Friend or Foe?

A Realist Perspective on Alliance Formation in the Central African Republic

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Abstract

In 2012, the Central African Republic (CAR) saw the beginning of what has been described as a civil war based on religion between two alliances: the primarily Muslim Séléka versus the primarily Christian anti-Balaka. These alliances have since fractionalized and reorganized into new alliances, some across the original religious divisions. In this thesis, I therefore explore the following research question: *How can we explain shifting alliances between warring groups in the Central African Republic?* To answer this, I develop seven hypotheses based on the international relations theory of neorealism. The hypotheses offer different explanations as to why and how the armed groups in CAR create alliances. To gather data for this primarily theory testing thesis, I adopt a twofold qualitative approach: Document analysis and semi-structured interviews. The main part of the analysis ranges from 2012 to 2018 and focuses on the groups that created and eventually fractionalized from Séléka and anti-Balaka. My results suggest that religion played a minimal role when it came to the forming of alliances but became increasingly important as a tool to justify violence towards civilians. The two most common ways of creating alliances in CAR are either to balance the opponent by allying with weaker actors, or to bandwagon to what is perceived to be the strongest actor. Most alliances in CAR are created with the motivation of potential gains, but there are also a few instances where security is the primary motivation for alliance formation.

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Abbreviations

3R – Retour, Réclamation et Réhabilitation

APRD – Armée Populaire pour la Restauration de la Démocratie

CAR – Central African Republic

CLPC – Coordination nationale des Libérateurs du Peuple Centrafricain

CNDS – National Council on Defense and Security

CPJP – Convention des Patriotes pour la Justice et la Paix

CPSK – Patriotes pour le Salut de Kodro

DDR – Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration

DDRR – Disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation

DRC – Democratic Republic of the Congo

FACA – Forces Armées Centrafricaines

FDPC – Front Democratique du Peuple Centrafricain

FIDH – Worldwide Movement for Human Rights

FPR – Front Populaire pour le Redressement

FPRC – Front Populaire pour la Renaissance de la Centrafrique

HRW – Human Rights Watch

ICG – International Crisis Group

IPIS – International Peace Information Service

IR – International relations

KKV – King, Keohane and Verba

MICOPAX – Mission for the Consolidation of Peace in Central African Republic

MINUSCA – Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic

MISCA – International Support Mission to the Central African Republic

MLCJ – Le Mouvement des Libérateurs Centrafricains pour la Justice

MPC – Mouvement Patriotique pour la Centrafrique

NGO – Non-Governmental Organization

NSD – Norwegian Centre for Research Data

PECAR – Panel of Experts on the Central African Republic

RDR – Rassemblement Des Républicains

RJ – Révolution et Justice

RPRC – Rassemblement Patriotic pour la Réconciliation des Centrafricains

UFDR – Union des Forces Démocratiques pour le Rassemblement

UN – United Nations

UNSC – United Nations Security Council

UPC – L'Union pour la Paix en Centrafrique

1 Introduction

In 2012, the Central African Republic (CAR) saw the beginning of a conflict that up until 2018 killed more than 6800 civilians, led to 570 000 people fleeing the country and 650 000 being internally displaced and left an estimated 2.5 million people, over half the population, in dire need of assistance (UCDP, 2019; UNICEF, 2019; UNHCR, 2019). These numbers, and the little international attention the conflict received, have led the Norwegian Refugee Council to place the CAR in third place on their list of the world's most neglected displacement crises (NRC, 2019). What started as a rebellion against the sitting president, soon evolved into a full-blown civil war where neither civilians nor Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) were safe from attacks. One striking feature is that the conflict early on was defined by the media along sectarian lines based on religion (Adjovi, 2013; NYP, 2013; Welz, 2014) – a division that has been upheld (Ochab, 2018; Gulmesoff, 2019). This categorization is unsurprising, as the conflict began when the mainly Muslim rebel alliance *Séléka* rose to power in 2012 to oust the sitting President, François Bozizé. In its rise towards power, Séléka was especially brutal towards the Christian population in the country. As a consequence, by mid-2013, there was a rise of the largely Christian *anti-Balaka* self-defense movement aimed at countering the Séléka rebel alliance and protecting the Christian population. The two warring parties soon clashed, and the country experienced cycles of retaliatory violence directed at both Christian and Muslim communities. In late 2013, this spiral of violence prompted France to send 2000 armed personnel to support the African-led International Support Mission to the Central African Republic (MISCA), to help stop what was perceived as a potential genocide.

Since then, the targeting of civilians in CAR has both decreased and increased again, but the various perpetrators have largely upheld the religious justification for revenge killings. What *has* changed, on multiple occasions, are the various alliances across the different armed groups. There has also been a strong presence of fractionalization within the groups throughout the conflict, making it harder for authorities and brokers of peace to identify and engage perpetrators of violence. Alliances have emerged and dissolved, even across the defined sectarian lines of religion – challenging the common view that the conflict in CAR is driven by religion. Hence, this thesis aims at explaining the formation and fractionalization of alliances in the Central African Republic by employing a strand international relations theory.

1.1 Previous research

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, there was a marked increase in the scholarly study of civil wars. The 1994 Rwandan genocide and the 1995 Srebrenica massacre further increased interest in the ethnic aspect of civil war. A majority of these studies focused on civil war onset and the possible termination of them, rather than the within-conflict processes, which this thesis aims for. Nevertheless, civil war onset and termination is intertwined with within-conflict processes, making it relevant to review the literature. Barry Posen (Posen, 1993) wrote *The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict* in Eurasia, while Ted Gurr and Barbara Harff (1994) authored *Ethnic Conflict in World Politics*. As an answer to the heavy focus on ethnicity as an explanatory cause for civil war, Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler (2000) presented two contrasting motivations for rebellion in their defining work "Greed and Grievance in Civil War". They find that there is a strong relationship between civil war and economic growth rate, per capita income, and male secondary school enrollment. In "Ethnicity, Insurgency and Civil War", James Fearon and David Laitin (2003) agree with some of Collier and Hoeffler's conclusions but claim their theoretical framework to be "more Hobbesian than economic" (p. 76). Fearon and Laitin (2003) disagree with the underlying tone in Collier and Hoeffler (2000), which is that, if left unchecked, human beings are inherently violent – a way of seeing the world which we will further explore in the chapter on theory.

Moving on to the literature on termination of civil wars, we find defining works such as; "The Consequences of Negotiated Settlements in Civil War" by Roy Licklider (1995); "Spoiler Problems in Peace Processes" by Stephen Stedman (1997); "Ripeness: The hurting stalemate and beyond" by William Zartman (2000); and "Ending Civil Wars: A Case for Rebel Victory?" by Monica Toft (2010). Many of these writers scrutinize the methods and motivations behind negotiated settlements, as well as examine the potential problems encountered with them. Even though much work on civil war is on termination and onset, there is also mentionable work to be found on the civil war process itself. Roger Petersen (2001) wrote about how ordinary people become involved in resistance and rebellion against powerful regimes in his *Resistance and Rebellion: Lessons from Eastern Europe*, while Benjamin Valentino (2005) in his *Final Solutions: Mass Killing and Genocide in the 20th Century* found that ethnic hatreds or discrimination play a much smaller role in mass killing and genocide than was commonly assumed. In *The Logic of*

Violence in Civil War, Stathis Kalyvas (2006) challenges a conventional view that violence in civil war is irrational, and argues that violence mostly emerges among the population itself where there is a deep sense of hatred and ill will between people. Jeremy Weinstein (2007) in his *Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence* explains why some insurgencies are far more violent towards the civilian population than others, by looking at historical examples of insurgencies in Uganda, Mozambique and Peru.

In addition to the heavy focus on onset and termination of civil war, what is also apparent in much of the literature, is that scholars tend to treat civil war as a contest between two coherent unitary actors – the rebels versus the government. As such, significant alliances and divisions among the various armed groups in a civil war are often overlooked. One notable exception is the book *Alliance Formation in Civil War* by Fotini Christia. She employs a theoretical approach, alongside multiple empirical methods, both qualitative and quantitative, to shed light on warring group interactions in civil war, which she claims to be a largely understudied field (2012, p. 4). This thesis agrees with her claim of lacking studies about the interactions between armed groups in civil war, both based on conversations with researchers of civil war, as well as the obvious lack of literature on the subject. In Christia's pursuit to broaden the literature, she presents an in-depth comparison between the strikingly different civil wars of Afghanistan (1992-1998) and Bosnia Herzegovina (1992-1995). A common assumption about civil wars in countries where ethnicity and religion stand strong, is that warring groups mainly form alliances based on shared identity considerations; That Muslim groups allies with other Muslim groups, or Christian groups allies with their co-religionists and so on. Some of this thinking can be attributed to the previously mentioned civil war literature with an ethnic focus, but is further strengthened by a sensationalist driven media in the search for black and white explanations. It would therefore be easy to assume that the civil wars in the ethnically and religiously polarized Afghanistan and Bosnia Herzegovina would follow such patterns when civil war broke loose.

However, despite a high variance in structural conditions for the two civil wars, both Afghanistan and Bosnia Herzegovina experienced a high level of alliance changes and fractionalization, often across both religious and ethnic lines. Christia finds that the main reason for this, is that leaders of the armed groups were primarily motivated by a concern for victory and maximizing returns: "Each group seeks to form wartime intergroup alliances that constitute minimum winning

coalitions: alliances with enough aggregate power to win the conflict, but with as few partners as possible so that the group can maximize its share of postwar political control" (2012, p. 240). Christia's analysis relied on primary data collected over two years of fieldwork, including 135 interviews conducted in various local languages. The analysis also drew on wartime declarations, ceasefire agreements, fatwas, memoirs, archival documents and propaganda materials from the different parties involved in the conflict. The theoretical backdrop to her method is something she herself dubs a "neorealist account of group behavior in multiparty civil wars" (p. 50).

1.2 Research Question

Much of the reporting from the civil war in CAR is characterized as a conflict where Muslims kill Christians, and vice versa. However, when taking a closer look, it becomes apparent that this view is far too simple, and possibly even a contributor to spurring the conflict into a downward spiral of violence. This thesis therefore aims to follow in the footsteps of Fotini Christia and explore the more contemporary case of the multiparty civil war in the Central African Republic. Two years of fieldwork is however not feasible for this master's thesis, and neither is the number of methods she employed. Some hard choices were therefore necessary before diving into the complex matter of alliance formation. Since there is little to no quantitative data from the conflict in CAR, a natural choice of method for this introductory study is to do interviews and document analysis. As the title of the thesis suggests, I also employ the theory of realism when delving into the case of CAR. Even though Christia calls her theoretical backdrop a neorealist account, I argue that she leapfrogs over important nuances of the theory and cherry picks aspects of it, to best fit it into her expectation of the civil wars in Afghanistan and Bosnia Herzegovina. Her theoretical backdrop departs with only one of the strategies we will later explore in neorealism, namely the theory of balancing – which can be tied to a more defensive aspect of neorealism. This thesis will also bring into account the offensive strand of neorealism and explore if it holds any truth in CAR. This will be reflected in the theory chapter, as well as in the hypotheses that will be developed to guide the data collection. As such, this thesis is both inspired by, and a continuation of Christia's work. It is however also a scrutiny of the premise that one can apply neorealism on relatively small armed groups in civil war, as well as an investigation into offensive realism. On account of these objectives, the following research question thus emerges:

How can we explain shifting alliances between warring groups in the Central African Republic?

1.3 Contribution of thesis

Based on the findings in the analysis, this thesis offers implications for both policy and academic literature. To identify these emerging implications, the thesis scrutinizes the entirety of the conflict as it pertains to the armed groups. This is done by evaluating the processes of alliance formation through employment of a theory that has not before been utilized to study the CAR. Christia's (2012) contribution paves the way to applying alliance theory within civil wars, but I believe the more systematic and comprehensive use of neorealism enables us to take another step in the direction of normalizing the use of international relations theory within civil wars. Moreover, by shining light on a conflict that is 'forgotten' by international media and largely understudied by academics, I hope this thesis can be one small step in the direction of increasing attention on the deadly conflict.

The main findings in this thesis suggest that religion plays a minimal role when it comes to the forming of alliances, but that it became increasingly important as a tool to justify upheld violence towards civilians, and to recruit more soldiers. Moreover, it is found that the two most common ways of creating alliances in CAR are either to balance the opponent by allying with weaker actors, or to bandwagon to what is perceived as the strongest actor. Most alliances in CAR are created with the motivation of potential gains, but there are also a few instances where security is the primary motivation for alliance formation. A few actors in CAR are prone to working towards security through peace agreements and arms control, but the majority of armed actors continuously strives toward gaining power and achieving hegemony in the conflict-ridden country.

I believe that the findings of this thesis could contribute to reaching a resolution of the conflict in CAR, if adhered to by people trying to solve the conflict. Where the international community focuses on disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation (DDRR), I propose that a more effective approach to meet the realism-oriented armed actors in CAR would be to increase the international military presence and to fight fire with fire. Moreover, I also argue that it is important for all actors in the conflict to put aside the belief that this conflict is mainly religious in nature. To uphold the religious description only encourages the narrative upheld by leaders of the armed groups, and therefore adds fuel to the fire in the religiously justified violence carried out by all sides.

1.4 Thesis outline

This thesis will commence with a brief background on the history of CAR in chapter two, ranging from 1960 to 2012, explaining the roots of the current conflict. Chapter three is an in-depth scrutiny of the international relations theory of realism that is funneled down to neorealism, which in turn provides the structure for seven hypotheses designed to guide this thesis. Chapter four is a comprehensive walkthrough of the methods of semi-structured interviews and document analysis that have been employed in this thesis, as well as the considerations that have been made along the way to create trustworthiness. The methods chosen and hypotheses developed are then brought into the analysis in chapter five, which ranges from 2012 to 2018 and focuses on the groups that made up and came out of anti-Balaka and Séléka, with a particular focus on the latter. Chapter six concludes the thesis and is a summary of the main findings and reflections on the implications of these findings for the conflict in CAR and future research.

2 World Champion of Peace Keeping Missions

The aim of this chapter is to introduce the Central African Republic (CAR), ranging from a brief account of violent power transitions since its independence, up until the years before the latest coup d'état in 2013. As the modern name of the country reveals, it is placed more or less in the middle of Africa, neighboring Cameroon in the west; Chad in the north; Sudan and South Sudan in the east; and the Democratic Republic of Congo in the south. CAR is considered a medium-sized African country, with a population of 4.6 million people according to a 2016 estimation (WorldBank, 2019). With 80 different ethnic groups spread throughout the country, CAR is very ethnically diverse (Backiny-Yetna and Wodon, 2011). The largest groups include: Gbaya, Banda, Mandjia, Sara, Mboum, M'Baka and Yakoma (CIAfactbook, 2019). CAR's population is mainly Christian, about 50 percent Protestant and 35 percent Catholic, with a Muslim minority of 15 percent (Lombard and Carayannis, 2015b, p. 322). As will be explored, neither ethnicity nor religion has appeared to play a major role in how any of CAR's leaders have risen to power (Wohlers, 2015, p. 314).

CAR is a resource-rich country, but with its $700 in GDP per capita, it is nevertheless one of the poorest countries in the world (WorldFactbook, 2019). Moreover, due to its long list of foreign interventions aimed at hindering conflict, CAR has been given the dubious title of 'world champion of peacekeeping missions' (Lombard and Carayannis, 2015a, p. 1). How could a country end up in such poverty and recurring civil wars? The following historical account of the Central African Republic will address some of the reasons why CAR is what it is today and give a backdrop to the current conflict.

2.1 Coup on Coup (1960-2003)

Oubangui-Chari was a French colony from 1896 until 1960 when it declared independence as the Central African Republic. The newly independent country had been exploited and neglected in various ways under French colonial rule for the last 64 years, meaning CAR was in no way ready for the transition to political independence (Smith, 2015, p. 24). Nonetheless, soon after its independence in 1960, CAR was to elect its first president. Interior minister David Dacko saw his opportunity and surrounded the parliament with a group of pygmies armed with poison arrows. Along with promises of term extensions for the sitting ministers, Dacko secured the majority in parliament and became CAR's first president. Though technically not a coup d'état, since there

was no leader to overthrow, but it was nevertheless foreshadowing how the subsequent rulers would ascend to power in the years to come. President Dacko led the country down an authoritarian road and he soon found himself with dwindling support both home and abroad. Dacko therefore planned to transfer power to his friend Colonel Jean Izasmo, head of the gendarmerie. However, the national army's chief of staff, Jean-Bédel Bokassa, saw the possibility for a power grab and acted quickly before any such transition of power could occur (Smith, 2015, p. 24).

On the eve of 31 December 1965, Colonel Bokassa carried out a coup d'état, in which he literally strangled his main opponent Colonel Izasmo. President Dacko's life was spared, but several of his closest supporters were murdered in their homes. No civilians were harmed, and the new year's eve putsch was by many Central Africans welcomed as a liberation from the authoritarian rule of David Dacko (Smith, 2015, p. 26) Similar to Dacko, President Bokassa was relatively popular in his first years ruling as he commenced in an economic recovery program. However, in the 1970s CAR's economy declined due to financial mismanagement and a drop in global commodity prices, and it never properly recovered (Lombard, 2016, pp. 8-9). Coupled with the increasing megalomaniac tendencies, such as making himself president for life in 1972 and spending a full year's budget on the celebration in his crowning of Emperor of the Central African Empire in 1977 (Smith, 2015, p. 27). The misrule of Emperor Bokassa meant that the stage was set for another hostile takeover of power.

20 September 1979, the French 'Operation Barracuda' was initiated to remove the autocratic Emperor Bokassa and reinstate David Dacko as president. As Emperor Bokassa was visiting Colonel Muammar al-Gaddafi in Libya, the French-instigated coup was a bloodless affair. Demonstrations ensued, and the French army was forced to stay to ensure safety – a presence they have upheld in larger or smaller numbers until today, except for 1999 to 2003. France retook full control of CAR through supporting President Dacko with foreign aid and troops, but also by installing Lieutenant-Colonel Jean-Claude Mantion, nicknamed 'the proconsul' as closest advisor to the president. Mantion's duties made him de facto ruler of CAR for thirteen years, thus making CAR independent only on paper.

In 1981, President Dacko decided to hand power over to his friend General André Kolingba, after a near defeat in the presidential election to Ange-Félix Patassé. This time around Dacko's power transfer was successful, and President Kolingba ruled for twelve years with a watchful 'proconsul'

keeping him in line with French interests, as well as keeping him alive: In 1982, the proconsul foiled a coup attempt against President Kolingba instigated by Ange-Félix Patassé, and backed by François Bozizé (Smith, 2015, pp. 28-30). The two latter names are essential in the story of CAR to come.

In 1993, Central Africans went to the polls for the first free and fair legislative and presidential elections, supported by French President François Mitterrand. Ange-Félix Patassé was elected president of CAR after running a fierce anti-French campaign, and Mantion 'the proconsul' was recalled to France. Having been democratically elected, the new president believed he was in his right to rule as he pleased – traversing in the footsteps of his predecessors. President Patassé reorganized the army to ensure his own security, which led to three mutinies in quick succession and yet another French intervention in 1996 to restore order (Smith, 2015, p. 32). In the subsequent years, CAR went through several small armed rebellions, followed by international peacekeeping operations. A general sense of discord spread throughout the country.

In 2001, Patassé was attempted murdered in an unsuccessful coup attempt led by his former ally, François Bozizé. Seeking refuge in France, Bozizé avoided being arrested and continued to build support in exile (Smith, 2015, p. 35). In 2002, several of the African regions' leaders, especially Chad's President Idriss Déby, was fed up of President Patassé's misrule. When Patassé was abroad in 2003, Bozizé rather effortlessly claimed the presidential title by taking the capital of Bangui with a military force that was made up of seven-eighths Chadian mercenaries. These fighters served their purpose but simultaneously looted, raped and murdered along the way (Lombard and Carayannis, 2015a, p. 5). These actors would later have a crucial role in President Bozizé's fall from power. Re-entering the country after only four years gone, France sent 300 soldiers to protect the French community in CAR (Smith, 2015, p. 37). What the above walkthrough of CAR's history shows, it that there has almost become a norm in how one gains power in the country through violent means. Moreover, to stay in power in CAR, it is crucial to have both the former colonial power of France on your side, as well as African regional powers.

2.2 Different Ruler Same Ruling (2003-2012)

President Bozizé did little in terms of making the presidency a more democratic and legitimate institution in CAR. The network that benefited from his government became increasingly concentrated around Bozizé's evangelical church and family in the years to come (Lombard, 2016, p. 15). President Bozizé also gave preferred treatment to his own ethnic group Gbaya, which resides in the northwestern part of the country. Preferring one area meant neglect of other areas, and it was evident that other regions, especially the northeastern part of CAR, were of little interest to the president. The discontent following ethnic favoritism and regional neglect gave fuel to various rebel movements and community self-defense groups – which as we will see, created an increasingly unstable country (Øen, 2014, p. 10).

The next section is a list of all the relevant actors in most of President Bozizé's time of ruling. Not mentioned on this list is the Lord's Resistance Army led by Joseph Kony – an actor that has caused much harm to civilians in multiple African countries but is not relevant to this thesis. Bear in mind that many of the groups and leaders we are to explore below will become a central part of Séléka, which this thesis aims to explore.

2.2.1 Principal Actors in CAR 2003-2012

- **Forces Armées Centrafricaines (FACA)** – The national army of CAR. Not particularly strong, nor very well equipped.
- **Garde Présidentielle** (Presidential Guard) – Special military service in charge of presidential security.
- **"Ex-liberators"** refer to Chadian and CAR nationals that helped François Bozizé to power in 2003. They were promised compensation for their work, but never got it. Bozizé eventually repressed them, and many fled north to join armed groups.
- **Armée Populaire pour la Restauration de la Démocratie (APRD)** – 2005-2012: Established in the northwestern part of the country which is the birthplace of Patassé. They supported Patassé and sometimes worked as protectors of the ethnic group Sara-Kaba, other times as bandits.
- **Front Democratique du Peuple Centrafricain (FDPC)** – active beginning 2003: Created by Abdoulaye Miskine, former chief of the presidential guard of Patassé. Miskine fought Bozize´s forces when he took power in 2003. Predominantly of the ethnic group Gula.

- **Union des Forces Démocratiques pour le Rassemblement (UFDR)** – 2006-2012: Created by Michel Djotodia, Zakaria Damane and Abakar Sabone, operating in northeastern CAR. The armed group was composed of members of the Gula ethnic group, "ex-liberators", and former members of Patassé's presidential guard – all marginalized and dissatisfied with the Bozizé regime.

- **Convention des Patriotes pour la Justice et la Paix (CPJP)** – 2008-2012: Led by Abdoulaye Hissène from 2010. The group operated in northeastern CAR and emerged in response to the abuses committed by the UFDR against the ethnic Runga communities. After the former leader's death in 2010, the CPJP fractionalized creating two new movements; (1) **CPJP Fondamentale**, led by Nourredine Adam; and (2) Convention des **Patriotes pour le Salut de Kodro (CPSK)**, led by Mohamed Dhaffane.

- **Front Populaire pour le Redressement (FPR)** – 2008-2012: FPR was originally a rebel group from Chad which established itself in CAR in 2008. Led by Ali Darassa from 2010. Its combatants committed numerous abuses, justified by the marginalization of pastoral Fulani people.

