissement des formalités auprès du RCCM nécessitait la préparation de dossiers volumineux en version papier, des déplacements physiques vers le greffe compétent et des délais souvent longs pour l'obtention d'un numéro d'immatriculation ou de déclaration d'activité[56]. Grâce à la numérisation, ces étapes sont considérablement raccourcies : le déposant peut transmettre directement ses pièces justificatives scannées et remplir ses formulaires en ligne. L'Acte uniforme prévoit que l'immatriculation ou la déclaration d'activité donne lieu, dès réception, à la délivrance d'un numéro d'enregistrement accompagné d'un accusé électronique, ce qui évite de longues files d'attente et permet aux opérateurs économiques de démarrer plus vite leurs activités.

Les mécanismes mis en place par le RCCM électronique permettent donc un gain de temps substantiel. Par exemple, lorsqu'un commerçant dépose une

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[53] Irène Flore Kamnang Komguep, « Le contentieux de l'immatriculation du commerçant en droit au Registre du Commerce et du Crédit Mobilier OHADA » in *R.D.U.S.*, 2016, pp.139-144.

[54] Marie-André Ngwe et Serge Jokung, « La réforme du Registre du commerce et du crédit mobilier » in *Droit et Patrimoine*, 2011, p.56.

[55] Irène Flore Kamnang Komguep, *op.cit.*, pp.139-144.

[56] Yvette-Rachel Kalieu Elongo, «Le régime de la preuve électronique au Cameroun: entre réglementation nationale et droit uniforme OHADA », Tribune Justice, [En.ligne], [www.tribunejustice.com/le-regime-de-la-preuve-electronique-au-camerounentre-reglementation-nationale-et-droit-uniforme-ohada-par-pr-yvette-kalieu/], consulté en date du 03 septembre 2025

demande d'immatriculation par voie électronique, le greffe reçoit instantanément les informations, peut les examiner en ligne et délivrer l'accusé sans retard. Même en cas de validation manuelle par le greffier, le délai maximum fixé (48 heures) reste très inférieur aux pratiques antérieures[57].

L'autre aspect marquant de cette simplification réside dans la possibilité d'accéder aux services du RCCM sans contrainte géographique. Autrefois, un commerçant basé en zone rurale ou éloignée devait parcourir de longues distances pour se rendre au greffe compétent[58]. Désormais, grâce aux plateformes électroniques, il peut transmettre ses documents depuis n'importe quel endroit disposant d'une connexion Internet. Cela favorise l'inclusion économique, car même les petits entrepreneurs et les entreprenants disposent d'un canal simplifié pour déclarer leurs activités[59]. Cela a ou aura nécessairement aussi un impact positif dans la formalisation des économies de l'espace OHADA avec un avantage de diminuer l'informel.

De plus, l'interconnexion entre le RCCM local, le Fichier national et le Fichier régional tenu par la CCJA garantit que les informations circulent plus rapidement entre les différents niveaux. Ainsi, un document enregistré localement peut être automatiquement centralisé et mis à jour dans le fichier national, puis dans le fichier régional, sans nécessiter la reproduction fastidieuse de copies physiques[60]. Cette centralisation numérique réduit le risque de perte d'information et permet aux autres États parties d'accéder rapidement aux données d'une entreprise transnationale[61].

L'Acte uniforme sous examen prévoit également la possibilité de remplir des formulaires interactifs en ligne sur les sites Internet des RCCM. Cette innovation constitue un progrès majeur en termes de simplicité, car elle guide pas à pas l'utilisateur dans la constitution de son dossier. L'entreprenant, par exemple, peut saisir ses informations personnelles, indiquer son activité et transmettre ses justificatifs numérisés en une seule opération. De plus, l'utilisation d'un dossier unique numérique regroupant tous les éléments nécessaires (formulaire, pièces jointes, signatures électroniques) limite les

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[57] *Ibidem.*

[58] *Ibidem.*

[59] Marie-André Ngwe et Serge Jokung, *op.cit.*, p.57.

[60] Irène Flore Kamnang Komguep, *op.cit.*, pp.139-144.

[61] *Ibidem.*

erreurs et les omissions qui, auparavant, entraînaient souvent des rejets ou des allers-retours administratifs[62].

Par ailleurs, les greffes et organes compétents peuvent répondre directement aux sollicitations des usagers par voie électronique, sans obligation d'émettre une confirmation papier. Cette simplification des échanges réduit considérablement la bureaucratie et encourage une communication plus fluide et efficace entre les autorités et les opérateurs économiques[63].

La simplification tient aussi au rôle du Comité technique de normalisation des procédures électroniques, institué par l'OHADA pour fixer les standards techniques communs. En uniformisant les outils de signature, de transmission et de numérisation, ce comité garantit que toutes les parties prenantes utilisent des procédés fiables et compatibles[64]. Cela évite la multiplication des formats ou des méthodes et assure une interopérabilité régionale, condition essentielle pour des échanges transfrontaliers rapides dans un espace économique intégré.

Le RCCM numérique devient ainsi un véritable catalyseur de fluidité dans l'espace OHADA. En réduisant les délais d'enregistrement, en permettant une transmission électronique instantanée et en garantissant l'authenticité des documents grâce à la signature électronique qualifiée, il simplifie considérablement la vie aux opérateurs économiques. La rapidité d'accès aux informations et la délivrance immédiate d'accusés d'enregistrement permettent aux entreprises de se concentrer sur leurs activités principales plutôt que sur des démarches administratives lourdes[65].

En somme, la dématérialisation des documents et signatures électroniques dans l'espace OHADA répond à un besoin pressant de faciliter les affaires et de rendre l'environnement juridique plus attractif. Grâce à elle, les États parties réduisent les lourdeurs administratives et offrent aux entrepreneurs un cadre moderne et compétitif, condition indispensable pour stimuler la croissance et l'intégration économique.

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[62] Philipe Keubou et Fabius Kamla Foka, « La sanction pénale du non-respect des formalités relatives au RCCM dans l'espace OHADA : le cas du Cameroun », in *Revue de l'ERSUMA*, Vol. 1, n[0] 1, 2012, p.189.

[63] *Ibidem*.

[64] Lire l'article 81 AUDCG.

[65] Marie-André Ngwe et Serge Jokung, *op.cit.*, p.57.

2. Le renforcement de la transparence et de la sécurité juridique

Au-delà de la simplification des procédures, la reconnaissance juridique des documents électroniques et des signatures électroniques introduit un autre atout majeur dans l'espace OHADA : le renforcement de la transparence et de la sécurité juridique. Ces deux éléments sont essentiels dans toute économie moderne, car ils rassurent les investisseurs, réduisent les risques de fraude et renforcent la confiance entre les acteurs économiques[66].

Le principal défi de la dématérialisation est de s'assurer que les documents électroniques ont la même force probatoire que les documents papier. L'Acte uniforme répond à cette préoccupation en affirmant que les formalités accomplies par voie électronique produisent les mêmes effets juridiques que celles accomplies sur support papier, à condition d'être établies et conservées selon un procédé technique fiable[67]. Il va de soi que ceux qui ne répondent pas à cette exigence n'auraient pas la même force probatoire. La signature électronique qualifiée joue ici un rôle fondamental : elle lie le document à son auteur, garantit l'intégrité du contenu et rend toute modification ultérieure détectable[68]. Ainsi, un contrat ou une immatriculation signée électroniquement possède une valeur juridique incontestable, renforçant la sécurité des transactions. Les opérateurs savent qu'un document électronique ne peut être falsifié sans que cela soit visible, ce qui réduit les litiges liés à la falsification et accroît la confiance[69].

Le RCCM occupe une place stratégique dans ce processus de sécurisation. En centralisant toutes les informations relatives aux immatriculations, déclarations, inscriptions de sûretés et radiations, il constitue une source fiable et accessible de renseignements économiques. Grâce à sa version électronique, ces informations peuvent être consultées en ligne par toute personne intéressée, sous réserve des restrictions légales. Cela accroît la transparence dans la vie des affaires, car il devient possible de vérifier rapidement l'existence légale d'une entreprise, son immatriculation, son capital social ou encore les sûretés grevant ses biens[70].

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[66] En cet angle d'idées, lire Edwin Lau, « Principaux enjeux de l'administration électronique dans les pays membres de l'OCDE » in *R.F.A.P.*, Vol. 110, n⁰ 2, 2004, p.225.

[67] Lire l'article 82 al.2 AUDCG.

[68] Lire, l'article 83 AUDCG.

[69] En ce sens, lire Georges Chatillon, « L'administration électronique » in *R.I.D.C.*, vol.58, n⁰ 2, 2006, pp.673.

[70] Lire, Laëtitia Roux, « L'administration électronique : un vecteur de qualité de service pour les usagers ? » in *Informations sociales*, Vol. 158, n⁰ 2, 2010, p.20.

Le RCCM électronique, en alimentant un fichier national puis un fichier régional tenu par la CCJA, assure en outre une traçabilité complète des informations. Chaque dépôt, chaque modification et chaque radiation est enregistré et horodaté, ce qui empêche toute manipulation discrète ou suppression frauduleuse[71].

Les échanges entre les registres locaux, les fichiers nationaux et le fichier régional sont protégés par la signature électronique qualifiée du greffier ou du responsable compétent. Cette exigence garantit l'origine et l'intégrité des transmissions, empêchant toute interception ou falsification[72]. De même, lorsqu'un demandeur transmet directement ses documents, il doit utiliser sa propre signature électronique qualifiée, ce qui permet de l'identifier de façon certaine et d'attester de son consentement.

Cette sécurisation s'étend aussi aux copies et extraits délivrés par voie électronique. Lorsqu'une certification est demandée, la copie comporte non seulement la signature électronique qualifiée de l'autorité compétente, mais aussi la date et l'image du sceau officiel. Ces mécanismes assurent que les informations diffusées par le RCCM sont fiables et juridiquement opposables, renforçant ainsi la sécurité des transactions[73].

La transparence et la sécurité juridique reposent également sur la conservation des documents électroniques dans des conditions qui garantissent leur durabilité, leur lisibilité et leur traçabilité. L'Acte uniforme susévoqué prévoit que toutes les informations relatives à une demande ou une déclaration (données d'identification, signatures, propriétés, migrations techniques) soient conservées sans altération. Même lorsqu'un document est transféré d'un support électronique à un autre, il conserve sa valeur d'original[74].

