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MA (Political Science), Dalhousie University, 2006

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DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

TITLE OF THESIS: LIVING IN “NO PEACE—NO WAR”:
FLUCTUATING GOVERNANCE AMONG
ARMED ACTORS IN THE EASTERN
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

TIME/DATE: 10:00 am, Thursday, December 7, 2017

PLACE: Room 3107, The Mona Campbell Building, 1459
LeMarchant Street

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

Dr. Kevin Dunn, Department of Political Science, Hobart and William
Smith Colleges (External Examiner)

Dr. Christina Clark-Kazak, Graduate School of Public and International
Affairs, University of Ottawa (Reader)

Dr. Peter Arthur, Department of Political Science, Dalhousie University
(Reader)

Dr. David Black, Department of Political Science, Dalhousie University
(Supervisor)

DEPARTMENTAL REPRESENTATIVE: Dr. Katherine Fierlbeck, Department of
Political Science, Dalhousie University

CHAIR: Dr. Pauline Gardiner Barber, PhD Defence
Panel, Faculty of Graduate Studies

ABSTRACT

There is growing recognition among academics and practitioners that civilians play a critical role in armed conflict. Even if constrained to varying degrees and in varying forms, they make tactical decisions and develop strategies that influence the behaviour of armed actors. The existing literature typically categorizes civilian agency into the different *identities* and *responses* that civilians adopt and pursue. The resulting categorizations and typologies have failed to capture the complex reality of those living in prolonged armed violence. To advance these conceptual and theoretical debates, I analyze the different types of relations and interactions that emerge among civilians and armed actors. This includes relations and interactions that are underpinned by victim-perpetrator, coercion-persuasion, and ruler-ruled dynamics. Scrutinizing existing categorizations and typologies is important because they often influence the policies and programs that are implemented in “no peace—no war” contexts.

With a focus on eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), I examine the varied forms of engagement among civilians and armed actors, and demonstrate how they evolve alongside armed conflict dynamics. Administrative control of several areas in the region fluctuates among state armed forces, non-state armed groups, and at times, both sets of actors. I analyze the nuanced ways that individuals constitute and practice “order” amid this instability and unpredictability. Through a political ethnography, I uncover several strategies, including assessing and mitigating risks, drawing on symbolic and material resources to negotiate with armed actors, and manipulating threat perception to deceive armed actors. The strategies explored are adept at influencing armed groups’ use of violent repertoires, thus shaping the micro-dynamics that sustain and constrain armed violence in the “everyday”.

I argue that prolonged violence has shaped civilians’ decision-making and strategies in two ways. First, individuals often compared levels of abuse and exploitation carried out by the various armed groups. These comparisons have served as critical reference points for what would be accepted or tolerated. Second, participants require a certain degree of predictability to pursue vital economic and social activities, which also shaped their tolerance for abuse and exploitation.