(Dukhan, 2017, pp. 30-31) and (IRINnews, 2009)
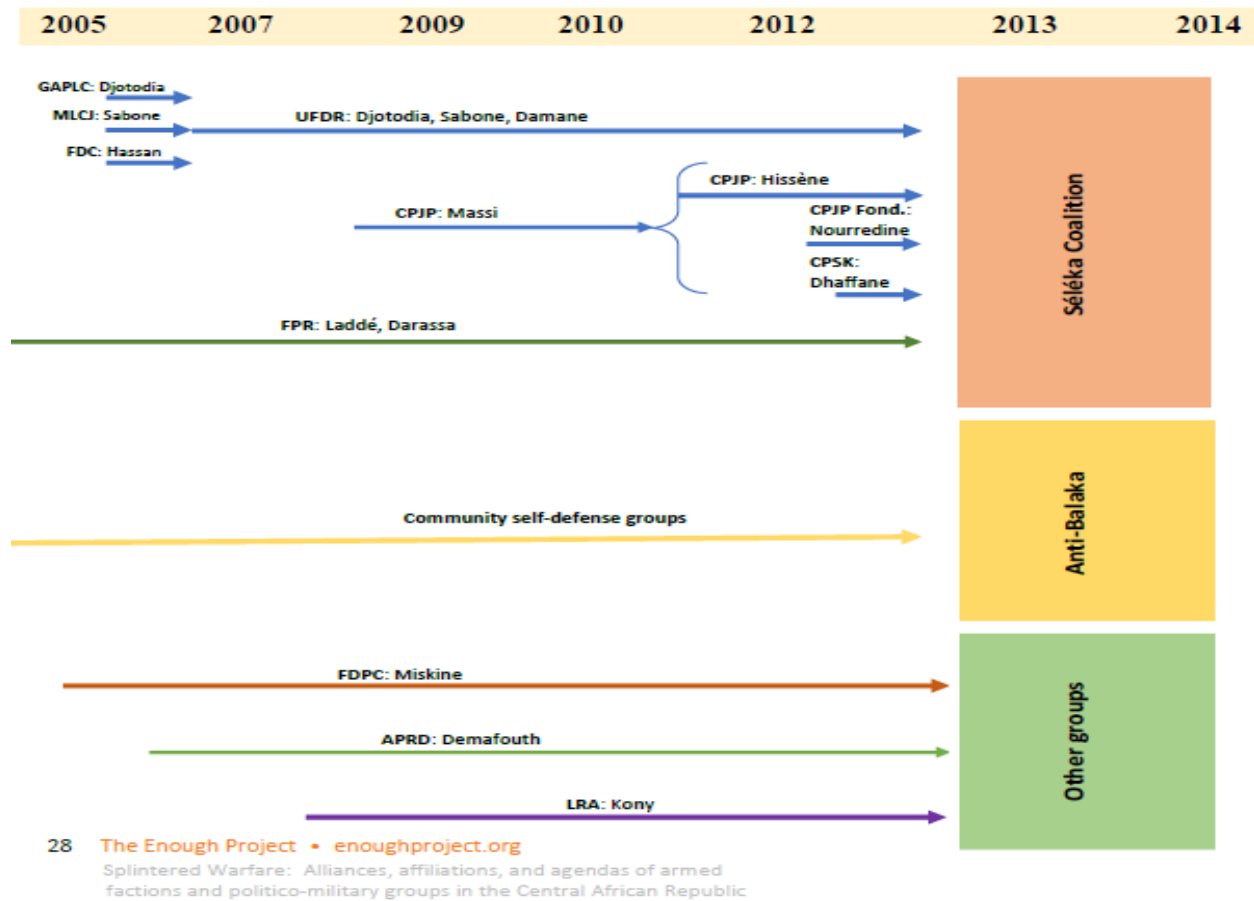
Figure 1 Rebel actors in CAR 2012-2014 (Dukhan, 2017)

2.2.2 Insurgencies and Failed Dialogues

Following the coup in 2003, President Bozizé consolidated power and secured support and recognition from nearby countries. He then held legislative and presidential elections in 2005. Former President Patassé was denied participation in the elections and Bozizé secured the presidential seat democratically. Even though democracy was re-established, Bozizé failed to strengthen the rule of law and respect for human rights, keeping the country in a political cycle of self-destructiveness. A few weeks after the election, the Patassé-supporting rebel group APRD attacked soldiers from the national army FACA in northwestern CAR. In an attempt to restore order, Bozizé sent his Presidential Guard. The clashes that followed led to more than 100 000 people displaced – both due to rebel activity, and a 'scorched earth' policy undergone by the Presidential Guard. The next insurrection was initiated by the rebel group UFDR in northeastern CAR in spring 2006. By October the same year they took Birao, an important town in the northeast.

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Supported by French forces, FACA launched a successful counteroffensive in November. UFDR attacked again in March 2007, but shortly thereafter, French bombing and 130 stationed paratroopers in Birao put a stop to further UFDR attacks. (Smith, 2015, pp. 38-41). The *Birao Peace Agreement* was signed in April 2007 between the government and UFDR and effectively ended the conflict. The agreement included an amnesty, and provisions for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former UFDR combatants into the regular army. It also provided a framework for UFDR's participation in the political realm of CAR (UN, 2007)

In January 2007, the smaller rebel group FDPC also underwent an unsuccessful rebel attack in the northwestern town of Paoua, which forced FDPC's leader Miskine to flee to Libya. The failed insurgencies in the north gathered the main stakeholders to the negotiation table, and in June 2008, representatives of the government and from the three rebel groups, FDPC, UFDR, and APRD signed a comprehensive peace agreement in Libreville, Gabon. In practical terms, this led to the passing of an amnesty law, preparations towards a demobilization, disarmament and reintegration (DDR) program, and an inclusive political dialogue where they further discussed measures towards peace (Lombard and Carayannis, 2015a, p. xxiv). Delayed elections were held in 2011, but the process was accused of being fraudulent, notably because a growing number of President Bozize's family members found their way into parliament. Furthermore, President Bozizé failed to fulfill his obligations from the 2008 Inclusive Political Dialogue: Reforms in the security sector, development assistance to outside Bangui, and judicial inquiries towards the Presidential Guard regarding their atrocities in the north (Øen, 2014, p. 11). Additionally, in the decade Bozizé ruled, development was neglected, national gross per capita income fell, and life expectancy remained low (ICG, 2013, p. 2). In other words, discontent was high, and conditions were ripe for yet another hostile takeover. Before we dive further into the forthcoming violence, we must however first develop the theory that will be employed in the analysis.

3 Theory

Realism is the longest standing conceptual framework of theory to help scholars understand international relations. In the most famous passage of Thucydides' History of the Peloponnesian war (431–404BC), Athenians sailed to the island of Melos, a Spartan colony and demanded that the Melians submit to Athenian rule. The Melians pointed out to the Greek generals that they never actually fought with the Spartans as they were a colony of Lacedaemon. They therefore asked the Greeks to leave them be as a neutral state in the Peloponnesian war, to which the Greek generals answered: "[...]since you know as well as we do that right, as the world goes, is only in question between equals in power, while the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must". *(Thucydides, 2009:ch. XVII)*

Looking at the ongoing conflict in CAR, it indeed seems that the strongest actors do as they please while the 'weak', unarmed civilians suffer immensely. Since Thucydides, numerous scholars have contributed to, and helped evolve, the large umbrella of various alternatives of realism. Today, some points are widely agreed upon by most modern scientists of the realist school: The most important actors in the international system are states, all politics are driven by power politics, and the world is evidently anarchic, thus having a powerful effect on state behavior. The implication of these principles is that all states seek power or security, and they do so through military power (Nye and Welch, 2013, pp. 68-69).

3.1 Definitions

Before we can even consider applying neorealism on the conflict in CAR, several aspects in need of discussion and definition emerge. First of all, what is power? What defines a powerful actor? Moreover, if it is true that states are the most important actors, does that mean this theory is meaningless to apply within a state? A final crucial aspect of realism is the assumption of rationality. The goal of all international relations (IR) theory is ultimately to analyze the behavior of the actors in an international system, and ideally, to predict their actions before they are acted out. Any scholar leaping into an endeavor of forecasting state behavior must thus first assume that the states in question are rational. If an actor does not do what is supposed to be the smartest move, how can one have any hope to predict such action? An assumption of rationality will therefore be explored below, as well as a definition of power and an exploration into the fruitfulness of using realism to analyze actors within a state.

3.1.1 State or Groups?

Within the first few classes of introductory political science, I was told that one of the defining aspects of realism is that it views states as the most important actors. This notion of states' importance is pervasive throughout most current curriculum on realism, as well as among the academics teaching it. Sure enough, even this thesis stated it when introducing realism. It is hence not evident at first that it is within the theoretical scope of realism to apply realism on relatively small armed groups in civil war. However, if we take a step back into the building blocks of realism, we find arguments supporting this endeavor:

> […] the contemporary connection between interest and nation state is a product of history, and is therefore bound to disappear in the course of history. Nothing in the realist position militates against the assumption that the present division of the political world into nation states will be replaced by larger units of a quite different character, more in keeping with the technical potentialities and the moral requirements of the contemporary world (Morgenthau, 1985, p. 12)

This quote from Morgenthau is originally from his defining work on realism: *Politics among nations: the struggle for power and peace,* written in 1948. It therefore seems that Morgenthau was way before his time in criticizing todays hang-up on states when employing realism to understand the world – even though he predicted nation states to be replaced by larger units of a different character, rather than the smaller entities of civil war.

With Morgenthau's words in mind, I therefore argue it is unproblematic to view CAR as a miniature world where anarchy is pervasive. The anarchic world as described by realism has the crucial characteristic that there is an absence of a central authority. What is meant by a central authority, is the presence of some sort of government which maintains a minimum level of law and order, as well as providing security for life, liberty and material possessions (Malnes, 1993, p. 28). Based on what we have investigated so far in CAR, it is not unfounded to claim that there is a lack of central authority to provide a minimum level of law, order and safety for its citizens. It is arguably therefore unproblematic to move from an anarchic world to an anarchic CAR, as well as to substitute the units of analysis from states to armed groups. In the end, my claim is that to employ the theory of neorealism to analyze smaller groups of armed individuals in a civil war is not only within the scope of the theory, but also a necessary next step to further develop the theory so that it is better suited for a world with increasingly less conventional and more irregular warfare. Perhaps it even can be seen as a modest first step of Morgenthau's prediction that nation states as

units of analysis are bound to disappear in the course of history. Whichever way one chooses to see it, I will stand by my claim that applying neorealism on armed groups in CAR is something I can do with a clear conscience and little academic backlash. However, in the exploration into various branches of realism later on, the term 'state' will be frequently used, as it is the unit of analysis used by most realist scholars.

3.1.2 Rationality

Exploring the groundwork for realism, Raino Malnes writes that "Fully rational agents have consistent goals, ground their beliefs in optimal amounts of information about available alternatives and opt for the best alternative". Based on this assumption of rationality, it therefore seems that the rationally best choice can differ from actor to actor. As the choices are based on the beliefs of the actors in question, circumstances will be decisive to reveal what is rational, and thus what the next move of an actor will be. Say that our actor is the native American Mohave tribe in the late 18th century USA. The sun has been baking every day for a month and the whole tribe is depending on rain to survive. Today, we know that there is nothing they could have done to hasten the rain, and that if immediate access to water was vital for the tribe's survival, the rational choice would be to move the whole tribe. However, as we also know today, the Mohave tribe had a firm belief in the power of rain dance (TribalDirectory, 2018), and therefore the rational choice for them would be to engage in such rituals to encourage the rain into falling.

The consequence of this train of thought is that we must strive towards revealing the current and true beliefs of the actors we wish to analyze. Only then can we begin to grasp what a rational action will be in the context of the case we are studying. The implication of this for this project is that I will attempt to move one step further towards understanding why the different armed groups choose to ally – is it due to religion, ethnicity, a wish for money and power, a combination of all or something entirely different? The answer to this question is crucially intertwined to the initial research question as it gives us an idea if realism is a suitable theory to better understand the conflict in CAR. As will be discussed in the subsequent sections, realism is primarily about acquiring either security or victory to oneself, and this is done by either being the most powerful actor in a conflict, or by being allied to such an actor. Should it be true that armed actors in CAR mainly choose alliances based on religious founding or ethnicity instead of selecting the

objectively smartest choice, the very foundation of this thesis will have to be reconsidered. To guide me in this exploration, my first hypothesis is thus put forward:

H1: In CAR, actors seek to ally with groups that have similar ethnicity or religious founding as themselves.

3.1.3 Power

Finally, we move on to the concept of power, as it is, according to realism, what ultimately decides the outcome of conflict. But what in the end is power? Robert Dahl in a much-used definition states that "A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do" (Dahl, 1957, pp. 202-203). The problem with this definition is that it is impossible to do a proper measurement of it. It is impossible for an outsider to know the inner life of B to the extent that we can say if B wanted to do this or not. If B is pressured into doing something he does not want to, it is unlikely he will admit to this to the rest of the world. Obviously, it would be clear that A is more powerful than B if A made B surrender half of its territory, but in practical terms, this is not a likely scenario. It is therefore relevant to bring in Kenneth Waltz:

> States, because they are in a self-help system, have to use their combined capabilities in order to serve their interest […] their rank depends on how they will score on all of the following items: size of population and territory, resource endowment, economic capability, military strength, political stability and competence (Waltz, 1979, p. 131)

Following in the footsteps of Waltz, Charles Glaser, a contributor to the development of defensive realism, states that "power is adequately understood as the resources available to a state for building military forces. Key elements of power include a state's wealth, population, and technological sophistication." (Glaser, 2016, p. 15). This is a definition more appropriate for measurement and therefore suitable for looking into the armed groups in CAR. To further tailor the definition to CAR, one must also determine if the groups in question have any external benefactors. I remove technological sophistication, as this on the ground level of armed groups is closely related to the wealth the group has to buy weapons. Accordingly, for this thesis, *power is understood as the resources available to a group for building military forces. This includes wealth, number of members in the group and any potential external benefactor.*

3.2 Mapping Realism – Security Seekers and Greedy States

Charles Glaser provides us with a useful mapping of the realist family from a contemporary standing point. Glaser starts with the building block for all theories of realism, namely that "the international system is anarchic" (Glaser, 2016, p. 14). As touched upon in the introduction, CAR today is in anarchy. Glaser moves to the most fundamental divide in the school of realism being the one between those scholars giving most importance to the impact of the international system, versus those whose main focus is states' motives and fundamental goals. The former, he claims to be commonly known as *structural realism* or *neorealism*, while the latter strand is by Glaser termed *motivational realism*. The states when described by neorealism, Glaser calls 'security seekers' because their main interest is to maintain sovereign control of their territory. In contrast, looking at states through motivational realism, Glaser dubs 'greedy states', because they are interested in territorial expansion even when they find themselves secure in a status quo (2016, p. 15).

3.2.1 Motivational Realism

Motivational realism argues that to understand competitive and conflictual international behavior, one must primarily investigate the nature of individual states, more specifically the greedy motives of these states. If we have a world where all major powers are security seekers, cooperation and peace are likely. If we, on the other hand, have a world where one or more major powers are greedy states, competition and war are the likely outcomes. According to Glaser, motivational realists does not need to provide an explanation for states' greedy motives (2016, p. 25). Instead, it can simply hypothesize in a state being greedy, and then explore what strategies would be rational for it to utilize faced with the international system. These characteristics of motivational realism – that one does not need to provide an explanation for states' greedy motives, and the urge for power is a universal lust in human nature that knows no limits, makes this strand of theory unfeasible if we are trying to explain the shifting alliances in CAR. As any alliance will be made up of two or more actors with some sort of motivation to enter an alliance, a theory that does not focus on such motives is consequentially deemed unfit as a theoretical backdrop for this thesis.

3.2.2 Structural Realism

Structural realism, on the other hand, places larger weight on the 'ordering principle' of the international anarchy. In the absence of a central authority, states are stimulated to compete against each other, even if they would rather prefer to avoid doing so (Walt, 2010, p. 4). The implication of this, is that the structure of the international system drives states into competing for power. Termed in Glaser's (2016) words, the states in this view are 'security seekers', as their main interest is to maintain sovereign control of their own territory. A hallmark of structural realism is the work of Kenneth Waltz and his *Theory of International Politics* (1979). In this work, all of the main assumptions that we established as key building blocks of realism are found: States are the most important actors living in an anarchic world, and they all seek power. In Waltz's structural theory, this power is primarily sought after to ensure security of the state, as the world essentially is a 'self-help' system where states must look after themselves. Waltz holds that "a self-help system is one in which those who do not help themselves, or do so less effectively than others, will fail to prosper, will lay themselves open to dangers, will suffer" (1979, p. 118). Moreover, he argues that a self-help situation is "one of high risk – of bankruptcy in the economic realm and of war in the world of free states" (1979, p. 111).

In the international self-help system, Waltz saw defining structures that have a distinct effect on the actions of the individual units fighting to stay secure. In response to his critics saying that he solely relied on structures to explain the international system, Waltz states that the "structures shape and shove. They do not determine behaviors and outcomes, not only because unit-level and structural causes interact, but also because the shaping and shoving of structures may be successfully resisted." (Keohane, 1986, p. 343). Nevertheless, implied by the self-help system discussed in the previous paragraph, resisting the 'shoving' of structures – i.e. by not ensuring the capabilities to defends one's own territory – will be at great risk of war and subjugation under the states that do adhere to these structures.

How then must states navigate to achieve security? According to Waltz, there are two basic options, both within a *theory of balancing* against a potential adversary. The first option, external balancing, is to create alliances with other actors in the international system, thus enabling the state to draw on outside resources. The second option is to do internal balancing, meaning "moves to increase economic capability, to increase military strength, to develop clever strategies" (Waltz,

1979, p. 118). Logically, balancing can then also entail weakening the adversary's efforts to create alliances or increase capabilities – at least if one believes the world is a zero-sum game where your opponent's loss is your win. However, defining to a balancing alliance is nevertheless the external part of balancing: That an actor joins the weaker side to offset the perceived power advantage of the other side.

> States, if free to choose, flock to the weaker side; for it is the stronger side that threatens them. On the weaker side, they are both more appreciated and safer, provided, of course, that the coalition the join achieves enough defensive or deterrent strength to dissuade adversaries from attacking (Waltz, 1979, p. 127)

The key alternative to Waltz's theory of balancing is what is called a *bandwagoning* alliance. In this type of alliance, an actor joins what is perceived to be the strongest state. Initially, this might seem like the most secure way to ensure victory. The problem with this type of alliance is that our actor is not instrumental to the strong state's security, leaving an ever-present potential for the strong state to turn on its ally after victory is achieved. In the end, according to structural realism, also known as neorealism, actors have two main strategies to pursue when attempting to achieve security or victory – balancing the system internally by capacity building and externally by allying with the weaker side of the conflict, or bandwagoning by allying with the stronger side of the conflict. (Glaser, 2016, pp. 19, 26). Putting this theoretical knowledge to the test, I put forward two hypotheses to explore how neorealism can explain power shifts in CAR:

H2: In CAR, actors will balance their adversaries by joining what is perceived as a weaker actor or alliance to ensure safety.

H3: In CAR, actors will bandwagon to what is perceived as the strongest actor or alliance to ensure safety.

3.2.3 Bandwagoning or Balancing for Gains

Randal Schweller (1994) challenges the simplicity of Waltz's definition of bandwagoning as joining the stronger coalition for security and balancing as allying with the weaker side for security. Instead, he claims the fundamental difference between bandwagoning and balancing to be about the cost of such behavior.

> Balancing is an extremely costly activity that most states would rather not engage in, but sometimes must to survive and protect their values […] bandwagoning rarely involves costs and is typically done in the expectation of gain. This is why Bandwagoning is more common, I believe, than Walt and Waltz suggests (Schweller, 1994, p. 93)

He agrees with Waltz that states which wish to maximize their power will bandwagon instead of balancing. However, he disputes Waltz's claim that the main concern of all states is security. Referring to classical realists which would say all states strive towards expansion and more power, Schweller holds that we need to account for the *revisionist states* that will always try to challenge the status quo (1994, pp. 86-87).

As an alternative model of explanation, Schweller divides the different states into hypothetical animals: *Lions*, *Lambs, Jackals* and *Wolves*. *Lions* are states that will pay a high cost to keep what they already possess, but only a small price to potentially increase it. The lion rules and protects the system and will either try to balance potential danger, or 'pass the buck' to another lion if it sees the possibility. Lions are thus likely to be status-quo actors. *Lambs* will only pay a small cost both to defend and extend their values. As the name indicates, these states are relatively weak in power, and in a world of predator and prey, they are prey. Strategies for lambs are either distancing from, or appeasement of potential danger, but they are also prone to bandwagoning with larger powers if it seems as there is a turning point, and the lamb can join the winning side. *Jackals* will pay a high price to defend their possessions, but an even higher price to extend their values. They are dissatisfied and partly revisionist states which will tend to be opportunistic and risk-averse. They will usually bandwagon with *wolves* to maximize gains but are also prone to bandwagoning with lions if they are winning. *Wolves* are the predators in this system. They are hungry for expansion and willing to gamble their safety to do so. According to Schweller, wolves do not bandwagon nor balance, they *are* the bandwagon (1994, pp. 101-104).

Glancing back at the background chapter, it indeed seems as some of the animals from Schweller's analogy are represented in CAR. We will thus return to this analogy in the analysis. When moving forward with my analysis I will however depart from Schweller's final claim about wolves simply being the bandwagon. My claim is that when a less powerful actor bandwagons to you, it will increase your overall strength compared to your adversary – which in the end is what balancing is all about. My claim is thus that, knowingly or not, wolves do in fact engage in balancing when they let smaller states bandwagon to them, even though it is not necessarily for security reasons.

Consequently, two more hypotheses materialize to guide the subsequent analysis of CAR. The following hypotheses are similar in form as the two previous, with the one crucial difference that they cover actors that are primarily motivated by potential gains, rather than their security.

H4: In CAR, actors will balance their adversaries by joining what is perceived as a weaker actor or alliance to maximize potential gains.

H5: In CAR, actors will bandwagon to what is perceived as the strongest actor or alliance to maximize potential gains.

3.2.4 Offensive Versus Defensive Realism

Finally, we move to the modern debate between the two sub-genres of structural realism, namely offensive and defensive realism. The main proponent of the offensive genre is structural realist John Mearsheimer. He claims Waltz to be a defensive realist and that defensive realism can be summarized in that it is unwise for states to attempt power maximization in the world, because the system will ultimately punish them if they get too much power (Mearsheimer, 2010, p. 78). This argument we do in fact recognize from the balancing alliances proposed by Waltz. However, Glaser (2016) disagrees with Mearsheimer and instead places Waltz and structural realism as the building block for both offensive and defensive realism. Glaser poses that defensive realism finds restraint and cooperation to be the best options for most of the situations that states are faced with. Moreover, that the international system does not create a tendency towards a competitive behavior – which is what Glaser ultimately claims offensive realism is all about. He also places the *security dilemma* as having a central role in defensive realism, a concept worth briefly exploring. In short, the dilemma involves two (or more) actors which are opponents of one another. The independent action of one country to increase its security, may lead to the other countries feeling less secure. The realist rational action for the other countries would then be to respond to this initial action by increasing *their* security – essentially creating an ever-growing arms race. A defensive realist would thus say that the best way to counter such an event will be through cooperative policies like arms control and unilateral restraint. An offensive realist, on the other hand, would claim such measures to be naïve and that surely the counterpart will cheat on such an agreement and exploit the situation to maximize power.