Ce dispositif de conservation fiable constitue une protection contre la perte ou la détérioration des dossiers fréquentes dans les systèmes papiers. Il permet aussi de maintenir une mémoire juridique durable, essentielle pour résoudre d'éventuels litiges.

En rendant accessibles des informations fiables et certifiées, la réforme renforce la confiance entre partenaires commerciaux et investisseurs. La possibilité de consulter en ligne l'existence légale d'une entreprise, ses dirigeants, ses statuts ou les sûretés qui pèsent sur ses biens permet de réduire

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[71] *Ibidem.*

[72] Laëtitia Roux, *op.cit.,* p. 20.

[73] *Ibidem.*

[74] Lire les articles 89 et suivants de l'AUDCG.

l'asymétrie d'information et de prévenir les risques de fraude. De plus, la délivrance d'accusés d'enregistrement électroniques horodatés assure aux parties que leurs démarches ont bien été reçues et traitées.

Cette transparence renforce l'attractivité de l'espace OHADA. Les investisseurs étrangers, souvent méfiants vis-à-vis des systèmes juridiques africains perçus comme opaques, y trouveraient désormais un cadre moderne et sécurisé. La digitalisation des registres et l'utilisation de signatures électroniques qualifiées rapprochent l'OHADA des standards internationaux et contribuent à améliorer son image sur la scène économique mondiale[75].

Cette innovation favorise une justice économique plus équitable. En réduisant les risques de manipulation des dossiers et en garantissant une information fiable et accessible, elle permet aux petites comme aux grandes entreprises de bénéficier des mêmes chances et d'évoluer dans un cadre juridique transparent. La dématérialisation réduit aussi la corruption et les pratiques arbitraires, car chaque formalité laisse une trace numérique vérifiable.

La reconnaissance juridique des documents électroniques et des signatures électroniques représente une réforme structurante qui transforme en profondeur le fonctionnement du droit des affaires OHADA au sein de ses États membres. Elle simplifie et accélère les procédures commerciales à travers le RCCM électronique.

II. LES LIMITES ET DEFIS DE LA TRANSITION NUMERIQUE DANS LE DROIT DE L'OHADA ET SON ESPACE COMMUNAUTAIRE

L'administration électronique du RCCM offre une simplification de la centralisation des données relatives aux investisseurs et un accès aisé aux données concernant les transactions économiques[76]. Cependant, cette administration électronique présente certaines limites dans le droit de l'OHADA. Il présente des contraintes liées au contexte des États membres (A) et les insuffisances juridiques. Cela conduit à réfléchir sur différentes perspectives pour améliorer cette administration électronique (B).

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[75] En ce sens, lire Irène Flore Kamnang Komguep, *op.cit.*, pp.139-144.

[76] Irène Flore Kamnang Komguep, *op.cit.*, pp.139-144.

A. Les contraintes liées au contexte des États membres

L'administration électronique du RCCM se trouve contraint des inégalités d'accès aux technologies, aux faiblesses des infrastructures numériques ainsi qu'aux difficultés d'appropriation par les acteurs économiques et juridiques.

1. Un accès inégal aux technologies et aux infrastructures numériques

L'un des premiers obstacles à la digitalisation du droit des affaires dans l'espace OHADA est lié à l'inégalité d'accès aux infrastructures numériques. L'innovation introduite par l'Acte uniforme organisant le droit commercial général repose largement sur l'utilisation de plateformes en ligne, de bases de données centralisées et de signatures électroniques[77]. Or, tous les États membres de l'OHADA ne disposent pas du même niveau d'équipement en matière de réseaux Internet, de serveurs sécurisés et de moyens techniques permettant la gestion informatisée des registres[78].

Dans plusieurs pays, notamment ceux enclavés ou marqués par des crises économiques et sécuritaires récurrentes, l'accès à Internet haut débit reste limité et coûteux. Les coupures fréquentes d'électricité et les interruptions de connexion entravent la continuité des services numériques, rendant difficile une mise en œuvre homogène de la digitalisation. De même, les greffes et juridictions locales ne disposent pas toujours de salles informatiques adaptées, ni du matériel nécessaire pour scanner, stocker et transmettre les documents électroniques de manière fiable[79].

Cette inégalité d'accès aux infrastructures engendre un risque de fracture numérique entre États membres. Certains, comme la Côte d'Ivoire ou le Cameroun, avancent plus rapidement dans la mise en place de plateformes électroniques pour le RCCM, tandis que d'autres peinent à amorcer ce virage technologique[80]. Le résultat est une digitalisation à plusieurs vitesses, compromettant l'objectif d'harmonisation poursuivi par l'OHADA. Cette harmonisation variée voire contrastée se fait observée aussi dans le domaine du droit pénal des affaires OHADA[81].

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[77] Lire les articles 35 à 100 AUDCG

[78] Dans cet angle d'idées, lire Adjayi Kodjo Ndukumu, *op.cit.*, pp.24-34.

[79] *Ibidem*

[80]En ce sens, lire Vicaire Bepyassi Ouafa, *op.cit.*, pp.653-697.

[81] Pour plus de détails, sur l'harmonisation variée et contrastée du droit pénal des affaires OHADA, voir Valéry Iragi Ntwali, « Le droit pénal des affaires OHADA et son effectivité en RD Congo. Regard sur l'action pénale du Tribunal de commerce

Au-delà des infrastructures, les moyens financiers nécessaires à la transformation numérique représentent un autre défi. La mise en place d'un RCCM électronique et interconnecté avec un fichier national et un fichier régional nécessite des investissements lourds : acquisition de serveurs sécurisés, logiciels de gestion des bases de données, formation des greffiers, mise en place de systèmes de signature électronique qualifiée, etc. Or, de nombreux États membres disposent de budgets publics limités, souvent absorbés par des priorités sociales et sécuritaires[82].

Cette contrainte financière limite les capacités de certains pays à déployer efficacement les réformes. Dans certains cas, la dépendance à l'aide internationale ou à des partenariats techniques avec des bailleurs de fonds se révèle incontournable. Cela pose la question de la durabilité des systèmes numériques mis en place, car leur maintenance à long terme nécessite des ressources constantes.

Pour rendre efficace cette digitalisation, les États membres de l'OHADA devraient accroître leur contribution financière afin de fournir à l'Organisation les moyens nécessaires pour qu'elle puisse atteindre pleinement ses objectifs.

2. Une appropriation inégale par les acteurs économiques et juridiques

La transition numérique dans l'espace OHADA ne concerne pas seulement les infrastructures ; elle implique aussi l'appropriation des nouvelles technologies par les acteurs concernés. Les commerçants, notaires, avocats, greffiers et magistrats doivent s'adapter à des procédures entièrement dématérialisées[83.] Or, cette adaptation est loin d'être atteinte en plus du manque de son uniformité.

De nombreux commerçants opérant dans l'informel, qui représentent une grande partie de l'économie africaine n'ont ni les compétences techniques ni les moyens financiers pour effectuer leurs formalités en ligne. Le risque est que la digitalisation profite surtout aux grandes entreprises urbaines déjà familiarisées avec les outils numériques, laissant de côté les petites structures rurales[84].

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de Bukavu », Dans *Droit et investissement*, Mélanges en l'honneur du Professeur Cossi Dorothé Sossa, Tome 2, Cotonou, Editions du CREDIJ, 2021, pp. 451-476.

[82] Vicaire Bepyassi Ouafa, *op.cit.*, pp.653-697.

[83] *Ibidem.*

[84] Irène Flore Kamnang Komguep, *op.cit.*, pp.139-144.

De même, les juridictions et administrations locales doivent former leurs agents à l'utilisation des plateformes électroniques, ce qui suppose un effort de formation continue et de mise à niveau. Faute de formation adéquate, les agents peuvent commettre des erreurs dans la saisie, l'enregistrement ou la validation des documents électroniques, compromettant la fiabilité du système.

Si la digitalisation vise à faciliter et accélérer les formalités, elle peut paradoxalement créer de nouvelles formes d'exclusion et de blocage. Les commerçants analphabètes, les personnes sans accès à Internet ou sans compétences informatiques risquent d'être marginalisés. De même, les disparités entre zones urbaines et rurales s'accentuent : dans les capitales, les plateformes numériques sont accessibles, mais dans les villages éloignés, leur utilisation reste très limitée.

Ce risque d'exclusion est particulièrement préoccupant dans le cadre du RCCM, qui est censé constituer une base d'information accessible au public. Si une partie de la population n'a pas la capacité technique, logistique et financière d'y accéder, l'objectif de transparence et de démocratisation de l'information économique sera compromis[85].

Les contraintes liées au contexte des États membres ne se limitent pas aux infrastructures et aux moyens financiers ; elles touchent aussi aux pratiques socio-culturelles et organisationnelles. Dans certains environnements, la confiance dans les documents électroniques reste faible. De nombreux opérateurs économiques continuent de privilégier les documents papier munis de cachets et de signatures manuscrites, perçus comme plus tangibles et plus sûrs.

De plus, l'organisation administrative dans certains États reste marquée par la lourdeur et la centralisation. La digitalisation suppose une certaine agilité institutionnelle qui fait encore défaut dans plusieurs pays membres de l'OHADA. La lenteur dans la prise de décision, la bureaucratie et parfois la résistance des agents à changer leurs habitudes constituent autant d'obstacles au déploiement harmonieux des réformes.

B.Les insuffisances juridiques et les perspectives d'amélioration

L'administration électronique du RCCM est confrontée à des insuffisances juridiques énormes (1). Ces insuffisances et bien d'autres limites poussent à rechercher des perspectives pour améliorer cette administration (2).

[85] Laëtitia Roux, *op.cit,* p.23.

1. Les lacunes en matière de cybersécurité et à la protection des données

L'un des principaux défis juridiques de la digitalisation est lié à la cybersécurité[86]. Les documents électroniques, bien que reconnus par l'Acte uniforme susévoqué, restent exposés aux risques de piratage, de falsification ou de perte de données en cas de cyberattaque. Or, la plupart des États membres de l'OHADA ne disposent pas encore de législations robustes et uniformes en matière de cybersécurité mais aussi, ils ont un déficit énorme des ressources humaines qualifiées dans ce domaine très stratégique aujourd'hui[87].