It makes good strategic sense for states to gain as much power as possible and, if the circumstances are right, to pursue hegemony. The argument is not that conquest or domination is good in itself, but instead that having overwhelming power is the best way to ensure one's own survival (Mearsheimer, 2010, p. 78)

If offensive realism is correct in its view on actors in a system, one would expect actors to pursue as much power as possible, to become the strongest player in the field and hence having the capacity to dominate other actors. The implication of this on alliance formation in CAR is that if an actor pursues such offensive measures, one would not expect that actor to willingly engage in alliances where the conceived power and hegemony of that actor is threatened. Looking at an actor following the path of a defensive realism, on the other hand, one would expect to see an actor that is willing to negotiate for peace, as well as to engage in arms control – given that the options of alliance and restraint seem credible. The offensive versus defensive realism debate drives forth my two final hypotheses on alliance formation:

H6: In CAR, actors work towards gaining power and achieving hegemony.

H7: In CAR, actors work towards security through peace agreements and arms control.

3.3 Hypotheses

The above scrutiny of realism ultimately leaves us with the seven hypotheses compiled on the next page. A few moments are due to consider before moving forward. If hypothesis one should turn out to hold an overwhelming truth to it, there will be grounds to challenge the entirety of this thesis in its endeavor to apply realism as a tool to understand how and why rebel groups in CAR allies. This because realism holds that alliance formation is primarily motivated by power, not religion and ethnicity. Hypothesis two, three, four and five are interchangeably connected and developed from core strains of realism. What strategy of allying is employed by the different actors in CAR and what motivates them to undergo such actions? Bandwagoning or balancing? Security or gains? The final two hypotheses will reflect the debate between offensive and defensive realism and how this resonates in CAR. They do not tell us anything about alliance formation in CAR but can be seen as an indicator of how the armed groups in CAR interact with each other and with the government.

Together, the seven hypotheses below will be reflected in the questions asked actors connected to CAR, as well as the approach taken when researching secondary literature for empirical evidence. I do not expect any of the hypotheses to solely explain my research question and I thus assume to find evidence supporting all of the hypotheses in some way. I do however hypothesize that religion and ethnicity have had a far lesser role than the media has portrayed it to be, and that the prospect of profit rather than security has played the key role in the forming of alliances in the Central African Republic.

H1: In CAR, actors seek to ally with groups that have similar ethnicity or religious founding as themselves.

H2: In CAR, actors will balance their adversaries by joining what is perceived as a weaker actor or alliance to ensure safety.

H3: In CAR, actors will bandwagon to what is perceived as the strongest actor or alliance to ensure safety.

H4: In CAR, actors will balance their adversaries by joining what is perceived as a weaker actor or alliance to maximize potential gains.

H5: In CAR, actors will bandwagon to what is perceived as the strongest actor or alliance to maximize potential gains.

H6: In CAR, actors work towards gaining power and achieving hegemony.

H7: In CAR, actors work towards security through peace agreements and arms control.

4 Methods

The process of creating this study of alliance formation in the Central African Republic (CAR) has presented me with both substantial and lesser choices along the way which has shaped and turned the study into the finished result you are currently reading. This chapter aims at revealing these consciously made choices, and the reasons for making them – ranging from the selection of theory, case and methodological approach, to the process of data collection, interviews and coding.

4.1 Case Selection

In *Alliance Formation in Civil Wars* (2012), Fotini Christia challenges the common perception that the civil wars in Afghanistan (1992-1998) and Bosnia Herzegovina (1992-1995) were driven by religious and ethnic motivations. I found the fact that she employed the international relations theory neorealism *within* a state intriguing and wanted to do a study in a similar fashion. George and Bennett describe the scientific approach of a case study as "a detailed examination of an aspect of a historical episode to develop or test historical explanations that may be generalizable to other events" (2005, p. 5). The first step in the process was therefore to select a case, or multiple cases. During initial descriptive research of mapping major conflict events in CAR between 2014 and 2018 done for the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment, I found a discrepancy between what the media portrayed as a religiously motivated conflict, and my own impression that the conflict was motivated by an opportunistic craving for power and profits. CAR was therefore seemingly a match to the theory I wished to explore.

At this point, I was presented with the choice between a single case study or if I should include one or more additional cases to compare with CAR. Gerring argues that "case studies may be more useful than cross-case studies when a subject is being encountered for the first time or is being considered in a fundamentally new way" (2007, p. 40). As CAR for decades largely has been neglected by the international community in terms of development and security, the academic interest in the country been limited as well. There has been relatively little academic research on CAR in general, and I have been unable to discover evidence that the current conflict in CAR has been studied through a lens of neorealism. With Gerring's words fresh in mind, and a conviction that my research was unique in nature, I therefore limited my research to the sole case of CAR. This decision was also based on the fact that I knew based on my initial research that there was

sparse data that had been collected in CAR. This meant that any relevant data for my project would have to be collected personally. A time-consuming task.

Delving deeper into the case of CAR, I had to select which units and what time period I wanted to scrutinize. Even though the thesis was not a comparative study, I still wanted to be able to see what, if anything, changed in how and why the various rebel groups in CAR allied to each other. I therefore included the formation of the two large alliances anti-Balaka and Séléka, but also their fractionalization and their realignment throughout the years. The analysis thus ranges from the end of 2012, until the end of 2018. The number of rebel groups present in CAR at different times of my study is highly fluctuating, ranging from nine to twenty. I therefore wanted to lay a particular focus on those groups that had been a part of the most clear-cut alliance Séléka from 2012 to 2013 and how they acted before, during and after this alliance. This is also due to practical reasons, since some of the smaller groups, as well as anti-Balaka, are decentralized and thus harder to find source material on. Anti-Balaka is however not neglected and has been given its own chapter of scrutiny in the analysis.

4.2 Research Question and Hypotheses

According to King, Keohane and Verba (KKV), there are two criteria which all research projects in the social sciences should satisfy: "A research project should pose a question that is "important" in the real world" (1994, p. 15), and "a research project should make a specific contribution to an identifiable scholarly literature by increasing our collective ability to construct verified scientific explanations of some aspect of the world" (ibid.). Inspired by Christia's work in Afghanistan and Bosnia-Herzegovina, I developed the following research question to guide me in my studies: *How can we explain shifting alliances between warring groups in the Central African Republic?* As already elaborated on in chapter 1.3, this research question satisfies the first criteria of KKV for social science research projects.

In chapter 1.2, I did however find Christia's theoretical walkthrough of neorealism to come up short if I was to apply it to CAR, and therefore chose to do my own examination and development of theory. My scrutiny of neorealism culminated in the seven hypotheses laid out in chapter 3.3, which I then brought with me into the process of analyzing relevant data. This self-development of the theory was also meant to satisfy the second criteria of KKV for social science research

projects. Consequentially, I conducted a deductive study. A process which Alan Bryman (2016) describes as a six-step procedure: 1) choose a theory, 2) deduce a hypothesis based on the theory, 3) collect relevant data, 4) analyze the data which makes up your findings, 5) reject or confirm your hypothesis based on the findings, and 6) if your hypothesis is rejected, revise the original theory. It is however important to note that his final step is the opposite of deduction, namely induction: to infer the implications of your findings for the theory that prompted the exercise to begin with (2016, p. 21). In the end, as can be read in the concluding chapter, the implications of this study are a series of suggestions meant to spur further research into neorealism and alliance formation in civil war.

4.3 Qualitative Research Approach

Even though many researchers of methodology find the distinction ambiguous (Bryman, 2016, p. 31; King et al., 1994, p. 5), the division between qualitative and quantitative research is often one of the first choices to be made. Quantitative research is associated with using numbers and statistical methods. It is often based on numerical measurement of a specific phenomenon (King et al., 1994, p. 3). It aims for broadness and a representative overview of general conditions. Qualitative research, on the other hand, aims for an in-depth, comprehensive understanding of specific conditions (Grønmo, 2015, p. 365). Moreover, it tends to focus on one or a small number of cases, to use in-depth analysis of historical events or interviews, to be discursive in its method, and the finished product is often a comprehensive account of some small unit or event (King et al., 1994, p. 4). I argue that qualitative research often is the first academic step when studying a specific field of interest that has not yet been studied sufficiently to contain the quantifiable data needed for quantitative studies. Due to the low academic interest in CAR, there is little quantifiable data to be used in a potential quantitative study, and my choice therefore fell on an introductory qualitative study on alliance formation between rebel groups in CAR.

4.3.1 Quality in the Qualitative Approach

A much used tool for securing the quality in social science is the application of the two criteria validity and reliability, often divided into external and internal. External reliability tells us something about the degree to which a study can be replicated by other scientists. (Bryman, 2016, p. 384). Internal reliability is defined by to what extent the indicators that make up the scale or index in your study are consistent – will a respondent's answer on one indicator be related to scores

on other indicators? (Bryman, 2016, p. 157). Validity is about "measuring what we think we are measuring" (King et al., 1994, p. 25). Internal validity therefore tells us to what degree there is a correspondence between the researcher's theoretical ideas and what he or she is actually observing. External validity refers to the degree that the findings in a study can be generalized into other social settings (Bryman, 2016, p. 384). Bryman challenges the traditional ways of measuring quality in social science when doing qualitative research. In example, much qualitative research does not include a form of measuring as suggested to be vital for validity in research by KKV. Bryman therefore presents four other criteria to measure quality in qualitative research: 1) *Credibility,* paralleling internal validity; 2) *transferability*, paralleling external validity; 3) *dependability,* paralleling reliability; and 4) *confirmability,* paralleling objectivity. Together, these criteria give us *trustworthiness* in social science (Bryman, 2016, p. 384).

Establishing *credibility* in your findings is about ensuring that the research is carried out within the principles of good practice. Since social reality is made up of different accounts from different people, establishing credibility is also about striving to include these aspects. One technique to do so is *triangulation*, which involves using more than one method or source of data when studying a social phenomenon. (Bryman, 2016, p. 386). As will be discussed, this thesis has employed two distinct methods of collecting data and collected data from different kinds of sources. This to strengthen credibility.

Since qualitative research often entails a rigorous study of a smaller group of people based on certain characteristics, the study often ends up as a unique product not necessarily easy to generalize into other social settings. Bryman therefore encourages qualitative researchers to produce a *thick description* – a rich account of the details of the object of study. The thick description works as a database for making judgments about the possible *transferability* of findings to other social environments (2016, p. 384). In this thesis, this is reflected in a detailed and rich background chapter about both its armed groups and the society as a whole, as well as a meticulous examination of the empiric evidence discovered in the analysis chapter.

For *dependability*, Bryman encourages social science researchers to keep an *audit trail* of the whole research. Why did the researcher choose this approach? Why these sources? How were sources collected, and so on. Ideally, fellow peers of the researcher work as auditors throughout every step of the research to ensure that proper procedures have been followed. (Bryman, 2016, p.

385). The audit trail for this thesis is reflected in this chapter. As for auditors, I have had fellow students and my advisors read and revise my work along the way of writing, as well as the finished product. I have received much advice and helpful criticism on how to stay within proper procedures of social science.

Even though it is not possible to achieve complete objectivity, *confirmability* is concerned with ensuring that the researcher has acted in good faith. It should be clear to the reader that the researcher has not been overtly influenced by theoretical inclinations or personal values when conducting his or her research. To ensure confirmability, Bryman suggests employing the mentioned auditors from dependability (2016, p. 386). This is exactly what I have done in planning and doing my research, as I have adhered to advice and constructive criticism given to me by fellow students and advisors who have pointed out what they have experienced as discrepancies in objectivity.

4.4 Data Collection Methods

After deciding on the qualitative approach, the next step was to find a data collection method that best fitted my needs and limitations in the case study of CAR. Grønmo (2015) argues that there are three main types of sources in social science: Actors, respondents and documents. The data collected from *actors* is obtained through direct observation of individuals or groups over time. What they say or do and how they interact with other people in the social setting they live in. Data from *respondents* is the same type of information, only that the scientist asks the relevant people questions instead of observing. An important distinction to respondents is that which Grønmo calls an *informant* – which is when the person being questioned gives similar information as a respondent, only that it is about other actors and not him or herself. The third main source is *documents*. These are material that can be analyzed to reveal relevant information about the social structures we wish to study. Also included in this category are visual or auditory sources such as videos, recordings, pictures etc. (Grønmo, 2015, p. 134).

Ideally, my study would include a field trip where I could collect data directly from actors and respondents currently experiencing the case I am studying. However, because CAR is currently in civil war and my French is lacking, field research was not feasible. Since my units of analysis are rebel groups, it was impossible for me to get in touch with respondents affiliated with these groups

when I could not travel to the country. In the end, I therefore decided on two main sources of information: the primary source of informants and the secondary source of documents. This to ensure a triangulation of my sources and thus strengthen the credibility of my research.

4.4.1 Selecting informants

Fairly early in the process, I realized that it would be difficult to acquire a large number of informants due to the ongoing civil war. Initially, I wanted to get in touch with locally based informants, but this too turned out to be more difficult than expected. There are two reasons why: 1) Internet is awfully unstable in the country, meaning a potential Skype or WhatsApp interview would prove difficult. 2) The contacts I had in Norway and abroad simply did not know any people that would be relevant for me to speak to. The choice hence fell on people I judged to have been closest to the conflict without directly participating, namely scholars and people affiliated with non-governmental organizations (NGO). Even this proved to be problematic, as I first got in touch with the Norwegian Refugee Council where the relevant person did not want to participate because she believed the project to be too political. After much back and forth with potential candidates, I eventually interviewed four relevant people: two scholars and two employees in an NGO operating in CAR.

The NGO-workers wished to be anonymous for the safety of the people still working in the country for this organization. One of them was in Bangui in 2013/2014, then in Bangassou later in 2014 and in 2017. This person is referred to as NGO1 in the analysis. The other one was a senior figure in the NGO's mission and spent four months in Bambari in 2015 and eleven months in Bangui in 2017. Throughout her stay, she had many meetings with the leader of UPC, Ali Darassa and the leader of a local anti-Balaka in Bambari, Gaëtan Boade. This person is referred to as NGO2 in the analysis. Since both NGO-workers stayed in multiple places in CAR, this increases their credibility, as it can be seen as sort of a triangulation of their knowledge about the situation in CAR.

The scholars I interviewed are both well known for their work on CAR. The first one is Nathalia Dukhan, a field researcher and analyst for the Enough Project and the Sentry, on the Central African Republic. Through these organizations, Dukhan has published detailed reports about the various rebel groups in CAR, as well as on their many alliances. The second scholar I interviewed was Louisa Lombard, assistant professor in anthropology at the University of Yale, and author of

The State of Rebellion / Violence and Intervention in the Central African Republic (2016), as well as editor of *Making Sense of the Central African Republic (2015a).*

4.4.2 Semi-structured interviews

In preparation for the interviews, I had to decide on which method I wished to utilize. There are two main types of interviews in qualitative research, unstructured and semi-structured interviews. In an unstructured interview, the scientist will typically have a list of issues or topics that are to be covered and the style of questioning is usually informal. Both phrasing and sequence of questions will vary from interview to interview. The semi-structured interview, on the other hand, primarily diverges in that it has an interview guide with set questions to structure the interview. The semi-structured interview does however still give leeway to vary the sequence of the questions, ask follow-up questions based on the respondent's answers, as well as to adapt the questions to the respondent's background (Bryman, 2016, p. 201). One of my concerns was that I wanted to be able to compare answers from the different informants. The interview guide that comes with the semi-structured interview was of great help in this. Even though I varied some of the questions based on whom I was talking to, the overall data was comparable across the different informants.

All my interviews were done through the mobile app WhatsApp, as my informants were spread out across the world. I began each of my interviews by explaining the topic of my study so to lay a groundwork for a common vocabulary throughout the interview, as well as keeping the informants on the topic I wished to talk about. I did however not tell the interviewees about my hypotheses, because I did not want to influence their opinions in what they answered. The interview guide structured the conversation so that I rather systematically could get through the different hypotheses. The guide also helped me prepare questions, so that I mitigated the risk of asking leading questions, which is a potential risk when collecting data through interviews (Grønmo, 2015, p. 173). Leading questions could create a confirmation bias in my data, which in turn could decrease the credibility of the thesis (Hellevik, 2016, p. 349).

When informants had already answered my question in a previous segment, the flexibility of semi-structured interviews gave me leeway to forego some questions, or to ask them in a different form than originally planned. To maintain the flow of the conversation, I did not take notes during the interviews. Instead, I used a recording device and then transcribed the entirety of the interview afterward. This method also ensures the transferability of my study, as it permits for other

researchers to employ the exact same sources as I did. One of the informants did however not want to be recorded and I therefore had to take notes for that specific interview. To make sure I did not misinterpret any statements I sent my notes to this individual, and with a few minor adjustments, she approved them.

4.4.3 Document Analysis

Document analysis is a systematic procedure for evaluating or reviewing documents. Either in the form of printed documents or electronic material, ranging from state documents to advertisements. The procedure of document analysis entails finding, selecting, appraising and synthesizing the data found in documents. Such data includes excerpts, quotations or entire passages, which in turn are organized into major themes, categories and case examples. Document analysis is often used in combination with other qualitative research methods, such as interviews. This is done to ensure the triangulation of sources and in turn strengthen credibility (Bowen, 2009, pp. 27-28). As Bowen echoes what Bryman deems necessary for credibility in social research, I chose document analysis in addition to interviews to secure trustworthiness in my project. Moreover, even though this project is not conducting a rigid qualitative content analysis, it is still important to assess the documents in a way that creates confidence in the process. Bryman presents four criteria that are to be reflected on when determining if the documents in question can be trusted. They are authenticity, credibility, representativeness, and meaning (Bryman, 2016, p. 546). Throughout the process of selecting secondary sources, I thus had these four criteria in the back of my head and weighed them against each other to ensure that I chose sources that could be trusted.

I collected a wide selection of sources. This includes book chapters, NGO reports and letters, as well as reports from a research institute. By combining different sources on the same issue, I mitigate the potential bias that lies within each of the authors of different types of sources. In example, a researcher for an NGO might not be as concerned about source criticism as a scholar, perhaps compromising some of the credibility of the source, but he or she might have better access on the ground than the academic, strengthening the representativeness. My main source is nevertheless the lengthy reports from the Panel of Experts on the Central African Republic (PECAR) to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). The panel was established in 2013 and has since then sent a bi-annual report to the UNSC covering a large list of topics related to the conflict in CAR. Since the first report came in 2014 and the latest report at the end of 2018, they

together cover most of the period I am investigating. For the initial period of the conflict, I also found the report from the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment about CAR to be helpful in describing the history about the formation of Séléka and anti-Balaka.

For NGO reports, I found the *Splintered Warfare* I and II by Nathalia Dukhan for the Enough Project especially useful as it investigates the various rebel groups and factions. Coupled with the questions I was able to ask her, it yielded good data for my study. I also found useful information in reports from other NGO's including; the International Crisis Group (ICG); the Sentry; Human Rights Watch (HRW); and Worldwide Movement for Human Rights (FIDH). The mentioned books of Louisa Lombard (2015a; 2016) also gave good material, but because of their publication date, the usefulness ends at around year 2015 – as such yielding a good overlap with the reports from the panel of experts to the UNSC. I also investigated research reports from the International Peace Information Service (IPIS), which gave me good insight into, and access to their map of armed groups' roadblocks and geographical control of areas in CAR.

4.4.4 Coding

The final step of the process was to apply my hypotheses to the sources I had selected, to extract the useful information for my analysis. This was done with the help of the qualitative data analysis program NVivo 12, which is computer software designed for aiding qualitative researchers working with text-based or multimedia information in doing deep level analysis on small to large volumes of data (McNiff, 2016). To be able to code the interviews as rigidly as the written documents, I also used the transcription function in NVivo and then applied the same codes to the transcribed interviews.

Having a deductive approach, I created seven nodes in the program which mirrored my hypotheses as laid out in chapter 3.3. I coded the material in three steps. The first step was rough coding where I read through all my source material and placed all relevant information into the corresponding node. Most qualitative research contains some form of interpretation, thus leaving me with the risk of misinterpreting the data. To avoid confirmation bias caused by cherry-picking, I therefore strived to be objective, but simultaneously lenient in my selection of data. As a consequence, I soon realized there was relevant information which did not fit directly into the pre-defined nodes, so I had to create five additional nodes for general information. These nodes were divided into: External support to armed groups, anti-Balaka, facts and quotes, fractionalization and historic

events. These eleven nodes were then employed to code all primary and secondary sources. The second step involved refinement of the data found, where I went through all information discovered in step one and deleted excess information or moved misplaced material. The third step arose as a necessity when I was starting to write my analysis. Even after having refined the data in the two previous steps, I still had hundreds of snippets of information which were too chaotic to analyze or to write a reader-friendly analysis chapter. To mitigate this predicament, I decided to structure the planned analysis into a chronologic retelling of the conflict divided into phases based on larger events relating to alliance formation and fractionalization in CAR. Consequentially I had to create seven sub-nodes to each one of the existing nodes, which in turn allowed me to place information from all the original nodes into a sub-node of a year between 2012 to 2018 – leaving me with a manageable amount of data in each original node for each year of the conflict. This measure helped me in triangulating sources since it made it easier to compare data from different sources, thus strengthening the credibility of the coding process. Moreover, it also gave me an introductory overview into which of my hypotheses had the most explanatory power for each phase, as some years turned out to have far more data to a node than others.

4.5 Research ethics

The most important aspect of doing research in social science is to stay within ethical lines of conduct when working with human beings and their personal information. To not do so would destroy any credibility of the study. Those who are asked to participate in a study should be informed about the purpose and approach of this particular study. They have to consent to be a part of it and they should be able to withdraw at any point. Participation in the study should not create any physical or psychological harm to participants, and all personal information about participants should be handled confidentially (Grønmo, 2015, p. 33). My primary way of adhering to these principles was to get an approval from the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD). With their guidance, I created an information letter about the project, as well as how I would handle the participants' personal information within Norwegian law. The document also had a form of consent that the informants signed. The consent opened up for being anonymous – which two of the informants wished to, and to not be recorded – which one of the informants did not wish to. The importance of the information letter becomes apparent in the case of an employee at NRC. After being given an introductory consent via email, she changed her mind after reading the

information letter. This is preferable to withdrawal during the interview. I also chose to not use Skype or phones for the interviews, since WhatsApp has encryption, which gives extra safety for the informants and their personal information.

4.6 Limitations

The main limitations of this research project have been lacking access to information. An ideal situation for me would be to go to CAR and interview both regular soldiers and leaders of the various rebel groups. This was as mentioned not a viable option due to security reasons. I would however argue that it is not necessarily so that an interview with a rebel leader would yield good data revealing the true intentions of these leaders. As will be shown in the analysis, many of these rebel leaders seem to employ *ambiguity* – "secrecy surrounding criminal intentions, whilst mobilizing necessary support" (Beadle and Kjeksrud, 2014, p. 17). Following up on this aspect, it is generally hard to define the true intentions of human beings. In the end, my analysis and discussion are therefore grounded in my subjective perception of what the words and actions of the units studied actually means. This is where the interviews enter to mitigate this limitation, since the credibility of my claims are strengthened through triangulation of sources – once again highlighting the importance of not asking leading questions in my interviews.

The chaotic situation of ever-changing alliances and fractionalizations is also an aspect I want to emphasize as a limitation in my research. Because of the makeshift nature of the alliances that are being made and broken, it is impossible to include all of them in this research – both due to spatial reasons, as well as limited interest in the details of shorter alliances from the organizations behind my secondary sources. The fluctuating number of alliances and armed groups also means that the findings of this research are limited in their transferability to other cases since many civil wars have more clearly defined actors which are more stable in nature. A final limitation of this thesis has been language. As mentioned, I do not speak French. This has first and foremost left me with limited access to both primary and secondary sources. My academic informants early told me they could help me with getting more informants and perhaps even respondents, but as I told them I did not speak French, their list of potential candidates shrunk substantially. My main loss of secondary sources due to lacking language I believe to be those of communiqués (official statements) made by various rebel leaders. These statements are shown and referenced to in my main primary source of reports made to the UNSC, but unfeasible for me to translate due to financial constraints.

5 Analysis

This chapter presents the empirical evidence from expert interviews and document analysis on alliance formation in the Central African Republic. Looking at this evidence through the lens of neorealism, the analysis and discussion will be guided by the hypotheses that were developed in chapter three. As suggested in chapter 3.3, no hypothesis alone describes why and how armed groups in CAR have allied throughout the conflict ranging from 2012 to 2018. The sub-chapters in the analysis are divided into the phases compiled below, which are based on periods of time relating to major events on alliance formation in CAR. 5.1 is phase one, 5.2 is phase two, etc.

Phase one ranges from late 2012 until the end of 2013 and analyzes the formation of Séléka and their successful military campaign to claim the presidency of CAR.

Phase two overlaps with phase one as it scrutinizes the emergence of anti-Balaka in 2013 and their efforts to counter Séléka.

Phase three ranges from 2014 until mid-2015 and studies the fractionalization in this period and describes the new groups that emerged from anti-Balaka and Séléka.

Phase four overlaps with phase three as it covers all of 2015, but instead of fractionalization scrutinizes the elections, the Bangui forum and the formation of the Nairobist Alliance.

Phase five covers 2016 and analyzes the formation of the anti-UPC coalition, as well as exploring the practice of roadblocks in CAR and the fighting related to it.

Phase six covers 2017 and analyzes how most of the former Séléka found back together in a new alliance and investigates the ethnic fighting within certain groups which led to new splinter groups.

Phase seven covers 2018 and with no new alliances or fractionalizations, it scrutinizes the alliance created in phase six, as well as to take a closer look at the opportunistic violence that the groups belonging to this alliance employed.

5.1 Séléka (2012-2013)

The rising tensions and grievances described in chapter two towards President Bozizé, culminated at the end of 2012 in the formation of the rebel alliance *Séléka*, which in the national language Sango simply means "alliance". Three armed groups described in chapter 2.2.1 made up the core of Séléka; UFDR led by Djotodia; CPSK led by Dhaffane; and CPJP-Fondamentale led by Adam (Dukhan, 2016, p. 2), all groups based in the northeastern part of CAR. Among the groups that also have been reported to have been a part of the alliance, we find CPJP led by Hissène and FPR led by Darassa (Dukhan, 2017).

5.1.1 Ethnic Considerations Aside

Several of the rebel groups involved with Séléka were former enemies due to different ethnic composition, consequentially challenging hypothesis one holding that actors in CAR seeks to ally with groups that have similar ethnic foundation or religion as themselves. CPSK and CPJP-Fondamentale fractionalized from CPJP in 2012. CPJP was in turn a group that emerged in 2008 as a response to the abuses against the ethnic Runga communities, committed by the mainly Gula ethnic group of UFDR. Moreover, UFDR and CPJP had also been fighting for years over control of natural resources in northeastern CAR (ICG, 2013, p. 7). Since CPJP was part of Séléka for a period, and CPSK and CPJP-Fondamentale together with UFDR were the main actors in Séléka, it is evident that ethnic considerations were largely put aside when the alliance was created. Instead, the alliance was first and foremost held together by a common objective of forcing the Bozizé regime to respect and implement the 2007 and 2008 peace agreements – Particularly the recommendations from the 2008 Inclusive Political Dialogue; the release of prisoners; financial compensation for rebels and the opening of an investigation into the abuses of Bozizé's Presidential Guard (Øen, 2014, p. 12).

The founding of Séléka therefore seems to rest on an aspiration to balance out the strength of the Bozizé regime which had been in power since 2003. Bozizé had both the national army FACA, a personal Presidential Guard, as well as support from most of the international community, although the latter was receding (ICG, 2013, pp. 3-5). As the failed rebellions in 2007 described in chapter two revealed for the various armed actors, they would have to join forces if they were to have any chance in removing President Bozizé from power. In that sense, hypothesis two and four, holding that actors in CAR will undergo an act of balancing a stronger actor by allying with the weaker

actor(s), seems to hold truth to it when looking at the creation of Séléka. It is however harder to firmly establish whether motivations for the founding of Séléka were mainly due to security reasons or mainly with the hope for potential gains, which is what separates hypothesis two and four. As established in chapter two, the Presidential Guard of Bozizé was predatory in their behavior displacing over 100 000 people in 2007. This surely awoke a sense of injustice among the participants of Séléka, and perhaps also a fear for potential future reprimands. However, one of the demands put forward by Séléka in 2012 was also for the "unconditional return of diamonds, gold, cash and other goods taken by the government in 2008" (ICG, 2013, p. 8), showing a clear financial motivation for the alliance. Consequentially, it is therefore held that hypothesis four best describes how Séléka was formed – *H4: In CAR, actors will balance their adversaries by joining what is perceived as a weaker actor or alliance to maximize potential gains.* The joining of forces by the relatively weaker armed groups in CAR to balance the power of President Bozizé and eventually remove him from power.

A different way of looking at the formation of Séléka would be to differentiate its members in terms of power, to be able to determine if any of the groups' way of allying was more in line of bandwagoning – to join what is perceived as the strongest actor in the system. Looking back at the definition from chapter 3.1.3, power is understood as *the resources available to a group for building military forces. This includes wealth, number of members in the group and any potential external benefactor.* The problem with the conflict in CAR, is that due to low academic interest, no such data has been collected, which makes it difficult to differentiate the groups in terms of power based on this definition. The only such differentiation this thesis has come across is that of Nathalia Dukhan in her Splintered Warfare report (2017), where she illustrates the armed groups with thicker or thinner lines based on how much harm they are capable of doing. Upon being asked about the differentiation, she said that this power distinction is not necessarily a very academic one. It is based on her experience, interviewing stakeholders involved in the conflict or in the peacebuilding. She does nevertheless claim that her perception is shared with other analysts and experts working on CAR (Dukhan, 2019).

Looking back at figure 1 from chapter 2.3.1, there are seemingly not any large differences in power between the main actors in Séléka – UFDR, CPSK and CPJP-Fondamentale. Insofar the power differentiation of Dukhan is trusted, this strengthens the claim that the foundation of Séléka was

best described by hypothesis four – *H4: In CAR, actors will balance their adversaries by joining what is perceived as a weaker actor or alliance to maximize potential gains.*

5.1.2 The Séléka Coup

In December 2012, Séléka launched a large offensive and quickly occupied several important cities, as well as several towns in the north and center of CAR. They took up a position in the central town of Sibut, not far away from the capital of Bangui (Øen, 2014, p. 13). At first, regional leaders in Africa did not intervene, but when it became clear that Séléka was serious in their threat of taking Bangui, Chadian President Déby dispatched extra soldiers for the Mission for the Consolidation of Peace in Central African Republic (MICOPAX) led by the Economic Community of Central African States. These soldiers hindered Séléka from breaching the final frontier before Bangui. In January 2013, President Bozizé and leaders from Séléka met in Libreville to attempt a negotiated peace. An agreement was proposed which everyone signed, but no one adhered to in the end (Lombard, 2016, pp. 15-16). Séléka took Bangui by March 24, 2013, and leader of Séléka, Michel Djotodia, pronounced himself new president of CAR. Bozizé fled to shelter in the Democratic Republic of Congo. This lack of adherence to a peace agreement by all parties leaves us with little explanatory power for hypothesis seven, which holds that actors will seek peace through arms control and peace agreements. Hypothesis six is therefore seemingly more descriptive of the situation – *H6: In CAR, actors work towards gaining power and achieving hegemony*. There are numerous reports that Chadian President Déby shifted his support towards the end of the coup, and that this turned the tide of the conflict, forcing Bozizé to flee (Smith, 2015, pp. 42-43; Weyns et al., 2014, p. 63). This underscores that the support of regional leaders is key for political survival in CAR. Moreover, it was also reported that a large portion (up to 80 percent) of the incoming Séléka force was made up of foreign mercenaries, mostly originating from the neighboring countries Sudan and Chad (FIDH, 2014, p. 67). Séléka was balancing the regime by also employing external support of foreign forces, thus strengthening the claim that hypothesis four best describes the introductory phase of the conflict.

Even though the main grievances of Séléka had been the implementation of the 2008 Inclusive Political Dialogue, they had also been calling on socio-economic development in the northeast part of CAR and concrete measures to obtain better governance. During the 9 months Djotodia sat as president of CAR, he signed more than 500 presidential decrees. Not a single one of these decrees

was related to substantive socio-economic issues. Instead, a majority of the decrees were about nominations of military and political positions in state administration, with the aim of consolidating the position of Djotodia by rewarding Séléka commanders and pacifying political adversaries (Weyns et al., 2014, p. 25). Moreover, these positions in the government were clearly abused for personal enrichment. This was especially apparent in the business of giving out mining concessions. President Djotodia's cousin, Herbert Djono, was made Minister of Mines, and together they circumvented official procedures regarding signing bonuses, to make it easier to embezzle money from state funds (Weyns et al., 2014, p. 43). Even though these actions were not done during the creation of Séléka alliance, it is not hard to imagine that Djotodia and his peers in Séléka leadership had something like this in mind when they decided to ally in 2012. Insofar we can attribute these motivations to Séléka leadership, the descriptiveness of hypothesis four is further bolstered when looking at the first phase.

5.1.3 Predatory Violence

Even though Séléka claimed from the start to be liberators meant to bring peace and security, civilians were targeted from the very outset of their offensive. At the beginning of their advancement, we can categorize most of the violence as an insurgency: "Selective and indiscriminate violence […] to control populations upon which they depend and undermine trust in their rivals" (Beadle, 2014, p. 24). However, soon after taking power, Séléka leadership realized that the Bozizé regime had emptied the state coffers, meaning they found themselves in a situation where they could not pay all their fighters (Øen, 2014, pp. 15-16). Missing salary increased the level and extremity of violence against civilians, as soldiers sought compensation for their war effort. During this period there were numerous reports of civilian killings, raping of women and burning of entire villages. Séléka also engaged in widespread looting, particularly in Bangui and in the west of the country. Swathes of territory in the eastern diamond and gold producing regions were put under the exclusive control of Séléka. "As soon as the Séléka were in power, the strategic priorities and actions of the rebellion shifted from power to greed-related objectives" (Weyns et al., 2014, p. 28).

The violence exerted on the civilian population after Séléka had taken Bangui can best be characterized as predatory violence: "Coerce civilians into compliance through plunder, taxation, forced recruitment, opportunistic rape, brutality […] to survive or make a profit by exploiting

civilians" (Beadle, 2014, p. 24). The actions described consequentially increase the credibility in the claim that Séléka was formed with the motivation of profit, rather than security. Although Séléka did not spare Muslim communities for these atrocities, it became evident that Christian communities were targeted with particular viciousness. Incapable to control the men that had helped him take power, President Djotodia officially disbanded Séléka in September 2013. This move was meant to distance himself from the ongoing atrocities done in the name of his organization, but did little to decrease the violence, and in reality only left Djotodia with less leverage in the coming negotiations (Lombard, 2016, p. 18). From this point forward, the groups belonging to the alliance were now referred to as the ex-Séléka.

That the Christian population was the one suffering most, coupled with the fact that Séléka mainly consisted of Muslims, was what sparked the religious aspect of this conflict which exploded in the next phase. Based on what we have explored so far in this chapter, it is however argued that there were no religious considerations behind Séléka to begin with – neither in reasons for allying, nor in grievances towards the state regime. We have seen that they were not at all concerned with Muslim rights or security for the part of the population they emerged from when they started out. Rather it was about receiving what they believed they were entitled to according to the 2008 Inclusive Political Dialogue, as well as the more opportunistic claim to gold and diamond mines.

To explain why Séléka was dominated by Muslims to begin with, one needs to look at history and geography. The three main groups that created Séléka, namely UFDR, CPSK and CPJP-Fondamentale, were all based in the northwestern part of CAR. Historically, this sparsely populated area was home to the ethnic groups Gula, Arabs, Fulani and Runga, and they have strong economic and cultural links with similar groups in Chad, Cameroon, South Sudan and Sudan. Moreover, the region is mostly populated by Muslims, who is a minority of around 15 percent of the total population in CAR. Consequently, the northeast is economically and culturally stronger oriented towards Chad and Sudan than it has been towards Bangui and the rest of the country (PECAR, 2014a, p. 10). The large number of foreign mercenaries present in the ranks of Séléka as they were marching towards Bangui, thus found their way from these two neighboring countries. As laid out in chapter two, President Bozizé more or less ignored this region. In that perspective, Séléka did not rise in the narrative that they were the good Muslims who would remove all the bad Christians from CAR:

[…] guys I knew that became a part of Séléka, I believe they were being genuine in how they were really upset by the position of their region in the country. By how the government doesn't do anything for them […] They had an interest in changing this and took up arms as a way of getting people to pay attention to them (Lombard, 2019 40:00-42:30).

An alternative explanation to why Séléka exerted religiously motivated violence is therefore proposed in that there was a sense of: 'We, the people of this region are sick and tired of being neglected by the state regime. Join us as we march towards the capital, remove the president and get what we deserve. Those willing to join us are welcome to do so'. And then due to lacking centralized leadership, there were no strict rules or regulations for how Séléka soldiers would interact with whom they met along their way, and this resulted in increasingly violent behavior towards civilians. It is also likely that the soldiers did not have any provisions or logistics, which meant that they 'lived off the land' like soldiers have done for centuries before them. That Muslims were spared the worst of these atrocities could perhaps be explained by the fact that Séléka soldiers possibly felt some kind of familiarity with the people sharing their religion. This is however a phenomenon that needs further research before any conclusions can be reached.

5.1.4 Alliance Formation in Phase One

Summing up the first phase of the conflict, it is evident that religion and ethnicity were irrelevant when looking at reasons for the formation of Séléka, but that it began to matter somewhat once Séléka begun attacking the civilian population. The implication is that hypothesis one holds little explanatory power for this first phase. Since the peace agreement of early 2013 was ignored by all parties, hypothesis seven is also of little relevance for this phase, whereas hypothesis six was more present – *H6: In CAR, actors work towards gaining power and achieving hegemony.* The form of allying that Séléka underwent is evidentially that of balancing, since they joined their forces to counter the stronger opponent of President Bozizé and his state regime, and further balanced their opponent by employing external soldiers of predominantly Chadian and Sudanese origin. Since there is little evidence in Séléka's rhetoric and actions that points towards them primarily being concerned with security for themselves or their people, we are left with an opportunistic alliance aiming for personal gains. Recalling Schweller's animal metaphor from chapter 3.2.3, the armed groups going into Séléka were arguably those of *jackals* – actors that will pay a high price to defend their possessions, but an even higher price to extend their values. They are dissatisfied and partly revisionist which will tend to be opportunistic and risk-averse. In the end, alliance formation

in the first phase of the conflict is therefore best described by hypothesis four – *H4: In CAR, actors will balance their adversaries by joining what is perceived as a weaker actor or alliance to maximize potential gains.*

5.2 Anti-Balaka (2013)

There has been a long tradition in CAR for self-defense groups. Referring to them as groups is perhaps a bit misguiding, as they were more a network of people that can be activated when needed most. The communities of the ethnic groups of Gbaya, Banda, Mandjia and Mboum have supported each other throughout the decades against colonial powers, bandits or other threats. There is also a history of politicians employing these groups in their fight against potential threats towards the regime. One such example is how President Bozizé, during his rule, gave weapons to self-defense groups to combat bandits and contain the APRD in the northwest of CAR (ICG, 2015, p. 3). In the wake of Séléka abuses which were especially brutal towards the Christian population, these networks were once again called upon and formed into new groups under the name of the *anti-Balaka* in the second half of 2013 (Lombard and Carayannis, 2015a, p. 7; Dukhan, 2016, p. 4). The name has both been interpreted as anti-machete and anti-Kalashnikov bullets, meaning it can be understood as an anti-violence group to protect its members and their kin (Lombard, 2016, p. 18; Dukhan, 2016, p. 4).

5.2.1 From Self-Defense to Religious Predation

Anti-Balaka first appeared in 2013 in the northwestern regions of Ouham and Ouham-Pende, traditional strongholds for former presidents Patassé and Bozizé. Their numbers grew rapidly, and they were soon able to control most of the northwestern part of the country. Vital to their rapid growth was their ability to incorporate unemployed youths many whom had lost family members to Séléka, as well as bandits, opportunistic rebels and anyone else seeking food, revenge or other benefits. Anti-Balaka was further boosted by former members of the national army, FACA, originating in the northwestern part of CAR, which was now being hunted down and killed by Séléka (Øen, 2014, p. 20). Evidentially, the gathering of various self-defense groups into anti-Balaka began as a need to protect especially the Christian population from abuses of Séléka. In other words, an alliance which was primarily motivated by a wish for security for themselves and their loved ones. Since each one of these self-defense groups did not manage to counter Séléka individually, they banded together under the common umbrella of anti-Balaka to balance the superior military strength of Séléka. In that narrative, hypothesis two seems to be descriptive of the situation – *H2: In CAR, actors will balance their adversaries by joining what is perceived as a weaker actor or alliance to ensure safety.* Parts of the anti-Balaka movement were motivated by a

desire to bring former president Bozizé back to power. Bozizé had a close relationship with anti-Balaka through his command of former FACA officers, the Gendarmerie as and the Presidential Guard. This influence did however decrease over time. Unlike Séléka, there are no reports indicating that anti-Balaka replaced the administration in the areas they took control over. The prospect of gains was thus not irrelevant for the alliance of anti-Balaka, but it was nonetheless not a defining motivation for the majority of the group (Weyns et al., 2014, p. 55).

The first attack of anti-Balaka on Séléka militias was in August 2013. Throughout the fall, attacks on now ex-Séléka increased and spread to a larger area of the country in south and west. What began as a strong anti-Séléka sentiment quickly transformed into an anti-Muslim sentiment. At first, anti-Balaka attacked all civilians believed to be associated with Séléka, including people of Chadian origin, as well as the ethnic groups Fulani, Gula and Runga. Soon after, they began to persecute anyone believed to be Muslim. With many foreign fighters from Chad and South-Sudan in the ranks of Séléka, and the alliance in itself being made up of mainly Muslims, the leap was short to dub all Muslims in CAR foreigners and Christians as the 'true population' of CAR (Dukhan, 2016, pp. 4-5). The level of violence that was inflicted on their opponents thus went far beyond that of self-defense from the very beginning of their advancement towards Bangui: "The crimes perpetrated [by anti-Balaka] were from the start extremely cruel, including for example mutilations. Moreover, anti-Balaka targeted not only Séléka, but also Muslim men and women of all ages and social backgrounds" (Weyns et al., 2014, p. 53).

The action described above does not fit into the narrative of self-defense that hypothesis two describes. As the actions seemingly are religiously motivated, hypothesis one gains some leverage in explaining the formation of anti-Balaka – *H1: In CAR, actors seek to ally with groups that have similar ethnicity or religious founding as themselves.* The ethnic groups of Gbaya, Banda, Mandjia and Mboum, also mostly being Christian, banded together to meet the threat of the mostly Muslim Séléka. Showing us that various ethnic groups had a tradition of coming together to counter threats against their communities. Nevertheless, if we isolate the very founding of anti-Balaka, looking at the prime motivation for creating the alliance of self-defense groups, it is apparent that security for oneself and one's community was the key driver for alliance formation. Still, this is an artificial division, since the foundation of anti-Balaka did not happen in a single day. Rather it was a period of time where more and more people joined to counter Séléka, where religion played an

increasingly important role to the growth of the alliance of self-defense groups. Consequentially, both hypothesis one and two holds explanatory power when describing how and why anti-Balaka was created.

5.2.2 December Offensive

A turning point in the increasingly violent conflict was the attack on Bangui December 5, 2013, instigated by anti-Balaka. It was a well-planned and coordinated large-scale attack that showed the world that anti-Balaka was now a force to be reckoned with. Anti-Balaka seized the capital and went from door to door, executing anyone suspected to be a member of Séléka. This attack triggered a cycle of inter-communal violence across the country, where ex-Séléka deliberately targeted civilian Christians and anti-Balaka targeted civilian Muslims (Øen, 2014, p. 23). More than 600 civilians were killed in Bangui and more than 214 000 people fled from their homes (Lombard and Carayannis, 2015b, p. 321). Self-defense was at this point clearly not the main goal of anti-Balaka anymore, as religiously motivated violence and revenge instead took the leading role. Once again, it was seemingly not religion that was the main motivator in creating anti-Balaka, but it surely materialized as a factor for exerting violence towards their adversary, as well as civilian Muslims.

Leading up to the anti-Balaka December offensive, the international community got increasingly concerned about the situation in CAR. In a briefing to the UN Security Council in November 2013, Adama Dieng, UN special adviser on the prevention of genocide, said that: "If we don't act now and decisively I will not exclude the possibility of a genocide occurring in the Central African Republic" (Hubert, 2013) – words that were echoed by the French foreign minister days before the French intervention (France24, 2013). Consequently, the same day as anti-Balaka attacked Bangui, the African-led International Support Mission to the Central African Republic (MISCA) was approved by the United Nations, and MICOPAX got rehatted into blue helmets. The same resolution also approved the French Operation Sangaris. By the end of December, French soldiers numbered 1600, which was further bolstered to 2000 in February 2014. France's first mission was to pave the way for MISCA, which at the end of January counted 6000 soldiers (Øen, 2014, pp. 23-24). The main goal for MISCA and French forces was to establish a minimum level of security, prevent atrocities against civilians and implement confidence-building measures. France focused particularly on disarmament, and their strategy was to disarm anyone that was not national forces

of CAR. The problem with this, was that France directed their disarmament process mainly at the easier identifiable ex-Séléka (Øen, 2014, pp. 25-26). This gave anti-Balaka a military superiority that they used force out the Muslim population through ethnic cleansing – to "force targeted group to leave through threats, demonstrative killings, brutality, mass-rape, destruction of property" (Beadle, 2014, p. 24). In Bangui alone, about 130 000 Muslims had to flee north, or even out of the country. The religious aspect once again seemingly being the push factor for anti-Balaka actions. As a result of heightened media attention, foreign intervention and anti-Balaka's onrush, Djotodia and his government were forced by African leaders to resign in January 2014. Former mayor of Bangui, Catherine Samba-Panza, was appointed interim head of state, making her the first ever female president of the Central African Republic (Smith, 2015, p. 45).

5.2.3 The Story of Sylvester

While most people in CAR were desperately trying to get out of the country, there was a small team of NGO workers sitting on the plane headed towards Bangui. Only four days after the December 5 offensive, the team landed in Bangui, where a refugee camp had emerged right by the airport. Bangui at this time was clearly split in two between anti-Balaka and Séléka. One of these workers has been an informant for this project, and she had close contact with the local anti-Balaka commander of the area around the airport, named Sylvester. Before the war, Sylvester had been a successful car mechanic in a neighborhood in Bangui. So successful that he had even been fixing the cars of the Presidential Guard of Bozizé. He usually did not go to church, and his neighbors had been Muslim, even though he had never really thought them as Muslim. People more or less lived in harmony across ethnic and religious lines. This all changed when Séléka took Bangui in March 2013. Being a city boy, Sylvester had never been in the army, nor had any weapon. Nevertheless, when Séléka came, Sylvester armed himself to protect his family against the invaders. One night, Sylvester had a dream where God had spoken to him and asked him to form an army in God's name to fight for his people. Six months later, being well-spoken and charismatic, Sylvester had climbed the ranks to become a local commander of hundreds of anti-Balaka soldiers – fighting a battle to protect his family and community (NGO1, 2019 4:28-6:21).