La mise en place du RCCM électronique suppose une protection avancée des serveurs, des bases de données et des transmissions électroniques. Faute de normes strictes et de moyens techniques adéquats, le système reste vulnérable aux intrusions. Un piratage du fichier national ou régional pourrait entraîner des conséquences graves sur la confiance des opérateurs économiques dans le dispositif[88]. Même dans des pays développés disposant d'infrastructures de cybersécurité avancées, les attaques informatiques ne cessent de prouver leur efficacité, ce qui illustre combien l'espace OHADA serait encore vulnérable si l'on y adopte la dématérialisation sans précautions. La dématérialisation exige bien plus qu'une simple volonté : il faut des prérequis techniques, des ressources, une formation continue, des procédures rigoureuses de sécurité, et surtout un engagement durable pour maintenir le système à jour face à l'évolution constante des menaces numériques.

Un autre défi juridique concerne la protection des données personnelles. Les registres commerciaux contiennent des informations sensibles sur les commerçants, les dirigeants de sociétés, leurs adresses, leurs patrimoines ou encore les sûretés consenties. La digitalisation implique que ces informations soient accessibles en ligne, ce qui pose un problème de confidentialité[89]. Or, les législations relatives à la protection des données personnelles sont encore embryonnaires ou disparates dans les États membres de l'OHADA. Sans un cadre harmonisé, il existe un risque d'utilisation abusive des données par des tiers, ou de violation de la vie privée des acteurs économiques.

[86] Isabelle Falque-Pierrotin, *op.cit.*, p.7.

[87] Isabelle Falque-Pierrotin, *op.cit.*, p.7.

[88] Irène Flore Kamnang Komguep, *op.cit.*, pp.139-144.

[89] *Ibidem*

Un autre défi majeur réside dans l'harmonisation des pratiques numériques entre les 17 États membres de l'OHADA. Si certains pays avancent plus vite dans la mise en œuvre des réformes, d'autres restent en retard. Cette disparité crée un risque de fragmentation juridique : les entreprises opérant dans plusieurs États ne bénéficient pas toujours du même niveau de digitalisation, ce qui peut compliquer leurs démarches[90].

Pour surmonter cet obstacle, il est essentiel que les États membre de l'OHADA coordonnent leurs efforts et adoptent des standards communs, en particulier en matière de signature électronique qualifiée, de conservation des documents et de transmission entre fichiers nationaux et régional.

2. Les perspectives d'amélioration

Malgré ces insuffisances, des perspectives positives existent. Tout d'abord, la mise en place progressive des cadres législatifs nationaux en matière de cybersécurité[91] et de protection des données permettra de renforcer la confiance dans les documents électroniques et de prévenir ou du moins, limiter les potentielles cyberattaques. De nombreux États africains ont déjà commencé à adopter des lois sur la cybersécurité92, ce qui ouvre la voie à une harmonisation à l'échelle de l'espace OHADA.

Ensuite, l'amélioration des infrastructures numériques, grâce à des partenariats public-privé et à des investissements dans les technologies de l'information, favorisera une meilleure mise en œuvre des réformes. En plus, la formation continue des acteurs économiques et juridiques doit être une priorité, afin de garantir une appropriation effective des outils numériques. Enfin, l'OHADA devra renforcer les mécanismes de suivi et d'évaluation des réformes. L'instauration d'indicateurs de performance mesurant l'efficacité des procédures électroniques, la rapidité des enregistrements et la satisfaction des usagers permettra d'ajuster en permanence les dispositifs.

CONCLUSION

La transition numérique dans le droit de l'OHADA constitue une innovation majeure qui transforme en profondeur le fonctionnement du droit des affaires dans l'espace OHADA. Cependant, elle se heurte à de nombreux

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[90] *Ibidem*.

[91] Isabelle Falque-Pierrotin, *op.cit.*, p.7.

[92] Christiane Féral-Schuhl, *op.cit.*, p.35.

défis. D'une part, les contraintes liées au contexte des États membres – inégalités d'infrastructures, moyens financiers limités, appropriation inégale par les acteurs – freinent une mise en œuvre homogène. D'autre part, les insuffisances juridiques en matière de cybersécurité, de protection des données et d'harmonisation nécessitent des réformes complémentaires.

Malgré ces limites, les perspectives d'amélioration sont envisageables : renforcement des législations nationales, investissements dans les infrastructures numériques, formation des acteurs, et surtout coordination accrue entre États membres. Si ces défis sont relevés, la digitalisation dans l'espace OHADA pourra pleinement atteindre son objectif : offrir un cadre juridique moderne, attractif et sécurisé au service du développement économique africain.

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STUDIA UBB. EUROPAEA, LXX, 2, 2025, 221-239

FAITH AND RECONCILIATION: COMPARATIVE INSIGHTS FROM SOUTH AFRICA AND RWANDA

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DOI: 10.24193/subbeuropaea.2025.2.11
Published Online: 2025-12-16
Published Print: 2025-12-31

Abstract
This article examines the role of faith leadership and religious institutions in post-conflict reconciliation, using South Africa and Rwanda as comparative case studies. It highlights how the moral authority, credibility, and ethical integrity of church leaders can significantly influence post-conflict social reconstruction and healing. In South Africa, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, guided by the moral leadership of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, exemplified how faith-informed approaches, grounded in restorative justice and the principle of ubuntu, can foster dialogue, forgiveness, and national reconciliation. In contrast, in Rwanda, churches were implicated in the 1994 genocide, undermining their legitimacy and limiting the effectiveness of faith-based reconciliation efforts. The reconciliation processes of South Africa and Rwanda underscore the potential of faith leadership in guiding societies through division and trauma.

Keywords: *Faith leaders, Conflict resolution, Christianity, South Africa, Rwanda.*

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Introduction

In times of crisis, societies often turn to figures who can offer moral clarity, solace, and a framework for reconciliation and collective healing. Christian faith leaders, such as bishops, pastors, and other clergy, frequently assume this role by framing public discourse around spiritual truths. Their contributions in crisis contexts often include interpreting conflict resolution via theological lenses, legitimizing reconciliation efforts, mobilizing support for healing, and mediating between authorities and civil society, as well as within fragmented societies marked by deep ethnic, racial, or political divisions. Sacred narratives in Christianity, biblical stories, theological concepts, liturgical practices are central tools in Christian crisis communication. Narratives of forgiveness and reconciliation provide frameworks through which communities can process trauma and reach healing.

This study contrasts South Africa's comparatively peaceful process from apartheid with Rwanda's descent into genocidal violence and its subsequent recovery efforts. In South Africa, Archbishop Desmond Tutu exemplifies how authentic religious leadership, coupled with restorative narratives, can foster national healing. By contrast, Rwanda's fractured church response highlights the ambivalent role that religious authority can play in times of crisis.

1. Post-Apartheid South Africa: Pathways to Reconciliation

1.1 Historical Context: From Segregation to the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission*

Between 1948 and 1994, South Africa's apartheid system, instituted by the all-white National Party government, was a legalized state-enforced structure of racial separation and discrimination that restricted the majority non-white population to separate residential areas, public facilities, and social spaces. Rooted in a series of laws enacted after the 1948 elections, apartheid prohibited interracial relations, classified citizens into four racial categories (Black, Indian, Coloured and White), and forcibly relocated millions of Black South Africans to ethnic homelands, while reserving towns and cities for whites.[1]

[1]African Union, *AUHRM Project Focus Area: The Apartheid*, [https://au.int/en/auhrm-project-focus-area-apartheid], 27 August 2025.

Church leaders, both lay and ordained, were instrumental in the anti-apartheid resistance in South Africa. Operating through ecumenical networks, figures such as Beyers Naudé, Desmond Tutu, Allan Boesak, and Frank Chikane mobilized global ecclesial solidarity, securing international support for the pursuit of freedom, justice, and democracy.[2]

Nelson Mandela's 1994 election symbolized the formal disintegration of apartheid and the commencement of South Africa's turn to democracy. The nation was confronted with the monumental challenge of dismantling decades of institutionalized injustice without descending into cycles of revenge. Profound obstacles remained: a society deeply scarred by racial oppression, victims demanding recognition and justice, perpetrators seeking amnesty, and political leaders struggling to foster trust across entrenched divisions. Mandela's reconciliatory leadership was cardinal in preventing post-apartheid South Africa from descending into chaos; his presidency was distinguished by notable achievements and he maintained an incorruptible leadership. The post-apartheid government encompassing South Africans across social divisions, pursued a program of institutional reform and established the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* to confront apartheid's atrocities and advance restorative justice.[3]

The *Commission* which began its work in January 1996, with a mandate to bridge the nation's divided past and a democratic future by promoting human rights, unity, and reconciliation.

Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela had central roles in dismantling apartheid and advancing racial equality and justice for Black South Africans under white minority rule, although their approaches to justice diverged: "while Tutu favoured nonviolent means of resistance, Mandela was not against using armed resistance against Apartheid militants when he deemed necessary."[4]

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[2] Peter Lodberg, "Desmond Tutu: Church Resistance to Apartheid and Injustice in Africa," in Søren Dosenrode (ed.), *Christianity and Resistance in the 20th Century. From Kaj Munk and Dietrich Bonhoeffer to Desmond Tutu*, Brill, 2008, p. 261.

[3] Olufemi Vaughan, "Reflecting on Nelson Mandela's Historic Presidential Election, May 10, 1994," *Wilson Center*, 2021, [https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/reflecting-nelson-mandelas-historic-presidential-election-may-10-1994], 27 August 2025.

[4] Joshua Woo, "Desmond Tutu and the triumph against Apartheid," in *Vision of Humanity*, [https://www.visionofhumanity.org/desmond-tutu-and-the-triumph-against-apartheid], April, 2024, 27 August 2025.

Tutu's philosophy of peacemaking was deeply rooted in his Christian faith, which shaped his unwavering commitment to nonviolence. Central to his worldview were the principles of forgiveness and reconciliation, which he regarded as essential for restoring trust, compassion, and social harmony: "Tutu's declaration that "only forgiveness enables us to restore trust and compassion to our relationships," evokes an understanding of peace as achieved through reconciliation. "If peace is our goal," he continued, "there can be no future without forgiveness.""[5]

Archbishop Tutu's leadership of the *Commission* exemplified the integration of faith, justice, and reconciliation, demonstrating how religious conviction can shape and guide processes of national healing.