> Something I quickly realized in this mission […] was how he [Sylvester], but also everyone else, from week to week were increasingly radicalized. […] there were more and more hate and more and more sectarian violence towards each other and towards us in a very short amount of time" (NGO1, 2019 8:09-9:23).

Even though the story of Sylvester is not generalizable to all of those that joined anti-Balaka, there are definitely relevant observations from this anecdotal evidence. Sylvester was one of those that used to live in harmony with his Muslim neighbors in Bangui, but at some point, found himself sitting outside the tent of an NGO waiting to kill a Muslim that was hiding inside their office. Even though there was an increasingly religious dimension during the two months NGO1 was in Bangui, she was convinced that religion had little to do with why the war broke out in the first place. Instead, she characterizes religion as being "fuel to the fire" in how it was actively used by both sides in propaganda (NGO1, 2019 9:34-10:22). In short, differences in religion did not cause the fighting between Séléka and anti-Balaka, but it did deepen the fault line between the two parties to the conflict (Weyns et al., 2014, p. 54). Insofar the story of Sylvester exemplifies the typical motivation of an anti-Balaka soldier, it is evident that in reasons for joining, there was a strong sense of wanting to protect his family and community. This perspective thus leaves us with explanatory power in hypothesis two – *H2: In CAR, actors will balance their adversaries by joining what is perceived as a weaker actor or alliance to ensure safety.* There are however two interconnected factors for alliance formation unexplored by this thesis which was raised by NGO1: Hate and revenge.

> Because the Muslim wasn't a human being to them anymore, he was an enemy, a rat, a vermin without human abilities. Dehumanization surprisingly fast opens space to hate towards others, it is like cancer on your soul which kills all empathy […] What I believe the conflict was primarily driven by, was that there was a slaughter of people that you loved and cared about on both sides. Revenge is, after all, a very human reaction (NGO2, 2019 11:26-13:30).

Motivated by resentment, the attacks against the Muslim population gave anti-Balaka fighters the possibility for another motivation: Greed. Much like Séléka, once they were established and began killing civilians, anti-Balaka also looted their victims. Since Muslims traditionally have been the merchants of CAR, and have thus fared better economically, this was seen as an opportunity to take back what Muslims supposedly had taken from them the last decades (Weyns et al., 2014, p. 61). Consequentially, there was also an economic perspective in the formation of anti-Balaka. Nevertheless, it is argued that the self-defense perspective was the primary motivation for allying and that the motivation of possible gains emerged only after they had started to march towards Bangui.

5.2.4 Alliance Formation in Phase Two

Summing up the second phase of the conflict in CAR leaves us with a more ambivalent answer than that of the first phase. It is evident that religion and ethnicity had a more prominent role in the formation of anti-Balaka compared to Séléka. As happened before in the history of CAR, the ethnic groups of Gbaya, Banda, Mandjia and Mboum once again found together to counter a threat towards their communities. Since the threat they countered had a Muslim majority which specifically targeted Christians, the religious aspect quickly grew as a leading force in the identity of anti-Balaka. Nevertheless, it is argued that the primary motivation in the foundation of anti-Balaka is to be found in that of self-defense of yourself and your community. Looking at hypothesis six and seven regarding offensive versus defensive realism is less relevant for phase two since anti-Balaka at this point did not seek power or hegemony, nor did they have the opportunity to sign any peace agreements. In conclusion, the creation of anti-Balaka was primarily motivated by self-defense and possibly hate, but the actions displayed towards their opponents and civilians were those of religiously justified killings. Hypothesis one is thus put forward as holding some explanatory power to alliance formation in CAR in the second phase – *H1: In CAR, actors seek to ally with groups that have similar ethnicity or religious founding as themselves.* However, it is held that the second phase is best described by hypothesis two – *H2: In CAR, actors will balance their adversaries by joining what is perceived as a weaker actor or alliance to ensure safety*.

5.3 Fractionalization (2014-2015)

Shortly after Catherine Samba-Panza was elected President of CAR, the interim government agreed on a transition roadmap describing where to go next. It included plans for a peace agreement, a program of Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) and an election scheduled for February 2015 (Dukhan, 2016, p. 27). In July 2014, the Brazzaville Agreement on Cessation of Hostilities brought together representatives of anti-Balaka, the ex-Séléka, political parties, religious communities and civil societies. The Brazzaville Agreement was signed after three days of negotiations, but was considered a failure only few months afterward. (Dukhan, 2016, p. 26).

In terms of fighting between the armed groups and violence towards civilians, 2014 was similar to the end of 2013. Even though no single event measured up to that of the December 5 offensive, there were incidents throughout the year which affected civilians, aid workers, peacekeeping soldiers and the armed groups. 2014 saw a total of 3338 killed, two-thirds of which were civilians, meaning 2014 was almost as violent as 2013 with its 3396 killed (UCDP, 2019). After Michel Djotodia stepped down in January 2014, CAR saw cycles of reprisal attacks by anti-Balaka against the Muslim population both in Bangui and in the south-west of the country. The attacks forced tens of thousands of Muslims to flee to neighboring countries (Dukhan, 2016, p. ii). By the end of 2014, a total of 850 000 people were displaced either internally or as refugees (HRW, 2017, p. 13).

Due to the high level of violence, the UNSC in September 2014 authorized the deployment of a UN peacekeeping mission – the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), which rehatted the MISCA soldiers with blue UN helmets and increased the troop size to 10 000 (Dukhan, 2016, p. iii). As we will see, the infighting between rival anti-Balaka commanders and ex-Séléka factions also increased in the second half of 2014. This fighting between former allies can both be seen as a symptom of the failed Brazzaville peace accords and as a result of disagreements over resource-rich areas, as well as a positioning towards the planned elections in 2015 (Dukhan, 2016, p. 26; PECAR, 2014b, pp. 14-15). The fractionalization of the ex-Séléka was also driven by external actors who wanted weaker, more manageable actors in CAR, such as President Déby in Chad and France through Operation Sangaris (Dukhan, 2019).

5.3.1 'New' Groups Emerging from ex-Séléka

After Michel Djotodia was forced to step down as President, the ex-Séléka coalition fractionalized into several armed groups which soon turned on each other. Most rebels from ex-Séléka left Bangui and the southwest of CAR headed for provinces in the north and east of the country. The division was mainly caused by a combination of leadership rivalries, financial quarrels and ethnic divisions (Dukhan, 2016, p. 4). What is apparent when we look at the groups that emerged from what used to be Séléka, is that even though there were new group names, the names of leaders stay more or less the same. As such, the 'new' groups emerging from Séléka were more in line of a rebranding of the groups going into Séléka in 2012 – with minor adjustments to who decided over which group and the rhetoric used to justify their existence. It is hence useful to keep in mind chapter 2.3.1, Principal Actors in CAR 2003-2012, when reading the next sections about the third phase. It must also be noted that the groups which will be scrutinized in this chapter are considered the most important ones, as they were the groups that emerged from the two main alliances of anti-Balaka and Séléka from the previous two phases. Consequentially, groups such as Retour, Réclamation et Réhabilitation (3R), Le Mouvement des Libérateurs Centrafricains pour la Justice (MLCJ), Révolution et Justice (RJ) or any other group that did not splinter from anti-Balaka or Séléka, are not studied in the next sections, nor in the following phases.

5.3.1.1 FPRC

The first group to clearly emerge from the ex-Séléka was the Front Populaire pour la Renaissance de la Centrafrique (FPRC) in August 2014. It was created by Nourredine Adam of Runga ethnicity and supported by former President Djotodia of Gula ethnicity. The ethnicities of Djotodia and Adam represents the two main ethnicities of members FPRC, but there are also elements of Arab groups in their ranks (Dukhan, 2016, p. 5). A third name in the leadership of FPRC worth mentioning is that of Abdoulaye Hissène of the Runga ethnic group. A describing moment of his character was when he in August 2014 lost his position as prime minister in CAR: He wrote a letter to Chadian President Déby where he stated that "We want to destroy the country in order to rebuild everything", and simultaneously presented himself as a potential leader of the new state. The initiative failed and a year later, Hissène emerged as one of the most influential war profiteers in Bangui (TheSentry, 2018, p. 19). As we will see in the next phases, Hissène plays an important role in FPRC.

FPRC has been considered the most hardline group of the former Séléka, as they early on called for a partitioning of the country. In an interview with a local newspaper in Benin, Djotodia expressed the view that there were only two alternatives for peace in CAR: Either for former Séléka to regain power, or that the country underwent a partition to allow peaceful coexistence (PECAR, 2014b, p. 10). The proposed new state was declared as "Etat de Dar el Kouti", referencing the Sultanate of Dar el Kouti which was founded in the 18th century and practiced slaving raids in CAR (ICG, 2015, p. 19). Coupled with the looting that happened in 2012 and 2013 by Séléka, this further increased the anti-Muslim and anti-foreigner rhetoric which first appeared in 2013. Moreover, FPRC leaders uphold a climate of enduring crisis and intercommunal tension to justify their existence. The rhetoric they convey is that of a self-defense group that primarily exists to protect civilians from insecurity and that their job is to counter the claimed predatorial and authoritarian rule of the Central African government (Dukhan, 2017, p. 7). However, considering that all the leaders of FPRC held power as Séléka in 2013 and did absolutely nothing in terms of bettering the conditions, their rhetoric does not hold much leverage.

5.3.1.2 UPC

In September 2014, L'Union pour la Paix en Centrafrique (UPC) was created by Ali Darassa of Fulani ethnicity due to disagreements in ex-Séléka (ICG, 2015, p. 39). UPC is largely a rebranding of the FPR which went into Séléka in 2012, where Darassa held a key role (ICG, 2015, p. 8). The mainly Muslim ethnicity of Fulani are spread all over the Sahel – including Nigeria, the homeland of Darassa – and is traditionally a pastoral people. Indeed, the pastoralist economy is strong in CAR: In 2009, it supported around ten percent of the country's population (Schouten and Kalessopo, 2017, p. 27). Much like FPRC, leaders in UPC justify the group's existence with the continuous threats and attacks against the Muslims, particularly against the Fulani community. As such, the ethnic perspective is more important in this ex-Séléka group than the others. UPC also condemns the marginalization of the Fulani and seeks access to education and literacy for their people. Perhaps most important for the people represented by UPC, is that they fight against the systematic looting and taxes imposed on Fulani cattle and its soldiers are thus often involved in bloody conflicts over cattle. On the political agenda, UPC has supported a de facto partition of the country, but also seeks positions in the central government for UPC combatants (Dukhan, 2017, p. 25). Even though Ali Darassa portrays a picture of himself as the protector of the Fulani, it is argued that he is primarily motivated by the prospect of gains:

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We can't say he [Ali Darassa] cares about the Fulani. His motives are not the cause of the Fulani. He has demonstrated to be a military entrepreneur who opportunistically enters the politics of conflict in CAR and understood how to make the most of this system. He is a mercenary, now used by others having political, geostrategic or economic interests. (Dukhan, 2019)

In general, what they [Ali Darassa and Gaëtan Baode] are openly communicating: They are the good guys, and the others are the bad ones. But when you look at what they actually do, and areas that they control, it's more and more clear that their actual motivations are more about resource control, rather than caring about the population. (NGO2, 2019 4:18-5:10)

5.3.1.3 Séléka Rénovée

In October, Moussa Dhaffane, former 2nd vice president of Séléka as well as Water and Forestry minister during Séléka rule, created the group Séléka Rénovée (ICG, 2015, p. 39). Dhaffane led the ex-Séléka delegation in the Brazzaville negotiations in July 2014 and signed the Brazzaville Agreement on their behalf. Displaying their hardline approach, Nourredine Adam and Michel Djotodia disowned the signature of Dhaffane and rejected him from the group (ICG, 2015, p. 8). Séléka Rénovée promotes peace and reconciliation between Muslims and non-Muslims and calls for an end to violence and unity of the country. The group has no combatants in the country and is seemingly first and foremost a group meant to acquire a political position for its leader Dhaffane (Dukhan, 2017, p. 13).

5.3.1.4 RPRC

The next group emerging from ex-Séléka was the Rassemblement Patriotic pour la Réconciliation des Centrafricains (RPRC) founded in Kaga-Bandoro in November 2014. Led by Zakaria Damane of Gula ethnicity, they share FPRC's ideology and grievances, but are considered a more moderate Séléka faction (Dukhan, 2017:5-6). RPRC is mainly composed of Gula ethnicity, but also has elements of Runga ethnicity and Arab groups in their ranks. The creation of RPRC was meant as a move to distance itself from FPRC for both political and financial reasons. RPRC generally has a more conciliatory attitude towards CAR authorities than FPRC does (ICG, 2015, p. 39). An example of this is how RPRC did not support the partitioning of territory proposed by FPRC in 2014 (Dukhan, 2016, p. 6).

5.3.1.5 MPC

The final group to emerge from former Séléka was the Mouvement Patriotique pour la Centrafrique (MPC) in July 2015. Led by former Chadian mercenary Mahamat al-Khatim, the MPC is perceived more moderate than its roots in FPRC – where al-Khatim used to be the military leader for a period. In 2003, al-Khatim participated in the coup against former president Ange-Félix Patassé which put François Bozizé in power – the same President Bozizé which al-Khatim partook in removing from power as part of the Séléka rebel movement in 2013 (Crétois, 2017; ICG, 2015, p. 5). The group has a similar justification for its existence as UPC, RPRC and FPRC: to protect the Muslim population against the central leadership's authoritarian and predatory governance. What separates it from the other armed ex-Séléka groups is its focus on protecting Chadian Arabs in CAR (Dukhan, 2017, p. 9). Considering the fact that al-Khatim partook in both Bozizé's coup *and* the short-lived government of Séléka in 2013, his rhetoric of self-defense for Chadian Muslims does not seem overly trustworthy.

5.3.2 Anti-Balaka Coordination

As earlier discussed, anti-Balaka was much less hierarchical and centralized than ex-Séléka during the second phase of the conflict. In reality, anti-Balaka was only close to what can be called a unified group when they attacked Séléka in Bangui December 5, 2013. As also discussed in the second phase, there was a political goal for a small fraction of the group to reinstate former President Bozizé to power. A majority of the group were however not driven by the opportunity of political power, rather there was a wish for security in the beginning, which turned increasingly predatorial as they started to loot the Muslim population. Once their main enemy of Séléka was driven out of Bangui, anti-Balaka dispersed into a larger part of the country. Similar to ex-Séléka, the planned elections had an impact on anti-Balaka. When some of the groups went home during the third phase, certain leadership figures saw an opportunity for political power and thus restructured their groups into being relevant for the upcoming elections.

5.3.2.1 Local Groups of Self-Defense

These groups were the backbone of the anti-Balaka that attacked Bangui in December 2013 and then went on looting and revenge sprees. Many of these groups went home into inactiveness after Séléka was ousted from Bangui, but some groups remained active as bandits in different parts of the country. The leaders of these groups are local and act autonomously in relation to each other.

Even though they don't have a specific political agenda, nor military training, they represent a threat to a potential peace should they reactivate (Dukhan, 2017, p. 16).

5.3.2.2 CLPC

In 2014, a coordination of anti-Balaka was initiated by former Youth and Sports Minister in the Bozizé regime, Patrice-Edouard Ngaïssona (PECAR, 2014a, p. 42). It was first named Coordination nationale des Libérateurs du Peuple Centrafricain (CLPC), but today it is known as the National coordination of the ex-anti-Balaka. For simplicity, the group will be known as CLPC in this thesis. The relatively moderate group is known for mainly representing the political ambitions of Ngaïssona and is loosely tied to various anti-Balaka groups throughout the country (IPIS, 2018, p. 29). The group justifies its existence by the threat posed by ex-Séléka factions towards the non-Muslim communities. They also claim to be protecting CAR from what is deemed 'foreigners' of the land (Dukhan, 2017, p. 17). CLPC demands a general amnesty for past crimes of its fighters and political and military positions for their leaders and associates. Despite its affiliation with various groups on the ground, it is discussed how much influence Ngaïssona has in reality (IPIS, 2018, p. 30). CLPC is first and foremost driven by the political aspirations of its leader, leaving the claimed justification of self-defense more in the category of being political rhetoric with little truth to it.

5.3.2.3 Anti-Balaka Maxime Mokom wing

In May 2015, Maxime Mokom of Gbaya ethnicity officially broke off with CLPC as a result of Mokom's participation in the controversial 'Nairobi talks' – which will be further scrutinized in the next phase. Considered an anti-Balaka hardliner, Mokom has close ties to former President Bozizé and his family, which are also of Gbayan ethnicity (IPIS, 2018, p. 30). This is revealed in how the group's main political objective is to overthrow the central government and bring François Bozizé back to power. Moreover, it seeks to obtain general amnesty for its leaders and combatants and to obtain political and military positions for its leaders, as well as the lifting of sanctions imposed on individuals in the group. Similar to CLPC, the group justifies its existence by the threat posed by ex-Séléka factions towards the non-Muslim communities (Dukhan, 2017, p. 18). Even though the ethnicity of Gbaya is prominent in the group, and it has an anti-Muslim agenda, it is still argued that the group primarily is driven by an opportunistic aspiration for political power,

rather than religion or security. The group nonetheless maintains a high capability for generating insecurity in the country through their associated networks of anti-Balaka (IPIS, 2018, p. 30).
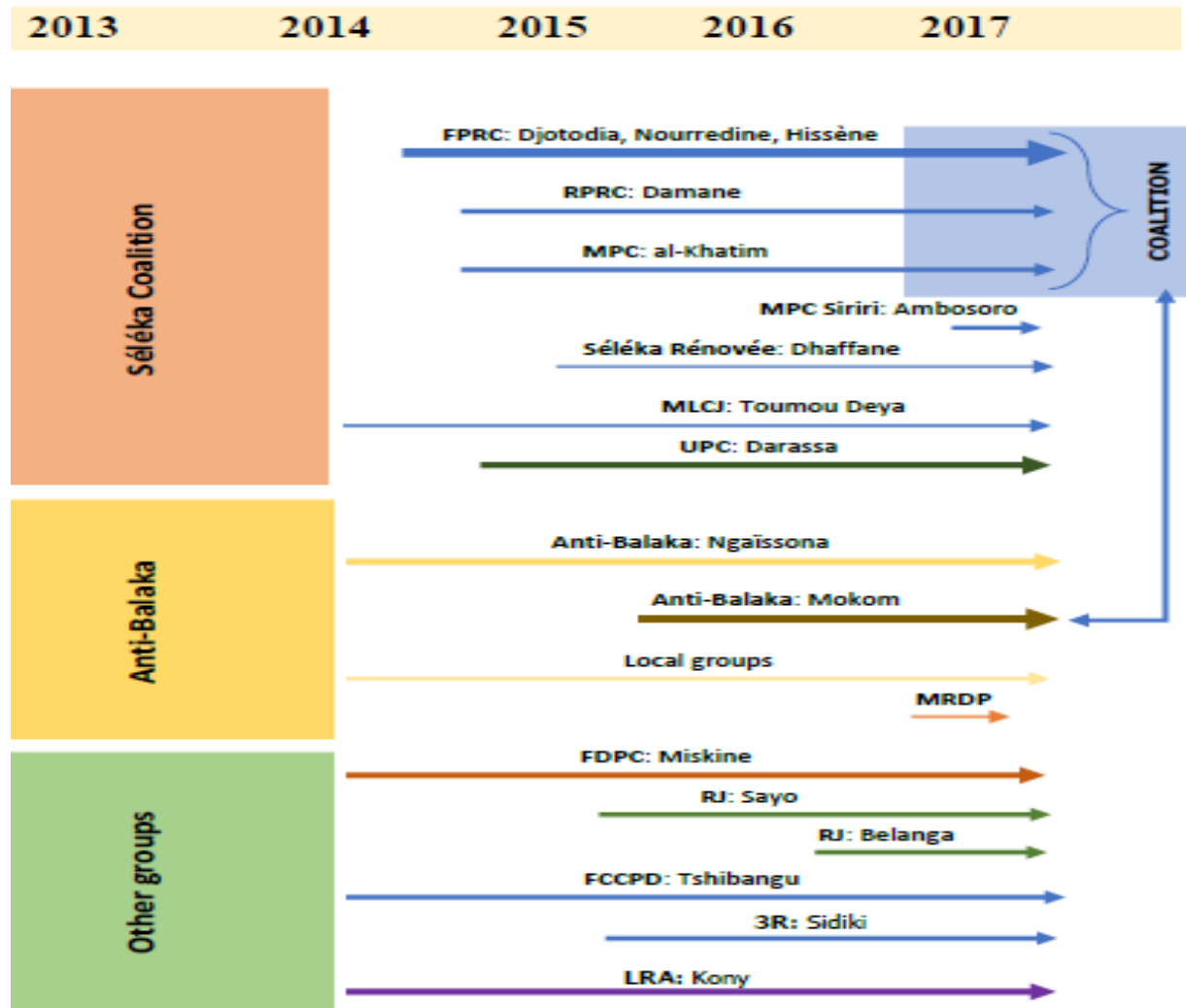
Figure 2 Rebel actors in CAR 2013-2017 (Dukhan, 2017)

5.3.3 Fractionalization for Gains in Phase Three

Since the hypotheses guiding this thesis are centered around alliance formation, none of the alliance formation hypotheses of one to five should explicitly explain this third phase. However, we can still extract the divisions between religion, security or gains to conclude which one of these factors were main motivations for fractionalization. As we have seen in this phase, all of the armed groups emerging from ex-Séléka and anti-Balaka have claimed a raison d'être in self-defense of various minorities in CAR. As argued in section on each group, this claimed self-defense has been

deemed not trustworthy, and a primary motivation of security for fractionalization is thus ruled out. Moreover, a majority of the new groups have an ethnic dimension in how leaders of the groups attract combatants with similar ethnic origins as themselves into their groups. This ethnic aspect is however not seen as a reason for creating the groups, rather it is observed as a consequence of which domains various leaders have the most influence. Hypothesis one regarding religion and ethnicity is therefore not considered to be explaining the third phase. Based on what we have scrutinized so far in this chapter, as well as former actions taken by group leaders in earlier phases, it is held that the main motivations for the emergence of new groups were those of potential gains – either in the form of revenue, political power, or both. It could be argued that to fractionalize is possible to put within the category of balancing. That we interpret the act to fractionalize as leaving a stronger alliance of two or more actors to join the weaker alliance of only one group. In the end, hypothesis four is therefore deemed to best explain fractionalization in phase three – *H4: In CAR, actors will balance their adversaries by joining what is perceived as a weaker actor or alliance to maximize potential gains.* That leader figures in Séléka and anti-Balaka believed there to be better potential for making gains as an individual group and therefore decided to fractionalize from the alliances.

Revisiting the animal metaphor of Schweller from chapter 3.2.3, it is argued that the ex-Séléka groups in the third phase acted in line of being the most revisionist animal of *wolves* – the predators in the system, hungry for expansion and willing to gamble their safety to do so. This was clearly illustrated in the fighting between the former allies e.g. in how RPRC and UPC clashed together for the control of road checkpoints and gold trade in the Bambari area, or how RPRC and FPRC fought each other for control of the diamond producing center of Bria at the end of 2014 (ICG, 2015, pp. 8-9). The exception is the group of Séléka Rénovée. As it did not have any soldiers and seemingly tried to approach the new government for potential political power, they can best be explained as *lambs* – weak in power and therefore left with no other possible strategy than distancing itself from or appeasing the potential danger.

Insofar it is possible to classify the two main groups of anti-Balaka in the third phase as unitary actors, it is argued that the anti-Balaka Mokom wing was best described as *wolves*, while CLPC was acting more in line of *jackals* – actors that are willing to pay a high price to defend their possessions, but an even higher price to extend their values. They are dissatisfied and partly

revisionist and will tend to be opportunistic and risk-averse. This because Mokom was considered a hardliner wanting to overthrow the government, whereas Ngaïssona was considered more moderate and willing to negotiate, but still posed a physical threat to the country.

In the end, it is maintained that all the newly formed groups in phase three were created with the prime motivation of potential gains – either in the form of revenue, political power, or both. Moreover, none of the group leaders adhered to the Brazzaville Agreement on Cessation of Hostilities which was signed by, or on behalf of these leaders. It is therefore argued that the third phase of the conflict in CAR is best described by hypothesis six – *H6: In CAR, actors work towards gaining power and achieving hegemony.*

5.4 New Opportunities (2015)

The spring of 2015 saw the first glimmer of improved security in CAR after two years of intense fighting between peacekeepers and armed groups, one-sided violence towards civilians and fighting within the armed groups. As we will explore, some of this climate of relative peacefulness can be attributed to the alliance created in January 2015 between the former enemies of FPRC and what would become the Mokom wing of anti-Balaka (IPIS, 2018, p. 7). The relative peace in this fourth phase is also due to how the armed groups outside the new alliance limited their violence in the prospect of gaining government positions. As we will explore in this chapter, 2015 nevertheless saw a minor-flare up of violence at the end of the year closing in on the elections when the new alliance was denied participation. This fourth phase will commence in January 2015, by such overlapping with the third phase which lasted until July 2015 when the MPC was officially created. This is because phase three mainly dealt with the fractionalization of the old alliances of anti-Balaka and Séléka, while phase four is more concerned with the formation of the alliance between FPRC and anti-Balaka Mokom wing.

5.4.1 The Nairobist Alliance

In January 2015, the clans of former presidents Djotodia and Bozizé gathered in Nairobi in a meeting organized by the presidents of the Republic of Congo and Kenya. Bozizé had the military support in what would later become the Maxime Mokom wing of anti-Balaka, while Djotodia had his FPRC led by Nourredine Adam. Even though these two groups had been at the center of the conflict to begin with – where Djotodia ultimately ousted Bozizé through a military coup in March 2013 – the two former enemies now found together in the military 'Nairobist Alliance' (Dukhan, 2018, p. 10). The Nairobi Agreement included provisions on demobilization, disarmament and reintegration (DDR), amnesty for all perpetrators of abuses and the removal of the current transitional authorities. CAR's transitional authorities and the international community dismissed the deal as it excluded them from the negotiations and undermined the existing agreement (Dukhan, 2016, p. iii). Two main motives were driving forth this alliance. First of all, it was to create a united front against the 'zero tolerance for impunity' policy introduced by transitional President Samba-Panza. The policy meant that most of the military and political leaders from the two clans were in one way or another stamped with judicial proceedings for crimes against humanity and war crimes ranging from 2003 to 2015. Secondly, many people affiliated with the

two former regimes of Bozizé and Djotodia were according to the transitional charter of 2013 barred from running for office in the upcoming elections at the end of 2015 (TheSentry, 2018, p. 15). The Nairobi Agreement thus found political support among those that had committed the worst atrocities throughout the conflict which still aimed for political power.

The Nairobi Agreement and the Nairobist Alliance primarily stands forth as a symbol of the opportunistic motives of group leaders. As we have scrutinized in the former chapters, all of the actors in the Nairobist Alliance did at some point claim their actions to be primarily motivated by the need to defend a certain part of the population from what was portrayed as the largest threat to the civilians in CAR. Since this rhetoric was issued accompanied by massive abuses of the civilian population, it was never fully accepted as being truthful. However, with this new alliance, all trustworthiness of any such claim of protecting a religious minority or an abused ethnic community crumbles into dust. Both sides were willing to engage in an alliance with someone that earlier had severely abused the people they claimed to be representing and protecting, and they did so with the prime motivation of avoiding charges of war crimes against themselves and to push the agenda of regaining political power.

What explains the formation of the Nairobist Alliance is thus the two hypotheses centered around possible gains. It is however not so easily decided if this alliance was an act of bandwagoning or balancing. If we look at the thickness of the lines representing FPRC and anti-Balaka Mokom wing in figure 2 from chapter 5.3.2.3, we see that Dukhan (2017) holds that FPRC is the most powerful of the actors based on the thickness of lines. If we are willing to trust this distinction in power, it means that there is a separation of which hypothesis holds the most explanatory power for each of the groups. For anti-Balaka Mokom wing, it is hypothesis five that best explains the formation of the Nairobist Alliance – *H5: In CAR, actors will bandwagon to what is perceived as the strongest actor or alliance to maximize potential gains.* Whereas hypothesis four is the one best describing how FPRC went into the Nairobist Alliance – *H4: In CAR, actors will balance their adversaries by joining what is perceived as a weaker actor or alliance to maximize potential gains.* A different way of analyzing the situation is to view the government and MINUSCA as the most powerful actors in the country, and thus both groups belonging to the Nairobist Alliance would best be described by hypothesis four. This is however not the view of this thesis, as MINUSCA is an external force in the conflict with radically different motivations and goals than that of the rebel

groups. MINUSCA is thus not a viable potential ally for the various rebel groups, and it should not be understood as a unit when analyzing how and why the rebel groups decide to create alliances.

5.4.2 The Bangui Forum

In May 2015, the Bangui Forum for reconciliation gathered around 600 participants from all parts of society, including national political parties, armed groups, the private sector, civil society, traditional chiefs, religious groups and the transitional government. The aim of the forum was to define a collective vision for the future of CAR. The Forum excluded Djotodia and Bozizé's political parties, as the two leaders were in exile and under international sanctions (Dukhan, 2016, p. 27). The forum culminated in the adoption of a Pact for Peace, for a National Reconciliation and Reconstruction, as well as the signature of a Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation and Repatriation (DDRR) agreement by 9 out of 10 armed groups (IPIS, 2018, p. 7). The DDRR agreement called for; combatants to give up their weapons before the elections; the release of child soldiers; a timeline for elections and the extension of the current government's mandate; and mechanisms for justice and reconciliation. Of the groups we have scrutinized in this and the previous chapter, all groups emerging from anti-Balaka and ex-Séléka that existed in May 2015 (thus excluding the MPC) signed the agreement of DDDR. However, FPRC withdrew their support not long after the forum (ICG, 2015, p. 25).

In the immediate aftermath of the Bangui Forum, it was seen as a tremendous success which increased the momentum of the political transition process towards the planned elections (IPIS, 2018, p. 7). After the forum, the transitional government started to approach some of the armed groups considered more moderate like RPRC and anti-Balaka coordination of Ngaïssona (CLPC) for positions in government. The groups considered to be more radical like UPC, FPRC and anti-Balaka Mokom wing were excluded from the process of involvement in government (PECAR, 2015, p. 7). The exclusion from government, coupled with the fact that Bozizé and Djotodia were denied access to the Bangui Forum would have dire consequences for the people of Bangui.

5.4.3 Elections

Leading up to the elections scheduled for October in 2015, Bangui once again saw a flare up in violence. The renewed violence which lasted from September 26 to October 16, 2015, resulted in the deaths of 79 civilians, as well as 20 attacks against UN premises and 19 attacks against guesthouses and offices of local and international NGO's (PECAR, 2015, pp. 5-6). Once again, the elections were delayed. The violence reportedly begun as protests which were stimulated to be increasingly violent by FPRC and anti-Balaka Mokom wing. The encouragement of violent protests was part of an attempt to bring down the transitional government while President Samba-Panza was out of the country (UNSC, 2017). As part of the attempted coup, dozens of FPRC combatants walked from northeast CAR to the strategic town of Sibut close to Bangui, mimicking what Séléka did in December 2012 before they took power in Bangui. However this time around, an international peacekeeping force was in place to halt their advances, and the coup attempt was thwarted (IPIS, 2018, p. 7). By mid-November, the Nairobist Alliance initiated a political agreement calling for a third transition led by new authorities of transition. Twenty-six representatives of civil society, armed groups and political parties signed the agreement. Of armed groups, only FPRC and anti-Balaka Mokom wing signed the document (Nzilo, 2015). The effort can therefore be seen as a political attempt of removing the transitional government, since the military attempt had been stopped by MINUSCA in October.

Despite the various efforts of the Nairobist Alliance to halt the elections they were barred from participating in, the first round of legislative and presidential elections was eventually held at the end of the year after pressure from the international community. Two candidates were confirmed for the second round: Georges Dologuélé and Faustin Archange Touadéra. Former prime minister (2008-2013) under the Bozizé regime, Touadéra, eventually won the election and assumed the role of President of CAR in March 2016 (Dukhan, 2016, pp. 27-28).

5.4.4 Power and Hegemony or Peace Agreement and Arms Control?

Analyzing the actions undergone by members of the Nairobist Alliance in phase four, hypothesis six clearly stands out as the most descriptive of the situation – *H6: In CAR, actors work towards gaining power and achieving hegemony.* They formed an opportunistic alliance which then was utilized in an attempt to overthrow the government, first through military means, then by political means. Looking at the rest of the armed groups in question, the answer is not as clear. Considering

how the other armed groups in this period limited their violence and signed a pact of peace and DDRR, hypothesis seven is seemingly the most descriptive of these groups in the fourth phase – *H7: In CAR, actors work towards security through peace agreements and arms control.*

It is however also possible to claim that the other groups also wanted to gain power and achieve hegemony during this fourth phase. That the signing of the DDRR was only a move meant to seem moderate, to gain trust and further strengthen their group, with no real intention of disarming – employing the tactic of ambiguity. Since representatives of both RPRC and CLPC gained government positions soon after the Bangui Forum, this analysis could also be valid. This thesis will nevertheless uphold the separation between hypothesis six and seven between the actions of the Nairobist Alliance and the other armed groups in the fourth phase. This because their actions are considered diametrically different in their approach towards a possible end to the conflict. Where the various other groups were at least willing to sign documents aiming to end the conflict through disarmament and reintegration, the Nairobist Alliance openly sought a partition of the country and to overthrow the transitional government. Moreover, the other groups did not sign the call for a third transition proposed by the Nairobist Alliance, which then further strengthens the claim of an upheld separation between hypothesis six and seven in the fourth phase.

5.4.5 Alliance Formation in Phase Four

Summing up phase four, it is evident that in terms of alliances, the notions of self-defense which we saw in phase one and two evaporated in the fourth phase. The Nairobist Alliance was an opportunistic alliance between the two most hardliner armed groups in the conflict: FPRC and anti-Balaka Mokom wing. Seeking to overthrow the transitional government and a partition of the country, the alliance formation in the fourth phase is thus best described by the two hypotheses concerning allying for gains. For anti-Balaka Mokom wing, hypothesis five best describes their participation in the alliance – *H5: In CAR, actors will bandwagon to what is perceived as the strongest actor or alliance to maximize potential gains.* Whereas hypothesis four covers how and why FPRC decided to be a part of the Nairobist Alliance – *H4: In CAR, actors will balance their adversaries by joining what is perceived as a weaker actor or alliance to maximize potential gains.*

The creation of the Nairobist alliance, as well as the actions they underwent during this fourth phase, leaves us with hypothesis six best describing FPRC and anti-Balaka Mokom wing in the fourth phase – *H6: In CAR, actors work towards gaining power and achieving hegemony.* When

analyzing the remaining armed groups in the fourth phase, it is argued that they through the signing of a pact for peace and DDRR, as well as limiting their violence, are best explained by hypothesis seven – *H7: In CAR, actors work towards security through peace agreements and arms control.* This final bit of analysis is however a bit more ambiguous, as it is also possible to argue that these groups were also primarily motivated by the prospect of gaining power, but unlike the Nairobist Alliance instead chose a path of appeasement and ambiguity to gain it.

5.5 Old Habits Die Hard (2016)

Together with a relatively peaceful 2015, the successful democratic election of Faustin Archange Touadéra as new President in early 2016 was by many marked as a step towards a more peaceful CAR. Even though Touadéra took decisive steps to better both the economic and security situation in CAR, there was however little evidence of improvement in either field under the new President (ICG, 2017, pp. 1-2). Instead, this fifth phase was marked by an enlargement of the Nairobist Alliance with MPC and RPRC, as well as an upsurge in violence at the end of 2016 which carried on into 2017. As we will see, much of the violence in this period was tied to the control of resource-rich areas and profitable operations like roadblocks. Together with the increased violence, phase five also saw the return of sectarian and religious rhetoric, primarily aimed at Fulani population.

5.5.1 Roadblock Economy

The practice of non-government roadblocks in CAR ranges back to the 1990's, when local self-defense groups started to create them to protect the scarce natural resources they owned from bandits and Sudanese poachers and pastoralists. By the end of 2008, the armed group APRD mentioned in chapter two had an effective system of protection and taxation of their area in northwestern CAR (Schouten and Kalessopo, 2017, p. 10). Fast forwarding until 2016, the practice of roadblocks was frequently used by all the armed groups in CAR. Since erecting a roadblock demands little more than something physically blocking the road and a few armed men to impose the illegal taxation, the practice is popular among both larger and smaller groups. As CAR is a landlocked country that relies on imports for about 50 percent of its basic consumer goods, it is a lucrative business. No one is immune to the illegal taxing, be it the moving of cattle headed for markets, humanitarian help, basic consumer goods or simply regular traffic (IPIS, 2018, p. 42).

It is estimated that the groups of FPRC, UPC, MPC and RPRC in 2017 was earning at least EUR 3.59 million a year from the taxation of the cattle circuit, and another EUR 2.38 million from the taxation of Sudanese traders (Schouten and Kalessopo, 2017, p. 16). Of the total 290 roadblocks in 2017, the state held 115 legal roadblocks divided among the Gendarmerie, FACA, Police, etc., while FPRC was the leading armed group holding 61 roadblocks. The rest of the roadblocks were divided among anti-Balaka (46), UPC (42), MPC (40), RPRC (4), as well as the unaligned RJ (16) and FDPC (1), which this thesis has not focused on (IPIS, 2018, p. 45). Figure 3 shows a snapshot of the 2017 territorial control of armed groups and the division of roadblocks in these areas. Since

some areas are more profitable than others, the groups often find themselves in armed struggles for control of areas close to mines, markets or border areas. As we will further investigate, the fighting over lucrative areas also encouraged the creation of yet another alliance in the conflict in CAR, or rather, the enlargement of one.
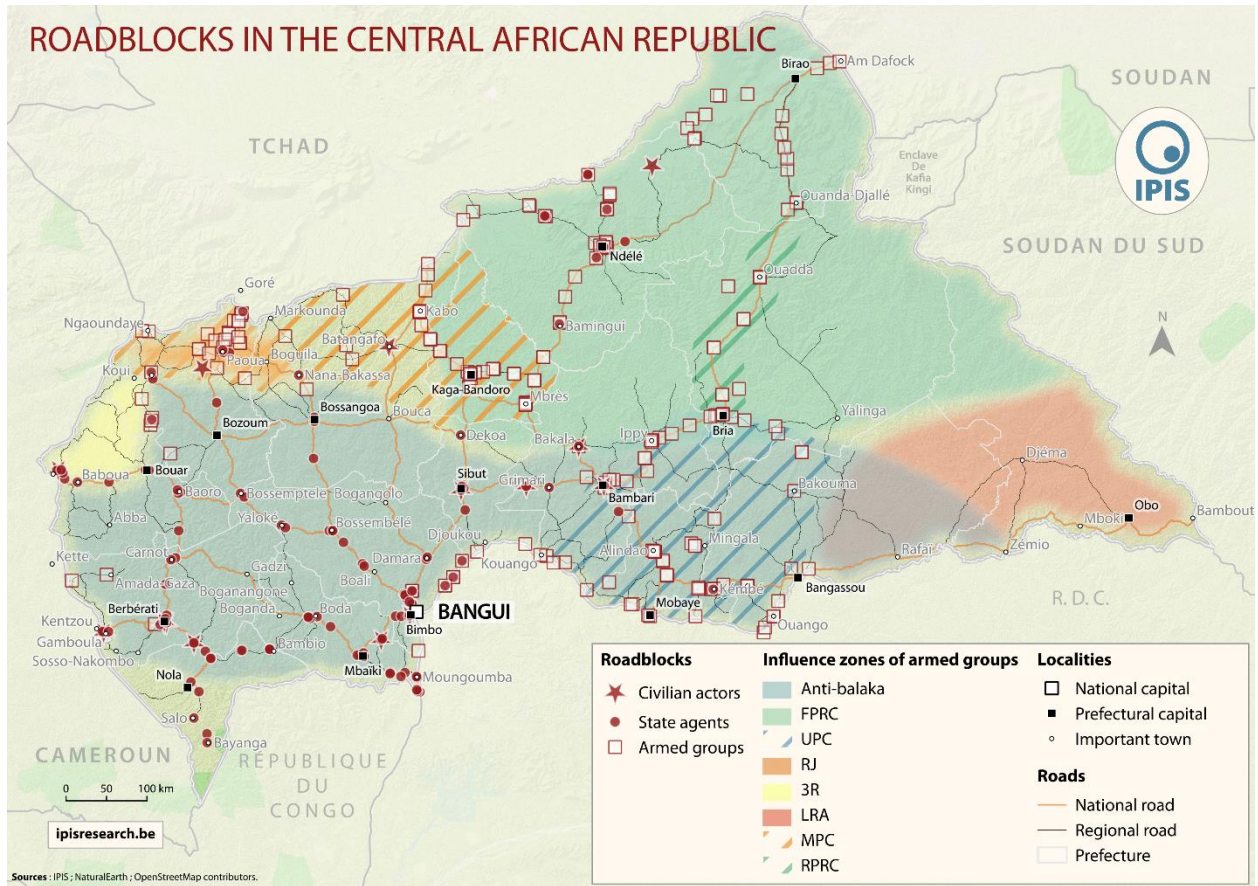
Figure 3 Roadblocks in CAR 2017 (Schouten and Kalessopo, 2017)

One example of many such struggles for lucrative areas was the battle for control of the areas around the northern town Ndélé between MPC and FPRC. Until February 2016, FPRC had almost exclusive control of the areas which are economically lucrative in terms of oil, mining and cattle trade. It is also one of the strategic checkpoints of the 'Sudanese circuit', yielding much profit from taxation. As MPC moved into the area to claim a part of the lucrative businesses, Ndélé experienced a cycle of killing and mistreatment of soldiers belonging to each of the groups, as well as towards civilians of the town (PECAR, 2016a, p. 20). Another example is how UPC decided in mid-2016 to expand its operations from the southern prefectures of Mbomou and Basse Kotto into the central prefecture of Nana-Grébizi (Kaga Bandoro, Mbrès, Ouandago). The expansion was

once again justified by the need to protect the Fulani population. The area was however considered by both MPC and FPRC to be in their zone of influence, and despite past tensions, the two groups created a temporary common front to contain the growing influence of UPC. One example is that of June 19, near Ouandago (close to Kaga Bandoro), as clashes between FPRC/MPC and UPC left between 10 and 15 dead, including one civilian (PECAR, 2016a, pp. 22-23). As we will explore in the next section, beyond the tensions related to control of lucrative areas, these clashes were also connected to the wish by Nourredine Adam and Abdoulaye Hissène of FPRC to reunify Séléka. This because they wanted to increase the collective threat and leverage in negotiations with the newly elected President Touadéra (Dukhan, 2016, p. 26).

What the above paragraphs about roadblocks and the fighting tied to them shows, is how the armed groups in phase five settled into a modus operandi which was primarily driven forth by the prospect of profit. According to Dukhan in her interview for this thesis: "the groups work like enterprises: they need money to pay for their fighters. They have been struggling between themselves to control resources. It is not necessarily an end goal, but money is definitely a strong motivation, if not the main" (Dukhan, 2019). In other words, money permits growth of the group. However, she also holds that not all actors in the conflict are solely motivated by money: "Nourredine, Djotodia and Bozizé are power hungry: Money is not enough – they want power" (Dukhan, 2019). This is an aspect that is further investigated in the next section. It is nevertheless clear that the practice of creating roadblocks and fighting the other groups over lucrative areas is best described by hypothesis six – *H6: In CAR, actors work towards gaining power and achieving hegemony.*

5.5.2 The anti-UPC Coalition

Working towards his goal of reunifying the former alliance of Séléka, Nourredine Adam invited former members to a General Assembly of ex-Séléka in Bria, October 2016. Only RPRC officially joined the assembly. Both Executive President of MPC, El Bachar Idriss Ahmed, and the Chief of Staff of UPC, Ali Darassa, held that they would not take part in a coalition led by Nourredine Adam because he was under international sanctions. The executive President of MPC also indicated he would not agree to join a group which he would be the leader of. The only group agreeing to join the alliance at this point was therefore RPRC, making the enlarged Nairobist alliance comprise of FPRC, RPRC and anti-Balaka Mokom wing. "The Bria Declaration" was issued at the end of October and called for a renewed dialogue between the government and the

groups involved in the rebellion. The declaration also condemned the persecution of minorities (PECAR, 2016b, p. 38). This final point is interpreted as being another attempt at claiming that armed groups in CAR primarily are there to protect civilians – a claim that at this point held little credibility as we learn below what the coalition was actually used for.

UPC did not join the alliance and continued their military campaign eastwards described in the previous sections. This expansionist strategy coupled with the fact that UPC refused to join the new coalition, resulted in what can only be characterized as an open war between UPC and the newly formed alliance (Dukhan, 2017, p. 26). On November 21, the coalition led by FPRC started their offensive by attacking UPC positions in Bria. To further weaken UPC and with the aim of taking their stronghold in Bambari, FPRC together with the coalition also conducted attacks on the Bria-Ippy-Bambari axis and Mbrés-Bakala-Bambari axis between December 2016 to February 2017 (PECAR, 2017a, p. 14). These attacks were also supported by MPC, which at this point decided to join what has later been described as "the anti-UPC coalition" – now consisting of FPRC, RPRC, MPC and anti-Balaka Mokom wing, headed politically by Adam and militarily by Hissène from FPRC (Dukhan, 2018, p. 10).

The clear cut anti-Balaka cooperation in the anti-UPC coalition as described by Dukhan can however be disputed. According to the UN Panel of Experts, there was only ad-hoc cooperation with anti-Balaka through the military coordination with anti-Balaka zone commander Gaëtan Boadé. Maxime Mokom on his part denied to having involvement at all in commanding the fighting with UPC (PECAR, 2017a, p. 15). This thesis will however go forward with the notion that anti-Balaka was a member of the anti-UPC coalition, as Boadé's participation in the fighting was later confirmed by the panel. This ambiguity regarding membership confirms that little in the conflict of CAR is clear cut and easily put into boxes. Indeed, as we will explore in the next chapter, there was later an Arab faction of the anti-UPC coalition which expressed that the anti-foreigner rhetoric proclaimed by anti-Balaka was harmful to ex-Séléka unity, and to the Arab faction in particular (ibid.).