Peter Lodberg emphasizes that, for Tutu, God is conceived not as a remote or impersonal being, but an active agent in history. Through the life and message of Jesus Christ, God is seen as one who overturns structures of injustice and restores right relations among human beings. On these grounds, Tutu regarded South Africa's transitional project of national healing and reconciliation as a paradigm for the international community: if God could bring healing and transformation in South Africa, the same divine action offered hope for other regions scarred by violence and oppression, such as the Middle East, Sri Lanka, and Sudan.[6] As P.G.J. Meiring emphasizes, Desmond Tutu will be remembered for his multifaceted leadership: his role in the anti-apartheid resistance, his fearless advocacy challenging the dominance of the white minority regime, his active participation in protests and funerals of slain activists, and his ecumenical efforts campaigning internationally for sanctions against the apartheid regime.[7] His activism before and after apartheid illustrated the United Nations' concept of *transnational justice*[8], encompassing the processes by which a society confronts past abuses to ensure accountability.

[5] *Ibidem*.

[6] Peter Lodberg, *op.cit.*, p. 265.

[7] P.G.J. Meiring, "Forgiveness, Reconciliation and Justice á la Desmond Tutu," *Acta Theologica* 42, no. 2 (2022): 86–103, p. 87.

[8] Since 2004, the United Nations has defined transitional justice as "the full range of processes and mechanisms associated with a society's attempts to come to terms with a legacy of large-scale past abuses, in order to ensure accountability, serve justice and achieve reconciliation." [https://unric.org/en/unric-library-backgrounder-transitional-justice], 27 August 2025.

His guidance, grounded in deep empathy and religious conviction, was pivotal in leading the *Commissio*n's approach.[9]

The *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* was structured around three committees: the Human Rights Violations Committee, mandated with documenting abuses; the Amnesty Committee, responsible for reviewing these submissions; and the Reparations and Rehabilitation Committee, which recommended measures of redress for victims. What distinguished the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* from many other transitional justice mechanisms was its explicit decision to place reconciliation on equal footing with truth-seeking, making healing and social cohesion central to its mandate.[10]

Moreover, Archbishop Tutu highlighted openness and transparency as defining features of the *Commission*, distinguishing it from similar bodies that operated behind closed doors, while still producing new and significant insights.[11]

The *Commission* further extended its outreach through a multimedia initiative titled *Truth Commission Special Report*. This project comprised 87 episodes that documented and broadcast testimonies from the public hearings, making the narratives of victims, witnesses, and perpetrators widely accessible. The hearings provided the faith community with a profound opportunity to confront and acknowledge wrongdoing. Archbishop Desmond Tutu articulated this moral imperative, emphasizing the centrality of truth and confession:

> The churches must say to those who know that they have a heavy burden of guilt: confess it, speak the truth, because isn't it God who says the truth shall make you free? The truth shall make you free—not so that people must be prosecuted, but so that people may be freed, so that people may be healed. Asseblief tog [Please]. God has entrusted us with the blessing of reconciliation. If we don't do it, who will? If we don't tackle it, who will?[12]

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[9] Tsholofelo Nakedi, "Transitional Justice and Peacebuilding: Is There a Role for Faith-based Actors?," *Center for the study of Violence and Reconciliation*, January 2022, [https://www.csvr.org.za/transitional-justice-and-peacebuilding-is-there-a-role-for-faith-based-actors], 27 August 2025.

[10] Richard A. Wilson, *The Politics of Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa: Legitimizing the Post-Apartheid State*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 97.

[11] *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report*, Volume 1, [https://hmcwordpress.humanities.mcmaster.ca/Truthcommissions/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/SouthAfrica.TRC_.Report-FULL.pdf], 27 August 2025.

[12] SABC, *Truth Commission Special Report*,

Through such guidance, the *Commission* underscored the role of spiritual and moral accountability in fostering reconciliation and healing in post-apartheid South Africa. Apologies for past inaction were not confined to white churches but were also offered by *Christians of all the denominations,* as well as Hindu and Muslim communities, all expressing regret for failing to do more to oppose apartheid:

> Christians of all the nominations, Jews, Muslims and Hindus asked for forgiveness as Bishops, Pastors, Rabbis, Imams and other religious leaders, one after the other confessed their sins of the past. Their passivity, even complicity, but mostly their silence over the evil system of apartheid. (…)
> In the past so-called leaders of the Hindu community, and I emphasis so-called Hindu leaders, failed hopelessly and miserably in voicing their protest against apartheid. The few who did so passively and not actively, or for that matter even militantly.[13]

Representatives of historically Black churches publicly condemned the oppression imposed on their congregations under apartheid. Several also offered apologies for failing to take stronger action against the abusive National Party government, acknowledging their moral responsibility in the broader struggle for justice.[14]

At its turn, the Catholic Church acknowledged that it had mirrored the deep racial divisions of apartheid society: "Just as apartheid divided people according to colour, so did it divide the church, our church, into a black community and a white community. There was in effect a black church and a white church."[15]

The hearings culminated with the appearance of the Dutch Reformed Church (NG Kerk), "the former white state church"[16] which had historically legitimized the system of racial segregation through selective biblical interpretation. Preceding this were testimonies from representatives of its former Black, Coloured, and Indian 'daughter' churches," whose statements provided a critical contextual framework for the NG Kerk's own

[https://sabctrc.saha.org.za/tvseries/episode75/section4/transcript2.htm], 27 August 2025.

[13] *Ibidem.*

[14] *Ibidem.*

[15] *Ibidem.*

[16] *Ibidem.*

moment of accountability. A representative admitted the church's complicity, and that they had misinstructed their congregants regarding apartheid.[17]

At the closing of the faith community hearings, Archbishop Desmond Tutu observed a striking contrast with the business sector hearings, where testimonies had largely been characterized by self-justification. In this instance, however, representatives of diverse faith traditions and Christian denominations began their testimonies from a position of moral accountability, openly acknowledging their failures and expressing heartfelt remorse. Their willingness to confess wrongdoing and to seek forgiveness profoundly shaped the atmosphere of the proceedings, fostering a spirit of humility and reconciliation that set these hearings apart:

> In stark contrast really to what have taken place in the business sector hearings where on the whole you found people in a self-justifying mode. Here, extraordinarily, virtually every single one of those who testified from the different faith communities and the different Christian denominations started off from the premise that they had done wrong. They confessed and it was heartfelt that they asked for forgiveness and you know that put a different slant on things and had a significant impact on the atmosphere that prevailed throughout the three days.[18]

Tutu's long-standing opposition to apartheid, and commitment to Christian values, gave him immense credibility and his presence reassured victims that the process had spiritual depth and reminded perpetrators that confession was a moral duty, not just a legal requirement.[19] His leadership of the *Commission* drew directly from his Christian faith and reputation as a courageous anti-apartheid cleric. His spiritual and pastoral authority gave the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* moral legitimacy that extended beyond politics. The *Commission* functioned as a space for confession, reconciliation, and forgiveness, shaped significantly by Archbishop Desmond Tutu's infusion of Christian concepts of reconciliation. [20]

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[17] *Ibidem*.

[18] *Ibidem*.

[19] *Ibidem*, p. 269.

[20] David Schalkwyk, 'Truth, Reconciliation, and Evil in South Africa', in *Truth, Reconciliation, and Evil*, ed. by Margaret Sönser Breen, Leiden: Brill, 2004, p. 5.

The *Commission* hearings reflected elements of Christian confession, with perpetrators publicly acknowledging wrongdoing and victims testifying to their suffering. Tutu emphasized that genuine reconciliation required truth-telling and forgiveness, rejecting both vengeance and silence: "True reconciliation exposes the awfulness, the abuse, the pain, the degradation, the truth. It could even sometimes make things worse. It is a risky undertaking but in the end it is worthwhile, because in the end dealing with the real situation helps to bring real healing. Spurious reconciliation can bring only spurious healing."[21] Forgiveness, he argued, was not about forgetting but about "liberation from the cycle of hatred."[22]

Tutu emphasized the distinction between retributive and restorative justice. Unlike retributive justice, which is primarily punitive and treats the state as the wronged party, restorative justice—rooted in "traditional African jurisprudence" and "the spirit of *ubuntu*"—focuses on healing relationships, "the redressing of imbalances," and rehabilitating victims of human rights abuses and those responsible in their enforcement. Thus, justice is achieved through efforts toward reconciliation, forgiveness, and the restoration of social harmony.[23] This articulation of restorative justice placed victims and perpetrators in a relational framework rather than opposing camps, reorienting the idea of justice itself away from punishment and toward the repair of human bonds. By framing justice in this way, Tutu provided the *Commission* with a moral and cultural logic that distinguished it from conventional juridical processes and made confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation meaningful within a national project of healing.[24]

Tutu's reflections highlight the extraordinary moral agency of victims, many of whom transcended trauma to embody *Ubuntu's* ethos of shared humanity.

1.2. *Ubuntu* as a Framework for Reconciliation

Central to Tutu's approach was *Ubuntu*—a philosophy of interconnected humanity. He linked this African concept to Christian theology, interpreting reconciliation as both a social and spiritual necessity. This narrative provided

[21] Desmond M. Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, Doubleday, 1999, p. 271.
[22] *Ibidem*, p. 120.
[23] *Ibidem*, p. 54.
[24] *Ibidem*.

South Africans with a language of shared destiny, countering the divisions of apartheid.