As the name expresses, the anti-UPC coalition was primarily an alliance meant to counter the expansionist strategy of UPC led by Ali Darassa. In a conversation with the UN Panel of Experts, one of the FPRC leaders, Abdoulaye Hissène, told the panel that they were not willing to negotiate with Ali Darassa and would continue to fight UPC until the armed group either had disappeared

as a political entity or become a part of FPRC-led coalition (PECAR, 2017a, p. 14). Moreover, there was a general conviction among the coalition leaders that there was a secret agreement between Darassa and the government which coalition leaders believed to threat both their existence and economic interests. In a secret recording done in late 2016, a high ranking MPC representative said that:

> "President Touadéra has given Ali Darassa the power to control the territory as far as the border with Sudan. He is going to disarm as far as Ndélé. If Ali Darassa disarms the Gula, he will also disarm the Runga and the Arabs... He has become Touadéra's FACA. Fulani are therefore fighting in place of the FACA. That's why we need to oppose him." (Dukhan, 2018, p. 11)

In their efforts to weaken Darassa and either expel him or force him to join them, members of the anti-UPC coalition once again started to employ sectarian rhetoric aimed at alienating a certain population. The campaign that began in late November 2016 lasted for almost a year and in sum led to the massacre of hundreds of Muslim Fulani civilians. UPC in turn responded by killing individuals they believed to be affiliated with groups in the rival coalition, including civilians (Dukhan, 2018, p. 10).

5.5.3 Alliance Formation in Phase Five

There are two main entities to analyze in this fifth phase: UPC and the anti-UPC coalition. The actors that did join an alliance, and the actor that refused. Beginning with UPC led by Ali Darassa, we have seen the clearest example of behavior which Schweller would describe as a *wolf* – hungry for expansion and willing to gamble their safety to do so. UPC in this period attempted to grow their power through geographical expansion, but in the end took heavy losses in doing so. The expansion was once again justified by the need to protect the Fulani population. As discussed in chapter 5.3.1.2, this rhetoric is not deemed trustworthy and is instead seen as a tool to recruit more soldiers. Moreover, Darassa was invited to join the reunion of former Séléka together with anti-Balaka Mokom wing, but flatly denied the invitation and instead went headfirst into battle against the new alliance. Considering our hypotheses, there is only one hypothesis that describes the actions of UPC during the fifth phase – *H6: In CAR, actors work towards gaining power and achieving hegemony.*

Looking at the members of the anti-UPC coalition, things are understandably not as clear as when explaining the actions of the single group. What is clear, is that hypothesis six also holds much

explanatory power for this group of actors in the fifth phase. Even though RPRC and eventually MPC were willing to make peace with the Nairobist Alliance, this was nevertheless done with the aim of decreasing the power of UPC and increase gains, not to seek the kind of peace that hypothesis seven describes. Moreover, the formation of this alliance further decreases the explanatory power of hypothesis one when explaining alliance formation in CAR – *H1: In CAR, actors seek to ally with groups that have similar ethnicity or religious founding as themselves.* With the addition of RPRC and MPC to the alliance, three mainly Muslim armed groups were now allied to the mainly Christin anti-Balaka Mokom wing. The fact that they together killed hundreds of Fulani, which are also mainly Muslim, leaves little explanatory power in hypothesis one. Since the anti-UPC coalition can be considered a continuation of the Nairobist Alliance, it is argued that the analysis of its members in the fourth phase is still valid for the fifth phase. Meaning that hypothesis four best explains FPRC's role in the anti-UPC alliance – *H4: In CAR, actors will balance their adversaries by joining what is perceived as a weaker actor or alliance to maximize potential gains*, while hypothesis five describes the role of anti-Balaka Mokom wing in the new alliance – *H5: In CAR, actors will bandwagon to what is perceived as the strongest actor or alliance to maximize potential gains.*

With the same argument that was made in the fourth phase regarding anti-Balaka Mokom wing – that FPRC was the most powerful armed group in CAR according to Dukhan (2017) – it is argued that the participation of RPRC and MPC in the anti-UPC coalition is also best described by hypothesis four. However, since both RPRC and MPC are considered weaker than UPC by Dukhan, it could be argued that they joined the anti-UPC coalition primarily for reasons of security. That MPC saw what happened to those who did not join the coalition, and therefore joined the coalition to not suffer the same fate as UPC. In that potential analysis, we keep the *how* from hypothesis four, which is bandwagoning, but change out the *why* of potential gains, with a wish for security as the primary motivation. If this claim holds evidence, hypothesis three is thus better at explaining the fifth phase for UPC and RPRC – *H3: In CAR, actors will bandwagon to what is perceived as the strongest actor or alliance to ensure safety.* Nevertheless, the two armed groups did partake in an alliance which employed sectarian rhetoric and killed hundreds of civilians with the goal of obtaining new territory. As such, this thesis will claim that both hypothesis three *and* five holds explanatory power when describing how and why RPRC and MPC joined the anti-UPC coalition.

5.6 The Cycle of Allies and Ethnic Violence (2017)

The fighting that started at the end of 2016 was upheld throughout 2017. As we will see, the ethnic violence from the previous phase continued for the first part of 2017 but changed character towards being more opportunistically driven when alliances were rearranged at the end of the year. Even though the main opponents from the last phase eventually made peace in 2017, the number of people that were killed only increased from the year before. Phase six also saw new splinter groups, but these groups did not make a big difference in the larger picture. During this sixth phase, there was also another attempt at a peace deal. 13 out of the 14 officially recognized armed groups signed an agreement in Rome which included a ceasefire and political representation for armed groups. However, considering how up to 100 people were killed the day after in clashes between FPRC and anti-Balaka fighters in Bria, the Rome agreement is only added to the list of failed peace agreements of this conflict – and hence not further scrutinized in the analysis of phase six.

5.6.1 Ethnic Fighting and Fractionalization

The anti-UPC coalition continued their targeted violence towards the Fulani community for the first part of 2017. Military leader of the coalition, Hissène, engaged in sectarian rhetoric where he convinced the other groups of the coalition that the Fulani were "foreigners" of the land which had to be chased out of CAR in order to "liberate" occupied territory (TheSentry, 2018, p. 14). UPC fighters, as well as hundreds of Fulani civilians, were killed, raped, looted and driven off selected territory. The sectarian violence was in many ways similar to the violence exerted by Séléka and anti-Balaka in 2013/2014, only that this time the Christian vs. Muslim rhetoric was exchanged with "us Central Africans" versus "the foreigners". The fighting with UPC continued until March 2017, with no major confrontations after that (PECAR, 2017b, p. 28). The ethnic violence enabled the coalition to gain lucrative territory in 2017, but it also increased the ethnic tension within the coalition itself (IPIS, 2018, p. 22). The main division in the anti-UPC coalition was centered around a rivalry in FPRC between the Runga community led by Abdoulaye Hissène and the Gula community led by Azor Khalit. This rivalry has a historic dimension as they fought in 2011 under the groups of UFDR and CPJP before joining forces as Séléka in 2012. In 2017, the Arab and Sara communities in the anti-UPC coalition expressed concerns regarding the Banda community of self-defense groups (anti-Balaka) in the coalition, as well as the "anti-foreigner" rhetoric which was being employed. They feared that it would not take long before they would be stamped as

"foreigners", as UPC had been. Consequentially, in May and June in 2017, the Arab and Sara community clashed with the Banda community in the anti-UPC coalition. The Arab and Sara community were supported by Hissène and the Runga, while Khalit and the Gula supported the Banda community (anti-Balaka). As a result of the fighting, Khalit was removed from his position of Chief of Staff for the National Council on Defense and Security (CNDS)[1] (PECAR, 2017b, pp. 30-31).

In June 2017 a group led by Mahamat Abdel Karim (known as General Amboroso) splintered from MPC, calling itself MPC Siriri. The new group consisting of Arab Muslims created the faction group to distance itself from the abuses perpetrated by the anti-UPC coalition towards Muslims, particularly Arabs (Dukhan, 2017, p. 11; IPIS, 2018, p. 25). The group was weaker than MPC and seemingly quickly disappeared from the conflict landscape in 2018. Nevertheless, what this fractionalization shows, coupled with the ethnic fighting within FPRC, is that ethnicity became increasingly important throughout 2017 as a result of the anti-UPC coalition's encouragement of ethnic violence. Even though there were no announced alliances created due to ethnic or religious reasons in this sixth phase, it is still argued that hypothesis one holds some explanatory power for phase six – *H1: In CAR, actors seek to ally with groups that have similar ethnicity or religious founding as themselves.* After all, alliance fractionalization is in many ways the opposite of alliance formation, and this particular fractionalization was clearly based on ethnic differences. 2017 also saw opportunistic fractionalization. In August 2017, the leader of anti-Balaka in Bambari, Gaëtan Boadé, established his own group called Rassemblement Des Républicains (RDR). Even though the group was now a separate group from anti-Balaka Mokom wing, Boadé upheld his cooperation with the Gula faction of FPRC. In this cooperation, they held control of a gold mine in Ndassima and the axis around Ippy, which is key for commercial exchanges and the moving of cattle (PECAR, 2017b, p. 28). Consequentially the creation of RDR is deemed opportunistic and seemingly a move meant to increase gains for its leader.

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[1] The military part of FPRC

5.6.2 Bringing the Old Crew Back Together

At the beginning of June, representatives from FPRC and UPC started to negotiate for a ceasefire. By October 2017, Hissène from FPRC and Darassa from UPC signed the Ippy agreement. The main objective of the agreement was to secure freedom of movement on the road between Bria and Bambari, as well as the reopening of the transhumance[2] corridors which had been closed for almost a year due to insecurity. Moreover, the agreement was an attempt at reconciling the competing, mainly economic, interests of the two groups. The agreement was also signed by Gaëtan Boadé for the RDR. Before the Ippy agreement was signed, MPC leader Al-Khatim issued a statement where he stepped down as Chief of Staff for CNDS and denied any further involvement with FPRC led coalition. Reportedly this was because he had been left out of the negotiations. Al-Khatim nevertheless signed the agreement one day after it was in effect (PECAR, 2017b, pp. 28-29). As a consequence of the agreement, also Damane from RPRC began to reconcile with UPC in the following weeks after the agreement was in effect (Dukhan, 2018, p. 12).

The agreement also had political implications. After the Ippy meetings, the leader of FPRC, Nourredine Adam issued a statement that affirmed Hissène as leader of the CNDS and simultaneously appointed Darassa as his deputy. However, Darassa later issued a statement that denied any involvement in the chain of command of CNDS – exemplifying the political complexity among the armed groups in CAR (PECAR, 2017b, p. 29). Who was officially leader of what does however not matter much in practical terms. The outcome of the agreement was nevertheless that there was a de facto cooperation on the ground between UPC and FPRC. By December, FPRC utilized this newfound ally in clashes against Azor Khalit and the Gula faction of FPRC and his makeshift ally of Gaëtan Boadé and the RDR. During the fighting in Ndassima, Boadé was killed (Rehman, 2017). As Boadé two months earlier had signed the Ippy ceasefire agreement, this incident exemplifies how much trust one can put in the agreements signed by the armed groups in CAR, especially when strategic and resource-rich areas are involved. Hypothesis seven regarding actors seeking peace through disarmament and peace agreements thus carries little weight also in this sixth phase. After Boadé was killed, the alliance was hence primarily made up of FPRC and UPC, supported by MPC and RPRC. The new alliance, which largely brought back together the old leaders of Séléka, soon put an end to the ethnic violence towards Fulani Muslims.

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[2] Movement of cattle

Moreover, the alliance also started to coordinate arms supplies from Chad, DRC and Sudan. The Ippy agreement also included provisions on revenue and information sharing, control of territory and the harmonization of political and military tactics. The alliance primarily aimed at asserting their control over resource-rich areas and to strengthen their positions in the various negotiations relating to DDRR and a potential peace (Dukhan, 2018, p. 12).

5.6.3 Alliance Formation in Phase Six

Looking at alliance formation in phase six, we can in many ways say that the alliance of Séléka has gone full circle. With the Ippy agreement, we saw the reconciliation between FPRC and UPC with the support of RPRC and MPC – those being the four largest armed groups emerging from Séléka in 2014/2015. What this goes to show, is the fragility of the alliances that have been created throughout the conflict – best exemplified in how Gaëtan Boadé was killed in battle with FPRC and UPC only two months after signing the Ippy agreement of ceasefire. These clashes are presumed to have started due to Boadé's control over a gold mine in Ndassima and over the strategic Ippy axis between Bria and Bambari. Once again revealing the opportunistic aspect of alliance formation and fractionalization. Since a ceasefire was broken and one of the men who signed it presumably was killed by other signatories for gains, hypothesis six carries much weight for phase six – *H6: In CAR, actors work towards gaining power and achieving hegemony.* Moreover, in phase six we also saw fractionalization based on ethnic considerations, both in the FPRC Gula faction and MPC Siriri. Hypothesis one is thus arguably represented in the sixth phase, even though it was through fractionalization, not alliance formation – *H1: In CAR, actors seek to ally with groups that have similar ethnicity or religious founding as themselves.*

When analyzing the actions of the armed groups through our hypotheses, we nevertheless need to divide the groups in the alliance. As with the former alliances it initiated, FPRC once again comes out as the most powerful actor. It could be argued that with the Gula fractionalization of Azor Khalit from FPRC, it lost some of its military strength in number of soldiers. This loss is nevertheless considered less than the presumed loss of soldiers and territory that UPC went through when fighting the anti-UPC coalition between late 2016 to early 2017. With the Ippy agreement, FPRC thus went through an act of balancing when allying with the presumed weaker actor of UPC, as well as RPRC and MPC. Moreover, no evidence has been found pointing towards anything else than the opportunistic motives of gains for why FPRC started this alliance. Once again, the actions

of FPRC joining an alliance is thus best explained by hypothesis four – *H4: In CAR, actors will balance their adversaries by joining what is perceived as a weaker actor or alliance to maximize potential gains.*

Moving on to RPRC and MPC, there is not much evidence pointing at any direction regarding why they supported this new alliance. It is nevertheless safe to say that both groups are less powerful than that of FPRC, meaning that they both fall under the category of bandwagoning. One would assume that since the two groups had been a part of the alliance punishing UPC when Darassa refused to sign the Bria declaration in October 2016, they knew what could happen if they did not sign the Ippy agreement one year later. In that view, one could argue that they agreed to join the new alliance mainly due to reasons of self-preservation – in other words security. We did however see MPC leader Al-Khatim issuing a statement where he denied any further involvement in FPRC-led coalition, but that this denial fell short only one day after the agreement was issued for signatures. According to the UN Panel of Experts to CAR, the signing by MPC was mainly due to it being economically beneficial for Al-Khatim. This because the agreement opened the roads between MPC and UPC controlled areas, which in turn increased the revenue from roadblocks and taxation (PECAR, 2017b, p. 29). Furthermore, we also saw a list of opportunistic goals for the new alliance which both RPRC and MPC eventually supported. In the end, it is therefore argued that for phase six, alliance formation for RPRC and MPC is best explained by hypothesis five – *H5: In CAR, actors will bandwagon to what is perceived as the strongest actor or alliance to maximize potential gains.*

The analysis of UPC's role in the new alliance resembles the above analysis of RPRC and MPC. Both based on figure 3 of Dukhan (2017) in chapter 5.3.2.3, and the fact that UPC had gone through fighting against the anti-UPC coalition between November 2016 to March 2017, it is held that UPC was weaker in power than FPRC. The form of allying UPC underwent in phase six was hence in line of bandwagoning. However, a proposed analysis that UPC joined the alliance primarily due to security reasons is arguably stronger than the same analysis for MPC and RPRC above, since UPC actually experienced the full measure of what it was to stand against a majority of the armed groups in CAR. In this view, hypothesis three therefore best explains alliance formation for UPC in the sixth phase – *H3: In CAR, actors will bandwagon to what is perceived as the strongest actor or alliance to ensure safety.* However, with the same explanation as for RPRC and MPC regarding

the opportunistic goals of the new alliance, as well as the predatory nature of UPC leader Darassa described in chapter 5.3.1.2, it would be naïve to presume that UPC was not motivated by gains to some degree as well. Considering that UPC also assisted FPRC in attacking the alliance of RDR and FPRC Gula faction for strategic and lucrative areas, it is held that hypothesis five also holds explanatory power for UPC in the sixth phase – *H5: In CAR, actors will bandwagon to what is perceived as the strongest actor or alliance to maximize potential gains.*

5.7 An Alliance of Distrust (2018)

The final phase of the conflict was not marked by any changes in alliances. Instead, the opportunistic motives of the armed groups in CAR were further underlined: More peace processes were signed and disregarded, more violence was pointed towards civilians, more fighting against peacekeeping forces and more fighting in between the armed groups. This phase did however see a decrease in fatalities from 1795 people killed in 2017 to 581 people killed in 2018 – the lowest number since the beginning of the conflict in 2012 (UCDP, 2019). The new alliance between UPC, FPRC, MPC and RPRC that was officially created in the sixth phase, were both weakened and bolstered throughout the months of this phase, often based on what was profitable at the time of a decision being made.

5.7.1 Almost Allies

Even though FPRC, UPC and MPC, supported by RPRC, signed the Ippy agreement in October 2017, it did not mean that all past conflicts were forgotten. For example, as late as May 3 in 2018, Damane from RPRC and Darassa from UPC met in Bria to conclude an agreement for movement of freedom between the Fulani and Gula communities. The agreement is seemingly opportunistic as it increased the capacity of UPC to acquire supplies from Sudan through Ouadda, which is a town under Damane's control (PECAR, 2018a, p. 19). Looking past former disagreements, Hissène of FPRC continued his efforts to create a strong and united alliance to stand against the government of CAR. To do this, he held several meetings with Darassa of UPC and Al-Khatim of MPC in August 2018. They made a particular show of unity on August 5, 2018, when they met and discussed a political process, and all groups committed to taking joint actions to address security issues related to cattle. However, these attempts at coordinating political action did not translate into military coordination on the ground. One example is how FPRC offered to support UPC in Bambari when the government forces of FACA deployed to the area, but UPC refused any form of reinforcement (PECAR, 2018b, p. 10). Another example of failed unity was when Hissène in April tried to put pressure on the government by moving his troops from Ndélé southwards towards Sibut – once again mirroring Séléka advancement in December 2012. Hissène only made it to Kaga-Bandoro, since the UPC and MPC elements that were supposed to move with him never arrived (PECAR, 2018a, pp. 17-18). Even though this happened before the talks in August, it still exemplifies the lacking trust within the alliance. Moreover, despite the increased meetings between

leaders and supposed show of unity, there were still numerous reports of violence between the former groups of Séléka throughout 2018 (PECAR, 2018b, pp. 15-16).

After MPC and UPC refused to provide troops to FPRC advancement, the Panel of Experts on CAR met with Al-Khatim of MPC in May. In this meeting, he categorically rejected the plan of FPRC to move towards Sibut. However, a few days later during the MPC General Assembly in Kaga-Bandoro, a new political leadership was appointed, and they publicly expressed their support to FPRC plans, thus turning the will of al-Khatim. The panel holds that al-Khatim has no interest in contesting the Touadéra regime's legitimacy, but that his position as leader of MPC is dependent on him recognizing the view of his followers. It is also held by the panel that Darassa, similar to al-Khatim, wishes to appear as a reasonable partner for the government and the international community. One example of this is how even though UPC clashed with FACA in Bambari on June 10, UPC still agreed to let the FACA convoy reach Bangassou. A decision which was hugely unpopular among other groups in the alliance, and even among elements within UPC itself (PECAR, 2018a, pp. 17-18).

What this goes to show, is that especially the leadership of MPC and UPC were eager to portray a picture of a moderate and reasonable group, ready to negotiate with the government. Recalling the animal metaphor of Schweller, the appeasement of the Touadéra regime suggests that Darassa and al-Khatim acted as *Jackals* which are willing to pay a high price to defend their possessions, but an even higher to extend their values. *Jackals* will usually bandwagon with *wolves* to maximize gains but are also prone to bandwagoning with *lions* if they are winning. The *lion* in this metaphor thus being the government, while the *wolf* describes the actions of FPRC. Nevertheless, since making an alliance with the government is not a viable option, and both UPC and MPC ultimately continued their support to FPRC, the conclusion from phase six is upheld: That hypothesis five best explains the continued participation of UPC and MPC in the alliance in the seventh phase – *H5: In CAR, actors will bandwagon to what is perceived as the strongest actor or alliance to maximize potential gains.*

Besides working to reunify Séléka to its former strength, FPRC reportedly continued to share a common opposition to the government with anti-Balaka Mokom wing and former President Bozizé. A delegation representing Bozizé met with Hissène in April to coordinate their actions with FPRC. Even though both groups share similar objectives, the capacity to preserve the alliance

remains fragile, exemplified in the intercommunal fighting throughout the country. Moreover, there have been reports of other actors based in Bangui, including politicians that has reached out to FPRC to inform it of their unofficial support if FPRC succeeds in its attempts of destabilizing the Touadéra regime (PECAR, 2018a, pp. 19-20). What this goes to show, coupled with the paragraphs above, is that the leadership of FPRC has a clear goal of political power and they are willing to ally with anyone opposed to the democratically elected government. Since they are the largest armed group (besides MINUSCA and FACA), it means that once again, hypothesis four is the one most describing for how and why FPRC makes alliances – *H4: In CAR, actors will balance their adversaries by joining what is perceived as a weaker actor or alliance to maximize potential gains.*

5.7.2 Double Discourse

When looking into alliance formation in CAR, it is easy to forget that all armed groups in CAR have continuously killed civilians and NGO-workers throughout the conflict. The armed groups make repeated assurances to the international community and local populations of their commitment to guaranteeing humanitarian access, creating secure zones and halting criminality. Leader of FPRC, Hissène, even invited the international news channel France 24 to FPRC-stronghold in Ndélé to broadcast to the world how happy and secure the local population was under his influence (France24, 2018). Nevertheless, the group leaders have so far not taken any concrete measures to mitigate the predatory and criminal actions of their fighters. This duplicity is well illustrated in how FPRC, MPC and UPC moved into the area surrounding Kaga-Bandoro with a large number of troops between July and September 2018. During this period, there was a significant increase in extorsion against the local population and robberies of NGO's. In September 2018, five NGOs in Kaga-Bandoro were robbed in a single week, which led several humanitarian organizations to halt their operations with the demand of armed groups' leaders to restrain their fighters (PECAR, 2018b, p. 16). Only a few days later, yet another NGO was robbed in the area, showing how little respect these humanitarian organizations have among the armed groups. According to NGO1, the criminal aspect of the conflict in CAR exponentially increased from the first time she was in Bangui in 2013, to the third time in 2017, when she was in Bangassou. She believes that this evolution is primarily due to the many young men that join the lower ranks of the armed groups in hopes of quick cash.

Young, angry, frustrated men that has lost all hope, with no job nor future […] it gives them purpose in life to achieve some sort of status in an armed group […] these are people that have lost any form of moral compass and therefore becomes extremely violent (NGO1, 2019:41-39:00)

Even though MPC and UPC also have been reported to kill civilians in their operations, FPRC being the hardliner of the three, was the one most heavily reported to commit civilian abuses in the seventh phase. Examples of this includes how FPRC on August 5, 2018, launched an offensive south of Bria to halt the targeting of Muslim traders and to dismantle anti-Balaka bases. In the process, they burned down 36 houses and killed at least 5 civilians. Or on August 25, when FPRC ambushed and killed at least 15 civilians belonging to the Banda ethnic group that were working in a mine north of Bria. Or finally on September 6, when FPRC elements abducted twelve civilians from a refugee camp in Bangui and executed nine of them when anti-Balaka leaders did not accept the conditions for their liberation (PECAR, 2018b, p. 16).