As explained by the Archbishop, *ubuntu* is "consistent with a central feature of the African *Weltsanschauung*":

> Ubuntu is very difficult to render into a Western language. It speaks of the very essence of being human. When we want to give high praise to someone we say, "Yu, u nobuntu"; "Hey, so-and-so has ubuntu." Then you are generous, you are hospitable, you are friendly and caring and compassionate. You share what you have. It is to say, "My humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in yours." We belong in a bundle of life. We say, "A person is a person through other persons." It is not, "I think therefore I am." It says rather: "I am human because I belong. I participate, I share."[25]

In their book *Made for Goodness: And Why This Makes All the Difference,* co-authored with his daughter Mpho Tutu, Archbishop Desmond Tutu emphasizes that in the South African lexicon, the pursuit of godly perfection is expressed through the rich and multifaceted concept of *ubuntu*. They describe *ubuntu* as a philosophy of human interconnectedness, emphasizing that humanity is a shared and relational condition. It articulates an ethical framework that seeks to ensure the well-being of others, where individual flourishing is not measured in isolation but by its capacity to enrich and sustain the broader community. [26]

Moreover, as Lodberg observes, Tutu integrates the African concept of *ubuntu* with the Biblical notion *of imago Dei,* grounding his theology in the relational nature of human beings. Drawing on the creation narrative, he emphasizes that humanity reflects God's fellowship, encompassing both unity and diversity. This relational anthropology underpins Tutu's resistance to apartheid, affirming that cultural and racial differences exist within the bounds of a shared human identity created by God. By recognizing this common divine origin, Tutu argues, differences become a source of mutuality rather than division, making apartheid—a system based on separation and hierarchy—a fundamental violation of God's design for human community: "Apartheid is a sin against God, because it favors separate development (as

[25] Desmond M. Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness,* p. 31.
[26] Desmond M. Tutu and Mpho Tutu, *Made for Goodness. And Why This Makes All the Difference,* Rider, 2012.

the word literally means) and not common development of a society for all South Africans."[27]

1.3. Legacy and Limitations of the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission*

Alongside its achievements, the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* also faced criticisms and limitations. As Meiring notes, Tutu's leadership was not without criticism. At times, his approach to guiding the process faced contestation, including from within the *Commission* itself. Critics argued that while he was appointed as chair of a parliamentary commission rather than a church body, his approach often carried overtly religious overtones. Thus, the inaugural Commission hearing (16–19 April 1996), which commenced with acts of worship such as hymns and prayers led by Tutu, drew criticism from some observers who contended that the overtly religious atmosphere was unsuitable for a body designed to operate as a juridical mechanism.[28]

A white opponent of the apartheid, who suffered the loss of his wife and child in a 1984 bombing, observed pointedly: "We are not all Christians," while adding "there is no feeling of forgiveness in my heart. There is no legal or constitutional duty for me to forgive."[29]

In addition, Tutu himself acknowledged both the criticisms and the limitations of the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission*. He noted that critics, "mostly though not exclusively from the white community"[30] questioned what the *Commission* had actually achieved, and in response he clarified that it aimed to contribute to a broader national project, and not to achieve full societal healing. As he outlined, the *Commission*'s mandate was to produce a comprehensive account of the gross abuses committed during the thirty-four-year period under review and to promote—though not ensure—national unity and reconciliation.[31] According to the Archbishop, the *Commission* could make only a "strategic contribution" to healing, while the enduring responsibility for reconciliation rested with all South Africans as a long-term collective endeavor.[32]

[27] Peter Lodberg, *op.cit.*, p. 267.
[28] P.G.J. Meiring, *op. cit.*, p. 90.
[29] Peter Lodberg, *op.cit.*, p. 271.
[30] Desmond M. Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, p. 164.
[31] *Ibidem*.
[32] *Ibidem*.

In addition, the integration of religion in the *Commission* reveals both its power and at times ambiguous character. As Shore and Kline observe, Christianity and religious-symbolic discourse served as a powerful truth-telling framework for victims and survivors, validated and encouraged by Archbishop Desmond Tutu and other *Commission* leaders. This discourse gave survivors a language of healing rooted in confession, forgiveness, and hope. Yet, for perpetrators seeking amnesty, the *Commission* restricted testimony to legal and forensic terms, excluding explicitly religious narratives. Such asymmetry, scholars argue, both strengthened South Africa's emerging democratic political culture, yet simultaneously contributed to the postponement of fuller social and economic reparation for survivors of human rights violations.[33] Shore and Kline further contend that religion was not peripheral but central to the South African *Truth and Reconciliation* process, describing it as "a necessary step in a peaceful transition from apartheid to democracy. Though neither a miracle nor a model, the TRC stands as an example, however flawed, of a transitional justice body that found a religious dimension of a people vital to a successful transition".[34]

Peter Lodberg highlights a deeper dimension of the *Commission*, suggesting that its very feasibility may have been linked to the fact that "most South Africans considered themselves Christians,"[35] and to the population's broad familiarity with the foundational Christian concepts it embodied.[36] Yet, he emphasizes that the authority of Tutu and other church leaders derived not solely from religious affiliation, but also from their consistent commitment to nonviolence during the anti-apartheid struggle. Lodberg highlights Tutu's awareness of the ethical complexities involved, stressing repeatedly that the *Commission* could neither compel forgiveness nor mandate reconciliation with those who had caused profound personal loss. Instead, the *Commission's* role was to provide a structured space in which truth-telling and reconciliation could occur, contingent on the willingness of the individuals involved.[37]

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[33] Megan Shore and Scott Kline, "The Ambiguous Role of Religion in the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission," in *Peace & Change* 31.3, July 2006.
[34] *Ibidem*, pp. 328–329.
[35] Peter Lodberg, *op.cit.*, p. 271.
[36] *Ibidem*.
[37] *Ibidem*.

While not without limitations and not resolving all injustices, the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* helped avert civil war, created space for truth-telling, and provided a moral framework that helped avert cycles of revenge and established a foundation for healing through shared narratives of confession and forgiveness.

Ultimately, the process demonstrated both the effectiveness and the challenges associated with faith-based communication, leaving behind a moral framework for reconciliation that continues to shape South Africa's democratic journey.

2. The Genocide in Rwanda

2.1 The Churches' Divided Response

In April 1994, Rwanda was the scene of a devastating genocides, as extremist Hutu factions slaughtered an estimated 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus in roughly one hundred days. Rwanda was one of Africa's most Christianized nations, yet amid the genocide churches became sites of violence, and religious institutions were participants in the atrocities. As documented by *African Rights*, churches and parishes became the sites of the highest civilian casualties: "'more Rwandese citizens died in churches and parishes than anywhere else. Words cannot do justice to the site and smell of Rwanda's churches during the genocide or in the aftermath of the genocide."[38] Timothy Longman points out that the churches' complicity was not limited to allowing their premises to be used for mass killings; in certain areas, members of the clergy and other church staff actively facilitated the violence by revealing the identities of Tutsi community members, and in some instances, directly taking part in the atrocities themselves.[39] Moreover, from the onset of the Rwandan genocide, churches were deliberately targeted, yet the bishops remained silent in response.[40] Some clergy, however, did condemn violence and sheltered victims, while others were complicit in massacres or failed to speak out.[41] Longman observes that even after the

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[38] African Rights, *Rwanda: Death, Despair, and Defiance*, London, 1995, p. 865.

[39] Timothy Longman, *Christianity and Genocide in Rwanda*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 23.

[40] *Ibidem*.

[41] *Ibidem*.

genocide ended, certain church personnel continued to deny or minimize the severity of the crimes committed.[42]

Although individual clergy in Rwanda displayed extraordinary courage by risking their lives to protect others, many Church leaders have conceded that the institution failed during the genocide. Amid the genocide, Rwanda's church leaders largely maintained silence. The first official response of Protestant and Catholic leaders—an ineffectual call for peace issued five weeks after the massacres had begun, when hundreds of thousands were already dead—did little to mitigate the violence, and some among them were later accused of complicity. The Church emerged from the crisis profoundly fractured, as many of its leaders fled the country after the fall of the former government.[43]

This divided response and moral failure undermined the credibility of church leadership and compromised the moral authority of the Church in post-genocide reconciliation as the Church faced the difficult task of rebuilding trust in a context where survivors associated some clergy with betrayal. Local parishes and ecumenical groups attempted to use biblical imagery of forgiveness and communal healing in reconciliation programs.[44] Initiatives such as prayer services, communal confession, and grassroots reconciliation programs sought to restore fractured relationships.

2.2. Justice and Reconciliation in Post-Genocide Rwanda

Following the Rwandan genocide, the prosecution of over 120,000 alleged perpetrators was pursued through a system comprising the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, mandated by United Nations Security Council and recognized as "the first ever international tribunal to deliver verdicts in relation to genocide, and the first to interpret the definition of genocide set forth in the 1948 Geneva Convention,"[45] as well

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[42] Timothy Longman, "Church Politics and the Genocide in Rwanda," in *Journal of Religion in Africa*, XXXI, 2, Brill, 2001, p. 181.

[43] African Rights, "Rwanda: The Protestant Churches and the Genocide: press release," *Reliefweb,* [https://reliefweb.int/report/rwanda/rwanda-protestant-churches-and-genocide-press-release], 27 August 2025.

[44] Phil Clark, *The Gacaca Courts, Post-Genocide Justice and Reconciliation in Rwanda: Justice Without Lawyers,* Cambridge:
Cambridge University Press, 2010.

[45] United Nations International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals, "The ICTR in Brief,“ [https://unictr.irmct.org/en/tribunal], 27 August 2025.

as Rwanda's national judiciary. In addition the locally administered Gacaca courts ("justice in the grass"), "an age-old Rwandan system of justice conducted by communities in open-air assemblies," [46] provided a community-based mechanism to try genocide suspects, promote truth-telling, and rebuild social cohesion.

In the years following the Rwandan genocide, church leaders have gradually acknowledged their complicity and increasingly collaborated across denominations to address societal trauma and promote peace through pastoral and community-based initiatives: "Churches have accepted that they have a responsibility to rebuild the country. It has to be done by addressing the trauma the citizens suffered. All parishes have their own mechanisms in dealing with trauma healing, and clergy are equipped with skills to respond to those who need to be counselled."[47] Ultimately, several members of the clergy were charged for their roles in the 1994 atrocities through the *International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda*, the Gacaca courts, and judicial proceedings in Belgium.