5.7.3 Alliance Formation in Phase Seven

In phase seven there were no new alliances created, nor any fractionalization from alliances or groups. It is nevertheless possible to assess if the analysis from phase six is still valid for this seventh phase, or if it has changed in any way. The alliance that was created by the Ippy agreement in October 2017 was upheld, but as we have explored, it faced difficulties regarding trust. More than anything, this seventh phase underlined what was concluded in the sixth phase: FPRC was best explained by hypothesis four – *H4: In CAR, actors will balance their adversaries by joining what is perceived as a weaker actor or alliance to maximize potential gains,* while UPC and MPC still seems to be covered by hypothesis five – *H5: In CAR, actors will bandwagon to what is perceived as the strongest actor or alliance to maximize potential gains.* This primarily because all three groups have been increasing their gains under the new alliance. Phase six held that there was some explanatory power in hypothesis three when explaining the entrance of UPC in the new alliance – *H3: In CAR, actors will bandwagon to what is perceived as the strongest actor or alliance to ensure safety.* There has however been no evidence discovered in this seventh phase supporting that UPC primarily sought security. Hypothesis three is therefore deemed to not have any explanatory power in phase seven. Furthermore, there is generally not much written about RPRC in phase seven, leading me to speculate that one of two things happened: Either the group lost its importance during this seventh phase, which would not be surprising considering that it is the smallest of the four groups in the alliance, or the group took a step closer towards the

government and a potential DDRR program. Perhaps it was a combination of both. The implication of the lacking information is nevertheless that this thesis will not attempt to speculate an analysis of RPRC within the hypotheses of alliance formation.

It is nevertheless possible to make a general analysis of the actions undergone by MPC, FPRC and UPC. Once again, the hardliner FPRC which tirelessly works towards secession of the northern areas of CAR is best described by the offensive aspect of hypothesis six – *H6: In CAR, actors work towards gaining power and achieving hegemony*. The two other groups of MPC and UPC have in phase seven shown that they are more moderate than FPRC. This is nevertheless mainly true when analyzing the actions of the group leaders al-Khatim and Darassa. Moreover, it is claimed that this portrayed moderateness is primarily something that is done with an aim of obtaining gains. Consequentially, MPC and UPC are also deemed to be best explained by hypothesis six in the seventh phase.

6 Conclusion

The conflict in CAR that started in 2012 has so far led to the death of more than 10 600 people, 6800 of which were civilians. It has also forced around 600 000 people to flee the country and created 650 000 internally displaced people, and in sum left an estimated 2.9 million people, over half the population, in dire need of assistance (UCDP, 2019; UNICEF, 2019; UNHCR, 2019). What began as a rebellion towards the sitting government in 2012, soon evolved into a vicious cycle of revenge killings between mainly Muslim Séléka and mainly Christian anti-Balaka. These seemingly religiously motivated alliances soon fractionalized and went on to create new alliances in the following years – more than once creating an alliance that defied the religious lines from the first phases of the conflict. The aim of this thesis has therefore been to scrutinize the various alliances created and fractionalization that occurred between the original two groups of anti-Balaka and Séléka between 2012 and 2018, through the following research question: *How can we explain shifting alliances between warring groups in the Central African Republic?*

6.1 Summary of Thesis

Chapter 1 introduced the project by reviewing relevant scholarly work, presenting the research question and discussing the contribution of this thesis.

Chapter 2 explored the history of CAR, ranging from pre-colonial times up until the years before the conflict began in 2012. The background gave historical insight into the conflict-ridden country which between 1960 and 2012 experienced four successful coup d'états.

Chapter 3 scrutinized the international relations theory of neorealism and developed the seven hypotheses below which were then used to guide this thesis in its exploration into alliance formation in CAR.

H1: In CAR, actors seek to ally with groups that have similar ethnicity or religious founding as themselves.

H2: In CAR, actors will balance their adversaries by joining what is perceived as a weaker actor or alliance to ensure safety.

H3: In CAR, actors will bandwagon to what is perceived as the strongest actor or alliance to ensure safety.

H4: In CAR, actors will balance their adversaries by joining what is perceived as a weaker actor or alliance to maximize potential gains.

H5: In CAR, actors will bandwagon to what is perceived as the strongest actor or alliance to maximize potential gains.

H6: In CAR, actors work towards gaining power and achieving hegemony.

H7: In CAR, actors work towards security through peace agreements and arms control.

Chapter 4 discussed the process of creating this thesis and revealed the choices made along the way and the reasons for making them – ranging from the selection of theory, case and methodological approach, to the process of data collection, semi-structured interviews and coding.

Chapter 5 analyzed and discussed alliance formation in CAR between 2012 and 2018. The chapter was divided into the seven phases described below, which were based on periods of time relating to major events regarding alliance formation in CAR.

Phase **one** ranged from late 2012 until the end of 2013 and analyzed the formation of Séléka and their successful military campaign to claim the presidency of CAR.

Phase **two** overlapped with phase one as it scrutinized the emergence of anti-Balaka in 2013 and their efforts to counter Séléka.

Phase **three** ranged from 2014 until mid-2015 and studied the fractionalization in this period and described the new groups that emerged from anti-Balaka and Séléka.

Phase **four** overlapped with phase three as it covered the whole of 2015, but instead of fractionalization scrutinized the elections, the Bangui forum and the formation of the Nairobist Alliance.

Phase **five** covered 2016 and analyzed the formation of the anti-UPC coalition, as well as exploring the practice of roadblocks in CAR and the fighting related to it.

Phase **six** covered 2017 and analyzed how most of the former Séléka found back together in a new alliance and investigated the ethnic fighting within certain groups which led to new splinter groups.

Phase **seven** covered 2018 and with no new alliances or fractionalizations, it scrutinized the alliance created in phase six, as well as taking a closer look at the opportunistic violence that the groups belonging to this alliance employed.

6.2 Main Findings

Table 1 below is a summary of the sub conclusions made throughout chapter five. The color red tells us that a hypothesis had little to no explanatory power for the phase in question. The color yellow tells us that the hypothesis held some explanatory power for a phase, but that it was not the dominant explanation. The color green tells us that a hypothesis was deemed most explanatory for a group or an alliance for the phase in question.

Table 1 Alliance Formation in CAR 2012-2018

	Phase						
Hypothesis	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1 Religion/ethnicity	🟥	🟨	🟥	🟥	🟥	🟨	🟥
2 Balance security	🟥	🟩	🟥	🟥	🟥	🟥	🟥
3 Bandwagon security	🟥	🟥	🟥	🟥	🟨	🟨	🟥
4 Balance gains	🟩	🟥	🟨	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩
5 Bandwagon gains	🟥	🟥	🟥	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩
6 Power and hegemony	🟩	🟥	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩
7 Security	🟥	🟥	🟥	🟨	🟥	🟥	🟥

What is evident from the table is that there are three hypotheses standing out as most explanatory for almost all of the phases: Hypothesis four, five and six. The common denominator of these three hypotheses is that they are centered around the motivation of achieving power and gains. Hypothesis six is nevertheless of less importance than the two others, as it is meant as an indicator of how the various groups interact with each other and do not tell us anything about alliance formation per se. It does however tell us that the majority of actors in CAR between 2012 and 2018 through their actions were mainly concerned with gaining power and achieving hegemony. The main exception is that of anti-Balaka during its emergence in phase two, as they in the beginning were primarily motivated by the security for themselves and their communities.

When we look at hypotheses one to five regarding alliance formation, it is seemingly hypothesis four that holds the most explanatory power of all the hypotheses due to its frequency. This is however a truth with modifications. Hypothesis four is represented in all the phases except for the

second phase primarily due to the armed group FPRC. Ranging from phase four to seven, the form of allying that FPRC underwent was in the form of balancing with weaker groups with the main motivation of potential gains. However, every time FPRC balanced with weaker groups, it means that these groups in turn bandwagoned to FPRC. Since all the alliances we have scrutinized have involved FPRC, it means that there in sum are more acts of bandwagoning than those of balancing throughout the conflict. The difference in frequency of how many groups have bandwagoned and how many groups have balanced is however marginal, only separated by one act of bandwagoning. An additional moment to the discussion between bandwagoning or balancing for gains, is that FPRC has been the key driver in initiating the alliances. More than once there was an underlying threat of violence if the smaller groups did not join, this illustrated by the yellow color on hypothesis three in phase five and six. In the end, no final conclusion on which hypothesis alone explains the most when looking at alliance formation in CAR between 2012 and 2018. Hypothesis four – *H4: In CAR, actors will balance their adversaries by joining what is perceived as a weaker actor or alliance to maximize potential gains* and hypothesis five – *H5: In CAR, actors will bandwagon to what is perceived as the strongest actor or alliance to maximize potential gains,* are both deemed to explain a large portion of how and why actors in CAR creates alliances. In the animal metaphor of Schweller the conflict in CAR is therefore best described as a violent contest between the revisionist animals of *jackals* and *wolves*, which are continuously trying to expand their territory and obtain gains.

What can be concluded with certainty, is that hypothesis one to three holds little leverage in explaining alliance formation in CAR. One of the initial observations made about CAR at the outset of this thesis was that the conflict was by many defined along religious lines. This thesis has shown that religion has had little to do with any alliances being made, as well as to why the various armed groups and alliances in CAR choose to fight each other. The clearest example of this is the anti-UPC coalition created in phase five between the mainly Christian anti-Balaka Mokom wing and the mainly Muslim FPRC, RPRC and MPC, which together killed hundreds of Muslim Fulanis. Religion has nevertheless been shown to have a role in how it has been manipulated by armed groups' leaders to justify their existence, to rationalize the killing of civilians and as a tool to recruit more soldiers to the respective groups. The religious division is therefore not considered to be a cause for the civil war in CAR, rather it is claimed to be a symptom of the conflict which

has been actively employed by leaders of armed groups in their ultimate goal of obtaining gains for themselves.

In the end, it is possible to make some general statements based on these findings. Hypothesis one can be rejected. Actors in CAR do no primarily seek to ally with groups that have similar ethnicity or religious founding as themselves. Hypothesis four and five are the ones that best describe alliance formation in CAR, and hypothesis six explains how most of the actors interact with each other and the government. The implication of this is that the two most common ways of creating alliances in CAR is either to balance the opponent by allying with weaker actors, or to bandwagon to what is perceived as the strongest actor. Furthermore, most alliances in CAR are created with the motivation of potential gains, power and hegemony, rather than security. Most actors in CAR are willing to sign agreements on peace and disarmament, but few are willing to follow up on what is written in them. Hypothesis seven is consequently also rejected.

6.3 Implications

As mentioned in chapter 1.3, the contribution of this thesis is split between theoretical implications and policy implications. The successful analysis of the conflict in CAR through a lens of neorealism proves that it is not only useful to employ neorealism to analyze interactions between states, but also to understand the interactions between armed groups *within* a civil war. When deciding on theory for an in-depth study on alliance formation in a civil war, neorealism should therefore be considered as a viable option – also for conflicts that have little quantifiable data and hence demands a qualitative approach.

The main findings of this thesis are that the alliance formation in CAR is primarily driven by motivations of potential gains, not identity and religion. However, as discussed in chapter 4.6, the data for this thesis has been oriented around the statements and actions of armed group leaders. There is a good chance that if asked, the soldiers on the ground would express a motivation for joining a group other than power and gains. Further research on alliance formation in CAR is therefore encouraged to create a partition between top leadership, mid-level leadership and low-level members. A potential study should include field research interviewing actors on the ground, so to create viable data. As suggested in the analysis, further research could also include the variables of hate and the demand for revenge. A source for inspiration could be Kalyvas (2006)

which found that violence mostly emerges among the population itself where there is a deep sense of hatred and ill will between people. A final suggestion to further studies is to compare CAR with other conflicts with the same level of alliance formation and fractionalization. A noteworthy proposal is to do a comparative analysis of CAR and the two conflicts that Christia (2012) explores.

Since this thesis finds that religion has little to do with why groups are allying and fighting each other, it is therefore encouraged that all actors working on, and informing about CAR should immediately put aside the belief that this conflict is mainly religious in nature. Journalists appear to be especially prone to commit this sin, as they seemingly copy and paste background info on the conflict from 2012/2013. To uphold the religious description only encourages the narrative upheld by leaders of the armed groups, and therefore adds fuel to the fire in the religiously justified violence carried out by all sides.

The implication of the fact that leaders of armed groups are primarily motivated by gains and power, is that the current efforts to end the war through disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation (DDRR) is deemed more or less pointless. Take for example the armed group UFDR explored in chapter two. We recall that they in 2007 signed the Birao Peace Agreement which included provisions of DDRR. The same UFDR led by Michel Djotodia went on to create the Séléka in 2012. In other words, over ten years of DDRR, with little to show for it. In the spirit of offensive realism, I therefore offer the following recommendation: 'To end the conflict in CAR, the international peacekeeping force must be boosted to a level of personnel and professionality that makes it capable to disarm the rebel groups, offer real protection to civilians and portray a substantial threat to anyone trying to topple the government by force'. However, to get sufficient funds for such a large increase, the conflict of CAR must be put back on the international agenda. This thesis should therefore be considered as a small contribution in raising awareness about the forgotten conflict in CAR.

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Appendix

Appendix I

Map of the Central African Republic

(UN, 2016)

Appendix II

Letter of Consent

This is an invitation to you to participate in my research project with the object of understanding how and why alliances between the various armed groups in the Central African Republic (CAR) emerges – seen in the view of international relations theory of political science. This document will present information about the goals for the project and what a potential participation will mean to you.

Purpose of the project
The purpose of the project is to understand how and why alliances between armed groups in CAR were both made and broken in the years between 2011 and 2018. Moreover, it is also to challenge the common view of the nature of the conflict in CAR. To learn more about this and give depth to the project, the author wishes to interview both experts on the field, as well as people with a direct attachment to the Central African Republic – Ideally those that have inside knowledge from the armed groups. The tentative research question is: "How can neorealism explain alliance formation and fractionalization in the Central African Republic?". The project is a master's thesis.

Who is responsible for the research project?
The Department of Political Science under the Faculty of Social Science at the University of Oslo.

Why are you asked to participate?
Because you have a connection to CAR – either scholarly or directly. You are personally chosen because you are of particular interest to my research project. I believe you can add much value to this project by granting me an hour of your life.

What practical implications does it have for you to participate?
If you choose to participate it means you agree to be interviewed by me. It will take 60 to 75 minutes. The interview will be recorded, unless you wish that parts or the entire interview is not taped. If it is relevant, we might schedule a second interview. The interview will focus your opinions, experiences and expertise about the armed groups in CAR.

Voluntary participation
Participation in the project is voluntary. If you choose to participate, you may at any time choose to withdraw your consent to participate without having to give a reason for it. All information about you will then be made anonymous. There will be no negative consequences for you if you don't want to participate or if you later choose to withdraw.

Your privacy – how we keep and use your information
We will only use information about you to the purposes we have told you about in this document. We treat all information confidential and according to Norwegian rules of privacy.

Only the student and his counselors will have access to your information. Your name and contact details will be replaced with a code that is saved on a separate list of names away from the other data in the project.

What will happen to the information about you after we are done with the research project?
The project is planned to be finished by 30.05.19. The interview will be transcribed and anonymized. The recording will be saved in TSD, which is a University internet site that ensures safety for information. After the end of the project, personal information will be deleted. The anonymous transcriptions without your personal information will be saved indefinitely for replicability.

Your rights
As long as you can be identified in the source material, you have a right to:

- Have access to the personal information that is stored on you,
- to potentially correct personal information about you,
- have the personal information about you deleted,
- have a copy with the personal information given to you, and
- send a complaint to the Norwegian 'personvernombudet' or 'datatilsynet' in accordance to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)

What gives us the right to handle personal information about you?
We handle information about you based on your consent.

Working for the department of Political Science has NSD – Norwegian Center for Science Data, decided that the treatment of personal information in this project is in accordance with Norwegian rules of privacy.

Where can I learn more about this?
If you have questions about the study or wish to use any of your rights as explained above, please contact:

- The University of Oslo through Karin Dokken on karin.dokken@stv.uio.no or Emil Klashaugen on emilakl@student.sv.uio.no.
- Our ombud for privacy: Maren Magnus Voll on m.m.voll@admin.uio.no
- NSD - Norwegian Center for Science Data on personvernombudet@nsd.no or phone +47 55 58 21 17.

Best regards

Karin Dokken   Emil Klashaugen
Project manager   Master student Peace and Conflict Studies

Will of consent

I have received and understood information about the project "Alliances and in the Central African Republic – a Realist Perspective"?, and have been given the possibility to ask questions. I consent to:

☐ participate in an interview with the student
☐ that the interview will be recorded, transcribed and anonymized

I hereby agree that information about me is saved until the end of this project circa 30.05.2019

Date and place   Signed by attendant of project

Appendix III

Interview guide respondent 1

Religion

1) What role has religion had in this conflict?
2) Do you believe any of the groups in this conflict have allied due to religious reasons?
3) Same two questions about ethnicity.

Bandwagoning

1) In the SW reports you make a distinction between how much harm each of the groups are capable of doing in three levels. What factors are you basing this off?
2) Why do you think some of the less powerful groups are allying with more powerful groups?

Balancing

1) Why did the Séléka split up?
2) The formation of "the Coalition" was according to you in SW1 due to Nourredine Adam's ambition to reunify ex-Séléka factions (FPRC, RPRC, MPC, UPC) to increase their collective threat and leverage in negotiations with the new government and the international community (SW1) Why would he want to increase this leverage?
3) Why did this coalition appear?
4) What were the motivations for MPC and RPRC to join this coalition?
5) Why did MPC and RPRC leave "the coalition"?

Potential things not touched upon

1) Are there any other factors than security, religion/ethnicity or gains which I have not mentioned, that you believe are key to explaining alliance formation in CAR?

Interview guide respondent 2

Religion

4) What role do you believe religion has had in this conflict?

5) Do you believe any of the armed groups in this conflict have allied mainly due to religious reasons?

6) Same two questions about ethnicity.

Power and hegemony/Peace agreements and arms control

1) Are the armed groups in CAR mainly driven forth by strong men on the top gathering people around them, or by grassroot rebellion?

2) If you are to generalize: Are most armed groups in CAR mostly concerned about security or making gains?

3) Which groups have been willing to disarm in this time period?

Bandwagoning

1) Do you have an assessment of which group or groups are the strongest in the CAR right now? Why?

2) Are you aware of some of the alliances in CAR after the Séléka?

3) Why do you believe strongest armed groups is willing to make alliances with smaller armed groups, and why would the smaller ones have interests in joining the strongest?

Balancing

1) Why do you think the Séléka split up?

2) Which countries are the most important external benefactors and who do they support?

3) The formation of "the Coalition" (anti-UPC coalition) was according to Nathalia Dukhan due to Nourredine Adam's ambition to reunify ex-Séléka factions (FPRC, RPRC, MPC, UPC) to increase their collective threat and leverage in negotiations with the new government and the international community. Do you agree with this and why would Adam want to increase this leverage?

4) Could it also be to partly balance the strength of the UPC?

5) What were the motivations for MPC and RPRC to join this coalition? (Same reasons as Adam, or different?)

6) Why do you think MPC and RPRC left "the coalition"?

Potential things not touched upon

1) In my master's thesis I am mainly researching if alliance formation is driven by security, gains or religion and ethnicity. Are there any other factors you believe also to be important to explain why groups ally in CAR?

Interview guide respondent 3

I want to start off with your personal experiences

1) How the three rebel leaders you met justify the upheld fighting? Darassa for UPC, Zundeiko for RPRC and Gaetan for Anti-Balaka.

2) Was Gaetan leading the Anti-Balaka wing near Bambari in 2015, or was he simply a commander?

3) Did you meet any other rebel leaders or high commanding officers?

4) Was there any cooperation or alliances between these groups, or any of the rebel groups you know of during the period you were there?

Power and hegemony/Peace agreements and arms control

1) Are the armed groups in CAR mainly driven forth by strong men on the top gathering people around them, or by grassroot rebellion?

2) If you are to generalize: Are most armed groups in CAR mostly concerned about security or making gains?

3) Which groups have been willing to disarm in this time period?

Bandwagoning

1) Are you aware of some of the alliances in CAR after the Séléka?

2) Why do you believe strongest armed groups is willing to make alliances with smaller armed groups, and why would the smaller ones have interests in joining the strongest?

Balancing

1) Why do you think the Séléka split up?

2) The formation of "the Coalition" (anti-UPC coalition) was according to Nathalia Dukhan due to Nourredine Adam's ambition to reunify ex-Séléka factions (FPRC, RPRC, MPC, UPC) to increase their collective threat and leverage in negotiations with the new government and the international community. Do you agree with this and why would Adam want to increase this leverage?

3) Could it also be to partly balance the strength of the UPC?

4) What were the motivations for MPC and RPRC to join this coalition?

5) Why do you think MPC and RPRC left "the coalition"?

Religion

1) What role do you believe religion has had in this conflict?

2) Do you believe any of the armed groups in this conflict have allied mainly due to religious reasons?

3) Same two questions about ethnicity.

Potential things not touched upon

1) In my master's thesis I am mainly researching if alliance formation is driven by security, gains or religion and ethnicity. Are there any other factors you believe also to be important to explain why groups ally in CAR?

Interview guide respondent 4

Innledende

1) Hvor godt kjent er du i landskapet væpna grupper i CAR? Bare for å vite hvor jeg skal legge meg på spørsmålene, siden jeg er så dypt inne i CAR nå.

2) Hvilke grupper opererte i Bangui da du var der? Det var kanskje fremdeles Séléka som gjaldt?

3) Hvilke grupper opererte i Bangassou da du var der?

4) Var du i kontakt med noen av de væpnede gruppene i den forstand at du møtte og pratet med de? Hvilke grupper forholdt du deg i så fall mest til?

5) Hvordan opererte de ulike væpnede gruppene?

Religion

1) Hvilken rolle mener du religion har hatt i denne konflikten?

2) Tror du noen av gruppene i denne konflikten har alliert seg i hovedsak på religiøst grunnlag?

3) Samme to spørsmål om etnisitet

Power and hegemony/Peace agreements and arms control

1) Er de væpnede gruppene i CAR først og fremst drevet frem av ambisiøse enkeltpersoner, eller av grasrotopprør?

2) Hvis det er mulig å generalisere: Er de væpnede gruppene mest opptatt av å oppnå sikkerhet for seg og sine, eller handler det først og fremst om å oppnå profitt?

Bandwagoning

1) FPRC hadde en allianse med Anti-Balaka Bozizé, som senere ble utvidet med MPC og RPRC. Hvorfor tror du MPC og RPRC ønsket å alliere seg med den sterkere koalisjonen som var FPRC og Anti-Balaka? (profitt, sikkerhet eller begge deler?)

2) UPC ble invitert til denne alliansen i 2015, hvorfor tror du de valgte å ikke bli med?

Balancing

1) Hvorfor tror du Séléka splittet seg?

2) Kjenner du til noen omkringliggende land som støtter væpnede grupper i CAR?

Potential things not touched upon

1) I min oppgave så ser jeg i hovedsak på faktorene profitt og sikkerhet, samt religion og etnisitet som drivende motivasjoner for å alliere seg med andre grupper. Finnes det noen andre motivasjoner for å alliere seg som du kommer på?

2) Hvis vi skal generalisere igjen: Hva tror du er hovedmotivasjonen til de ulike væpnede gruppene er for å fortsette å kjempe?