Jean d'Amour Banyanga and Kaj Björkqvist, in *The Dual Role of Religion Regarding the Rwandan 1994 Genocide: Both Instigator and Healer*, argue that religion played an ambivalent role in Rwanda—first, as a contributing factor to the genocide through churches' historical favoritism of Tutsis and discrimination against Hutus, and later as a source of support for survivors. Data from 291 Rwandans residing in Belgium indicated that survivors expected churches to engage in conflict resolution, reconciliation, and peace education, helping them recover from trauma and rebuild hope, trust, and meaning in their lives.[48] However, unlike South Africa, Rwanda's recovery was marked by suspicion toward church leaders. While some reconciliation occurred, the divided role of the churches meant that faith did not carry the same unifying power. The Church's compromised moral authority limited its capacity to serve as a credible agent of national healing.

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[46] Stephanie Nieuwoudt, "Rwanda: Church Role in Genocide Under Scrutiny", IWPR, 2006, [https://iwpr.net/global-voices/rwanda-church-role-genocide-under-scrutiny], 27 August 2025.

[47] Stephanie Nieuwoudt, *op.cit.*

[48] Jean d'Amour Banyanga, Kaj Björkqvist, "The Dual Role of Religion Regarding the Rwandan 1994 Genocide: Both Instigator and Healer," in *Pyrex Journal of African Studies and Development*, Vol 3 (1) pp. 1-12, May 2017, p. 9.

In *No Future Without Forgiveness*, Archbishop Tutu reflects critically on the Rwandan genocide, questioning why Rwandans failed to embody the ethic of *ubuntu*, choosing instead to annihilate one another in an atrocity that devastated their nation.[49] A year after the 1994 genocide, Tutu, serving as president of the *All Africa Conference of Churches*, visited Rwanda, where he was confronted with the stark realities of the violence—an unsettling illustration of the depths of human cruelty inflicted among people who had long shared common villages, language, and, in most cases, the same Christian faith. Tutu addressed survivors and political leaders, warning against the entrenched pattern of retaliatory violence that had long shaped the nation's history. He cautioned that if justice were pursued solely in retributive terms, it risked deepening ethnic divisions, with Hutu perceiving punishment as collective guilt and awaiting opportunities for revenge. Instead, he urged Rwandans to move beyond retributive justice toward restorative justice, forgiveness, and reconciliation, insisting that "without it there was no future."[50] Although some leaders expressed skepticism about whether atrocities of such scale could be forgiven, Tutu's appeal was given serious hearing, largely because South Africa's own peaceful transition had offered a living example that reconciliation, rather than vengeance, might provide a viable path forward.[51]

Conclusion

While both South Africa and Rwanda faced the challenge of reconciling societies fractured by mass violence, the role and moral authority of the churches differed markedly. In South Africa, religious leaders—particularly Archbishop Desmond Tutu—leveraged their credibility and widespread social trust to foster reconciliation through the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, integrating restorative justice with spiritual guidance. Tutu's articulation of forgiveness as a moral imperative and the principle of *ubuntu* provided a consistent framework for dialogue and relational healing. This moral clarity helped the country begin a process of reconciliation despite decades of violence and division. In contrast, in Rwanda, churches were both sites of violence and complicity, which undermined their legitimacy as agents of moral guidance and

[49] Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, p. 35.
[50] *Ibidem*.
[51] *Ibidem*.

reconciliation; survivors often viewed clergy with suspicion, limiting the effectiveness of faith-based interventions. As a result, narratives of healing existed alongside distorted accounts of the past, public trust was weakened, and efforts at reconciliation remained fragile.

The *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* of South Africa not only guided domestic healing but also offered a visible example for other post-conflict societies. It demonstrated how faith-informed, morally credible leadership can facilitate national reconciliation. South Africa's experience revealed that when religious institutions uphold ethical standards and maintain public trust, they can serve as powerful agents of dialogue, healing, and social restoration. In contrast, Rwanda illustrates how religious institutions, when fragmented and ethically compromised, risk diminishing their healing potential. The contrast also highlights the importance of restorative approaches: South Africa's *Commission* emphasized relational justice and reconciliation, whereas post-genocide Rwanda was marked by mistrust and retributive pressures that hindered recovery.

The experiences of South Africa and Rwanda underscore important implications for conflict resolution, particularly regarding the role of faith leadership. Above all, without integrity, religious figures lose the trust required to guide societies through periods of division and trauma. Moreover, reconciliation cannot be pursued in isolation—collaborative partnerships with governments, civic organizations, and even international actors are vital to sustain long-term reconciliation and prevent cycles of retaliation.

Ultimately, the experiences of South Africa and Rwanda offer guidance beyond their national contexts. These lessons remain globally relevant, providing insight for faith leaders and policymakers involved in contemporary crises—from ethnic conflict and forced migration to social and environmental challenges—where moral authority and ethical leadership are essential for sustainable reconciliation.

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STUDIA UBB. EUROPAEA, LXX, 2, 2025, 241-252

STRATEGIC ASYMMETRY IN THE TAIWAN STRAIT IN THE CONTEXT OF A TRANSACTIONAL APPROACH TO US FOREIGN POLICY

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DOI: 10.24193/subbeuropaea.2025.2.12
Published Online: 2025-12-16
Published Print: 2025-12-31

Abstract.
This article examines how a transactional approach to United States foreign policy reshapes strategic asymmetry and deterrence dynamics in the Taiwan Strait. While existing scholarship focuses primarily on military balances and operational feasibility, this study argues that the most consequential asymmetry is political rather than material. It provides a comprehensive examination of contemporary cross-strait security dynamics, focusing on the accelerated military modernization of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the evolving asymmetric defense strategy of the Republic of China (ROC), in the context of declining confidence in U.S. strategic ambiguity. By doing so, the study highlights the deepening strategic asymmetry that characterizes the current security environment. It further argues that this asymmetry has far-reaching consequences for regional stability and the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific. The erosion of confidence in long-standing U.S. strategic ambiguity raises concerns that Taiwan could be used as leverage in U.S.–China negotiations. Economically and

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politically, the United States' increasingly trade-focused policy agenda significantly affects Taiwan. The weakening of Taiwan's so-called "silicon shield" demonstrates that transactionalism fundamentally reshapes the meaning of asymmetry in the Taiwan Strait by shifting deterrence from a credibility-based model toward a conditional and negotiable one.

Keywords: China; Taiwan; deterrence; military strategy; US *transactionalism*.

INTRODUCTION

The Taiwan Strait has emerged as one of the most challenging geopolitical flashpoints of the twenty-first century, shaped by China's expanding military power, Taiwan's resistance through asymmetric defence, and the ambiguous commitments of the United States. The changing nature of cross-strait relations reflects the consequences of overlapping and divergent interpretations of history, strategy, and ideology. China's goal of national rejuvenation frames Taiwan as an integral part of its sovereign territory that cannot be negotiated. This is backed up by extensive military modernisation in air, naval, missile, cyber, and space domains. The evolving dynamics of cross-strait relations reflect a complex intersection of historical legacies, strategic calculations, and competing political identities. China's pursuit of national rejuvenation positions Taiwan as a non-negotiable component of its sovereign territory, reinforced by extensive military modernization across air, naval, missile, cyber, and space domains[1]. By contrast, Taiwan's asymmetric defense strategy, emphasizing mobility and survivability, seeks to deny China a rapid military victory. U.S. strategic ambiguity remains central to the deterrence balance, yet its credibility is increasingly contested in a changing international system.

China's military pressure on Taiwan has escalated dramatically in recent years, with large-scale air and naval drills and regular intrusions into Taiwan's air defence identification zone (ADIZ). These manoeuvres demonstrate Beijing's determination to deter Taiwanese independence and assert control over the Taiwan Strait.[2] These manoeuvres, which notably coincided with the inauguration of Taiwan's new president, Lai Ching-te, underscore Beijing's

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[1] See Richard Bush, *At Cross Purposes: U.S.–Taiwan Relations Since 1942*, Armonk, New York, M.E. Sharpe, 2004, p. 57.

[2] M. Taylor Fravel, *Active Defense: China's Military Strategy Since 1949*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2019, p. 214.

enduring objective of reunification with Taiwan. They function simultaneously as instruments of military deterrence and political coercion. Such developments contribute to a progressively unstable security climate in East Asia, challenging established international norms and eliciting heightened concern from both regional stakeholders and the broader international community.

Taiwan's defence policy emphasises the necessity of resilience and the capacity to impose enormous costs on any invading force, so deterring future aggression. The island's military modernisation initiatives are bolstered by strategic ties and defence cooperation with other countries, notably the US.[3]

As such, Taiwan’s defense strategy has increasingly centered on asymmetric warfare, leveraging its geography to impose high operational costs on any invading force. The Overall Defense Concept (ODC) prioritizes survivability, rapid dispersal, and the deployment of mobile, concealed missile systems. While Taiwan cannot match China’s military scale, it seeks to delay or deny a successful invasion through technology, layered defenses, and broader civilian mobilization. However, implementation of these reforms has been hindered by institutional resistance, entrenched service-branch preferences, and budgetary constraints, raising doubts about the overall credibility of Taiwan’s deterrent posture. Some analysts argue that although Taiwan’s capabilities are improving, their current scale may still be insufficient to deter a determined adversary—particularly one willing to absorb substantial costs for political or ideological objectives.[4]

The article asks how a transactional US foreign policy alters strategic asymmetry and deterrence stability in the Taiwan Strait. It argues that transactionalism transforms deterrence from a credibility-based commitment into a conditional and negotiable arrangement, privileging actors with greater cost tolerance and longer time horizons. In the Taiwan Strait, this structural shift advantages China, imposes disproportionate risk on Taiwan, and converts strategic ambiguity from a stabilizing device into a source of instability. The result is a deterrence environment increasingly vulnerable to coercion, misperception, and escalation.

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[3] Oriana Skylar Mastro, The Taiwan Temptation, *Foreign Affairs*, no. 4, 2021, pp. 38–40.

[4] Heo Jaichul, Twenty Years of One Country Two Systems in China: Evaluation and Future Prospects, *Korea Institute for International Economic Policy*, 2021.

MILITARY ASYMMETRY BETWEN CHINA AND TAIWAN

The military balance across the Taiwan Strait is defined by a pronounced disparity in size, resources, and capabilities between PRC and ROC. China's armed forces, the People's Liberation Army (PLA), have undergone extensive modernisation over the past two decades, transforming into one of the world's most formidable military forces. These reforms include the development of a blue-water navy, advanced missile systems, fifth-generation aircraft such as the J-20 stealth fighter, and enhanced space and cyber warfare capacities. The PLA Rocket Force has strengthened China's anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) posture by targeting key U.S. and allied facilities across the Western Pacific.[5]

Taiwan's military, though professional and technologically capable, remains significantly smaller and more limited in scope. In response, Taiwan has adopted an asymmetric defence strategy that prioritises mobility, survivability, and precision over matching the PLA conventionally. This approach emphasises the acquisition of anti-ship cruise missiles (including the Hsiung Feng series), mobile coastal-defence platforms, smaller and more agile naval vessels, and an integrated air-defence network.[6] Taiwan's Overall Defence Concept (ODC), developed in recent years, seeks to exploit Taiwan's geography and the operational challenges inherent in amphibious warfare to make any invasion prohibitively costly for Beijing.[7]

Strategically, both sides interpret military strength not solely in terms of deterrence but within broader national objectives. Military pressure on Taiwan is integral to Beijing's reunification strategy, which incorporates coercive signalling, psychological operations, and diplomatic marginalisation. Chinese defence white papers repeatedly stress that resolving the "Taiwan question" is essential to national rejuvenation, reflecting both ideological priorities and strategic imperatives.[8]

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[5] International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), *The Military Balance 2023*. https://www.iiss.org/publications/the-military-balance/the-military-balance-2023/

[6] R.C. Bush, *op. cit.*

[7] See Ministry of National Defense of ROC, Ministry of National Defense of ROC, https://www.mnd.gov.tw

[8] The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, White paper of Information Office of the State Council of the PRC. http://english.scio.gov.cn/whitepapers/node_7247532.html

Taiwan, in contrast, frames military preparedness as essential to defending its democratic identity and sovereignty. Its government has increased domestic arms production, strengthened civil-military resilience, and deepened security cooperation with partners such as the United States and Japan. Taiwan's emphasis on deterrence-by-denial—rather than deterrence-by-punishment—reflects both its geopolitical constraints and the need to maintain credibility without provoking escalation.[9]

This asymmetry in power has created a fragile equilibrium in which miscalculation could quickly spark conflict. Existing literature on cross-Strait deterrence highlights the volatility of this balance, driven by China's accelerating military modernisation, Taiwan's attempts at strategic hedging, and uncertainty regarding the reliability of external intervention.[10]

Since 1979, when the United States and the PRC normalized bilateral relations, cross-Strait stability has been maintained by a set of implicit understandings rooted in the "one China" framework.[11] Deterring Beijing requires convincing Chinese leaders that the costs of conquering Taiwan outweigh the benefits.[12] Deterrence depends on severity and credibility.[13]

During the Cold War, U.S. deterrence relied on overwhelming conventional superiority and treaty obligations to Taiwan.[14] Today, China holds local military advantages, and questions remain over U.S. willingness to escalate, especially given China's nuclear second-strike capability.[15]

China's growing military capabilities do not merely alter the operational balance across the Strait; they function as instruments of political leverage by inflating the anticipated costs of third-party intervention. Under conditions of transactional deterrence, such cost inflation carries disproportionate strategic weight. When commitments are framed as conditional, rising intervention costs

[9] The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, *loc. cit.*

[10] Koga Kei, A New Strategic Minilateralism in the Indo-Pacific, *Asia Policy*, vol. 17, no. 4, 2022, pp. 27–34. *JSTOR*, https://www.jstor.org/stable/27254590.

[11] Crisis Group, *Preventing War in the Taiwan Strait*, 2023, https://www.crisisgroup.org

[12] Mike Sweeney, *Why a Taiwan Conflict Could Go Nuclear*, Defense Priorities, 2024, https://www.defensepriorities.org/

[13] Jared M. McKinney & Peter Harris, Broken Nest: Deterring China from Invading Taiwan, *Parameters*, vol. 51, no. 4, pp. 23–36, 2021, U.S. Army War College Press.

[14] *Ibidem*.

[15] *Ibidem*.

undermine credibility more rapidly than under alliance-based deterrence. Military asymmetry thus translates directly into political asymmetry by reshaping expectations of external involvement.

The United States faces structural challenges in extended deterrence, especially against a nuclear-armed peer competitor.[16] Although the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) provides a framework, it does not guarantee U.S. military intervention. [17] Some argue for strategic clarity, though such a shift is contested.[18] Because the U.S. does not recognise Taiwan as a sovereign state, it cannot enter a mutual defence treaty or deploy permanent forces on the island without provoking China.

Deterrence-by-denial is also strained. China's Joint Sword–2024A[19] drills demonstrated its ability to encircle and pressure Taiwan militarily.[20] Some analysts argue the U.S. may need to shift toward punishment-based deterrence.[21] China is no longer deterred as in earlier decades due to its modernised military.

The effectiveness of denial is hard to measure because deterrence success depends on adversary perception. Cost-imposition methods may also fail if Beijing is willing to pay the price. Will-based deterrence seeks instead to reduce Beijing's motivation to use force.

Taiwan's global importance in semiconductor supply chains means an invasion would trigger strong international economic retaliation. Understanding the shifting status quo is crucial. Beijing has increasingly challenged existing norms, while Taiwan's political posture evolves under President Lai Ching-te.

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[16] U.S. Department of Homeland Security, *National Infrastructure Protection Plan: Partnering for Critical Infrastructure Security and Resilience*, 2013.

[17] U.S. Congressional Research Service, *Extended Deterrence and Taiwan*, CRS, IF12481, 2024. Available at: https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF12481.

[18] *Ibidem*.

[19] Global Taiwan Institute, The PLA's Inauguration Gift to President Lai: The Joint Sword–2024A Exercise", *Global Taiwan Institute*, June 2024.
https://globaltaiwan.org/2024/06/the-plas-inauguration-gift-to-president-lai-the-joint-sword-2024a-exercise/

[20] *Ibidem*.

[21] Chee-Hann Wu, Without Punishment, China Cannot Be Deterred, *Global Taiwan Institute*, 2024. available at: https://globaltaiwan.org

TRANSACTIONALISM IN THE CASE OF ASYMMETRY BETWEEN CHINA AND TAIWAN

China's military modernisation represents one of the most comprehensive force transformations in modern history. Facing overwhelming conventional asymmetry, Taiwan has adopted a deterrence-by-denial strategy based on survivability and societal resilience. China enjoys overwhelming advantages in population, industrial capacity, and military resources. The modernization of the People's Liberation Army has focused on missile forces, airpower, and naval capabilities designed to overwhelm Taiwan and deter U.S. intervention. Taiwan faces structural constraints in manpower, strategic depth, and sustainment. This material asymmetry is likely to widen over time, reinforcing China's confidence in its long-term position. Taiwan's island geography provides defensive advantages that can be exploited through denial strategies.

The most consequential asymmetry may be political rather than material. For China, Taiwan is framed as a core sovereignty issue tied to regime legitimacy.[22] For the United States, Taiwan is strategically important but not existential.[23] Transactionalism views alliances as conditional bargains rather than enduring commitments.[24] While realism recognizes the logic of avoiding overextension, extended deterrence depends on adversaries believing commitments are durable and costly to abandon. Fearon argues that costly signals enhance credibility. [25] Transactional approaches reduce perceived sunk costs by framing support as negotiable, thereby weakening deterrence. In the Taiwan Strait, this creates ambiguity not about U.S. capabilities but about willingness.

For Beijing, transactionalism may encourage gray-zone coercion and limited escalation. For Taiwan, it may encourage greater self-reliance but also incentivize symbolic arms purchases to secure political reassurance, potentially undermining true asymmetry. As such, deterrence failure often results from misperception rather than irrationality. Transactionalism

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[22] Jarrod Hayes, Fit for Purpose? 'One China' Policy and Security in Sino-American Relations, *European Journal of International Security* 9, no. 1, 2024, 1–23.

[23] David C. Kang, What Does China Want?, *International Security* 50, no. 1, 2025, 46–82.

[24] Glenn H. Snyder, *op. cit.*

[25] Thomas C. Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1960, 35–91.

increases uncertainty during crises, compressing decision timelines and increasing the risk of rapid escalation. For the United States, credibility requires consistency and institutionalized burden-sharing. For Taiwan, asymmetric denial capabilities should be prioritized over prestige systems. For regional allies, coordination is essential to reinforce deterrence predictability.

Transactionalist approaches conceptualize commitments as conditional bargains rather than durable political obligations, such signaling weakens deterrence not necessarily through policy change, but through perception. When support is framed as conditional, adversaries discount credibility even if material capabilities remain unchanged. China exploits this uncertainty by raising the costs of intervention through missile forces, gray-zone coercion, and escalation management strategies. Taiwan, anticipating possible abandonment, must plan for worst-case scenarios, which can increase risk-taking behavior and crisis instability.[26] Fearon's framework underscores that credibility is enhanced through costly signals and sunk costs that "tie hands," rendering commitments politically expensive to abandon.[27]

In other words, transactionalism alters deterrence not by reducing American capabilities, but by reshaping adversary perceptions of willingness. Fearon's[28] distinction between sunk costs and tying-hands mechanisms highlights how credibility depends on political costs that constrain future choices. Transactional signaling weakens both mechanisms by presenting security commitments as revisable bargains rather than durable obligations. In the Taiwan Strait, this creates ambiguity not about U.S. power, but about the political price Washington is prepared to pay.

Taiwan's so-called "silicon shield" is often presented as a substitute source of deterrence, premised on the economic disruption that conflict would impose on major powers. Yet economic centrality alone does not generate credible security guarantees. Under transactional logic, economic value becomes a tradable asset rather than a binding strategic constraint. Rather than reinforcing deterrence, Taiwan's semiconductor dominance may invite strategic testing of whether market disruption can substitute for political resolve. In this context, the silicon shield amplifies uncertainty

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[26] *Ibidem*.

[27] James D. Fearon, Signaling Foreign Policy Interests: Tying Hands versus Sinking Costs, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 41, no. 1, 1997, 68–90.

[28] *Ibidem*.

rather than credibility.[29] Economic centrality does not automatically translate into credible security guarantees; rather, it amplifies deterrence only insofar as it reinforces expectations of sustained external commitment.[30]

Transactionalist signaling weakens this mechanism. By framing support for Taiwan as negotiable and contingent, transactional rhetoric reduces perceived sunk costs and casts doubt on whether the economic value of Taiwan's semiconductor industry would in fact compel U.S. intervention. In this context, the silicon shield may paradoxically heighten strategic uncertainty: instead of clarifying resolve, it invites adversaries to test whether economic interdependence alone can substitute for political willingness. In the Taiwan Strait, the resulting ambiguity concerns not American capabilities—which remain formidable—but the durability of U.S. commitment under conditions of escalating cost.[31]

Conclusion

Taiwan remains unbalanced in military power yet unbroken in political will and defensive resilience. In addition, strategic asymmetry in the Taiwan Strait is a durable condition. A transactional approach to U.S. foreign policy alters this asymmetry by weakening the credibility of extended deterrence. As argued in the paper, deterrence stability depends on commitments that appear costly, durable, and non-negotiable. US transactionalism risks undermining these qualities, increasing the likelihood of miscalculation and conflict in the most consequential strategic rivalry of the twenty-first century. The three actors exhibit sharply divergent time preferences. China benefits from long-term patience; the United States faces short political cycles; Taiwan confronts immediate vulnerability. Transactional signaling exacerbates these differences, increasing the risk of miscalculation as signals intended as bargaining positions are interpreted as strategic retreat. The Taiwan Strait thus illustrates a broader theoretical insight: when deterrence is priced rather than promised, the balance of resolve becomes more decisive than the balance of power. In such environments, ambiguity no longer stabilizes competition, it invites coercion.

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[29] Ian Bremmer and Mustafa Al-Rashid, The Silicon Shield, *Journal of Democracy* 31, no. 2, 2020, 144–157.

[30] Daniel W. Drezner, The Silicon Shield Is Overrated, *Foreign Affairs* 101, no. 5, 2022.

[31] Thomas J. Christensen, The Taiwan Problem: Deterrence, Credibility, and Strategic Ambiguity, *International Security* 44, no. 4, 2020.

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BOOK REVIEW

PHILIPPE RAYNAUD, *VICTOR HUGO, LA RÉVOLUTION ROMANTIQUE DE LA LIBERTÉ*, Paris, Gallimard, « L'esprit de la cité », 2024, p. 116.

Jérôme Roudier*

Philippe Raynaud est un personnage central de la vie intellectuelle française dans le domaine de la science politique et du droit. Libéral convaincu, il a publié aussi bien des essais sur l'actualité politique française (*L'extrême gauche plurielle*, Paris, Autrement, 2006 ou *Emmanuel Macron : une révolution bien tempérée*, Paris, Desclée De Brouwer, 2018) que des œuvres plus fondamentales, dirigeant avec Stéphane Rials *le Dictionnaire de philosophie politique*, PUF, 2003, proposant une comparaison des trois grandes révolutions libérales *Trois révolutions de la liberté. Angleterre, Amérique, France*, Paris, PUF, 2009 et expliquant aussi bien les institutions françaises de la Vème république (*Le juge et le philosophe : Essais sur le nouvel âge du droit*, Paris, Armand Colin, 2008 ; *L'esprit de la Ve République, L'histoire, le régime, le système*, Paris, Perrin, 2017) que méditant des réflexions plus liées à l'évolution politico-sociale des idées (*La laïcité : Histoire d'une singularité française*, Paris, Gallimard, 2019 ; *La politesse des Lumières: Les lois, les mœurs, les manières*, Paris, Gallimard, 2013). Une des constantes de son travail fut le retour aux grands auteurs politiques, ayant préfacé des éditions des textes politiques de Kant, Constant, Tocqueville, Kelsen… Par sa présentation de la pensée politique de Victor Hugo, il retrouve ainsi l'esprit de son travail de thèse *Max Weber et les dilemmes de la raison moderne*, Paris, PUF, 1987.

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L'étude de la pensée politique de Victor Hugo est assez souvent négligée. L'auteur est avant tout une sorte de « monstre sacré », ce qui lui a valu à la fois un respect distancié et, d'autre part, une forme de défiance. Son éclectisme politique, son humanisme volontiers proche du christianisme, sa vision d'une république tournée vers l'universel l'ont rendu finalement inassimilable pour tous les esprits de clocher qui entendent voir dans l'histoire de la littérature et de la pensée politique avant tout un système de précurseurs de leur propre idéologie. L'ampleur de l'œuvre, également, peut décourager jusqu'au chercheur le plus érudit, et particulièrement le politiste. Chez Hugo, en un sens, la politique est partout, mais elle est aussi en évolution constante et l'œuvre-fleuve ne contribue pas à permettre une synthèse aisée.

L'étude courte, vive et dynamique proposée par Philippe Raynaud est ainsi d'autant plus importante. Se repérer dans la pensée politique de ce génie littéraire français du XIXème siècle en 126 pages constitue, en soi, un outil intellectuel indispensable pour l'enseignant et l'amateur. Mais, et nous entendons l'affirmer et le répéter dans ce compte-rendu, ce petit livre va bien au-delà du simple ouvrage à visée pédagogique. Philippe Raynaud nous livre, en fait, l'essence de la vie politique française à travers la description chronologico-thématique de la figure d'un de nos plus grands écrivains. À la lecture de ce texte, on comprend à quel point, dans son mouvement même, la pensée politique de Victor Hugo fut une synthèse de celle de la France, comment elle passa du catholicisme au républicanisme en liant indissolublement les deux par son souci social. Son attachement à une liberté produite par un ordre juridique ne peut être, chez lui, séparée de la question sociale. Cet amalgame, qui fut avant tout celui d'un esprit libre et conscient des grands enjeux de son temps, le lecteur d'aujourd'hui, particulièrement s'il n'est pas français, peut s'en saisir grâce à cet ouvrage.

Philippe Raynaud, outre son avant-propos (pp. 7-8), déploie son analyse en 5 grands chapitres qui suivent chronologiquement les étapes politiques principales de son itinéraire intellectuel, à l'exception du chapitre central (à plus d'un titre) du texte, centré sur « *Les Misérables*, un livre-monde ». L'auteur indique ainsi dans le premier chapitre « Comment devient-on Victor Hugo ? » pp. 9-27 le progrès d'une éducation et d'un milieu catholique à l'élargissement intellectuel, consécutif chez Hugo à son romantisme. À la fin de cette période de formation, l'essentiel se met en place : « Le Hugo qui se rallie à la révolution de Juillet et qui triomphe avec *Hernani* est politiquement un libéral modéré, mais sa sensibilité religieuse, esthétique et sociale déborde largement celle des autres libéraux. » (pp. 26-27). L'« itinéraire d'un républicain », deuxième chapitre (pp. 28-49), montre l'articulation de cette sensibilité vers l'universel. Car plus que le régime politique, ce qui importe finalement à Victor Hugo selon Philippe Raynaud, c'est l'esprit universaliste qui doit accompagner tout individu vers une forme de perfectionnement. En ce sens, la république vient accomplir en politique ce que le christianisme a initié dans la sphère religieuse. L'échec républicain du milieu du siècle ne le détourne donc pas de l'essentiel et l'exil s'accompagne de la rédaction des « œuvres du génie » (p. 47).

Publié également dans le numéro 187 de la revue « Commentaire » d'automne 2024, le chapitre trois (pp. 50-68) « *Les Misérables*, un livre-monde », occupe donc une place doublement centrale dans l'ouvrage : « Les Misérables plaident pour une république rationaliste, qui, au-delà même de la lutte contre la misère et pour la généralisation du bien-être, vise l'amélioration morale de l'humanité. […] Cette doctrine repose par ailleurs sur une religion post-chrétienne qui ne se veut pas anti-chrétienne et qui s'efforce de repenser les relations entre la puissance de Dieu et l'individu en maximisant l'importance de la liberté. » (p. 65) Le retour d'Hugo en France, salué par la République malgré ses débuts troublés au chapitre quatre « Hugo en république », (pp. 69-82) permet à l'écrivain de méditer, en conclusion de son œuvre, sur sens profond de l'épopée révolutionnaire au chapitre cinq, « derniers feux » (pp. 83-108) : « La théologie progressiste de Hugo est au centre de sa vision politique qui, comme on le voyait déjà dans le projet de préface des *Misérables*, récuse conjointement l'héritage des religions passées et le matérialisme sans cœur de l'athéisme moderne » (p. 85).

En conclusion, il faudrait citer tout le texte de Philippe Raynaud tant sa concision est à la fois éclairante, suggestive et restitue avec finesse la pensée politique d'un des plus grands écrivains français, dont le succès populaire et la dimension sociale sans idéologie furent à l'origine d'une certaine mécompréhension voire d'une forme de désaffection. L'immense mérite de ce livre consiste, avec son érudition proprement sidérante, à redonner vie à cette pensée. Hugo ne fut certes pas un théoricien politique de premier plan ni un philosophe des idées. Romantique, il fit pénétrer le cœur dans un espace politique où la république risquait de faire dominer une raison impavide et trop abstraite. Pour cela, la littérature était évidemment un moyen commode et adéquat.

Ce livre de Philippe Raynaud indique, selon nous, deux directions suggestives en conclusion. D'une part, l'histoire des idées politiques, dans son rationalisme immanent, ne doit pas oublier la part de vécu du politique, son lien avec la sensibilité individuelle. Pour cela, la lecture et l'étude de l'art peuvent et doivent compléter le récit des théories. Le sentiment, toujours de l'ordre du vécu et difficilement communicable, doit trouver sa place dans les études politiques car il appartient à la vie politique. D'autre part, la figure de Victor Hugo restituée par Philippe Raynaud, par son immense tension vers l'humanité, permet de comprendre ce que la république française a voulu être et comment elle se perçoit. À travers le républicanisme universaliste de Victor Hugo, on entend celui de Jules Ferry et, s'il mena également à un colonialisme contradictoire avec lui-même car l'enfer est pavé de bonnes intentions, il ne doit pas obérer que l'effort vers plus d'humanité constitue, pour Hugo et bien d'autres, le fond d'où seule peut surgir la grandeur morale et politique de l'individu. À cet égard et pour toutes ses immenses qualités, ce livre est l'un des plus précieux que l'actualité intellectuelle française ait produit ces dernières années.

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