War and the political economy of Kinshasa

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1. WAR AND THE CITY

The first visible connection I saw between the war in Eastern Congo-Zaire and livelihoods in the Congo's Capital city was a 'sheet', a cover distributed by the United Nations in the Rwandan refugee camps in 1994 to homeless people so as to give them a semblance of a roof. Within months, some of these sheets began to travel around in the country and some of them made it even up to the suburbs of the capital city, 2000 kms to the west of the refugee camps. This is of course but a trivial illustration of a far more complex issue, namely the question of the interconnection between the war and economic life in the city.

The hypothesis that wars are, besides being massive machines of material and human destruction, also sources of rising rural-urban inequalities, comes in two versions. The first version goes back at least to Max Weber, who described the situation of the ancient cities as one of chronic war: It was the war indeed who "enriched the city, while periods of sustained peace were not supported by the class of citizens" (1923: 284). It's by military activities that the city appropriated the crucial economic ressources of this period, land and slaves. Further, the resources captured by contemporary African warfare also connect the city to global capitalism –be it to the flip side of globalisation (Bayart 1994). Thus, resources captured in the interior transit important cities acting as gateways towards an international market and most of the internal value added is consumed precisely at the gate, where it can be spent on imported goods. War as a particular source of a particular type of economic development in Africa? Anyhow, the relationship between war and the city is more complex. Another version of the same hypothesis has it that current rebel movements in Africa can best be seen as movements with an urban agenda, acting as roving bandits in the countryside (Mkandawire 2002). Most rebellions are rooted in increasing relative deprivation in the city, but the countryside, which has nothing to win from these rebellions, must pay the terrible toll of actual wars. This version has been questioned and qualified by others, arguing e.g. that some cities –like Kinshasa during the early nineties- have paid a terrible toll as

well. More importantly, it is difficult to restrict the motives of contemporary rebellions to 'urban' grievances, sometimes it's difficult to classify a particular rebellion as either 'urban' or 'rural', and sometimes greed is just as convincing a motive as whatever kind of grievance (Ellis 2003). Ellis concludes that "the relationship between cities and their hinterlands in time of war seems to be complex" (2003: 463), thereby hinting at further evidence from case studies on this topic.

These ideas form the conceptual background for an inquiry into the evolution of well-being in Kinshasa. This city is the capital city of one of the countries which has been involved in the 'First African World War' (from 1994 onwards), it has become directly involved in the so-called 'war of liberation' during 1996-1997 and in the 'second war' between 1998-2003. The effects of this second war have been nothing less but devastating for Congo as a whole: According to a mortality survey conducted by the International Rescue Committee, between 3 and 3,5 million people have died as a direct or indirect consequence of the second war (Roberts 2000, Roberts et.al. 2003). These estimates have been confirmed (and a bit qualified) by others (MSF 2003, Coghlan et. al. 2004). The latter estimate the number of excess death caused by the last war (from August 1998 up to April 2004) at 3,8 million. Most of these excess deaths reportedly die from ordinary diseases like malnutrition, diarrhea and the like and thus from 'by-products of the conflict', like the disruption of the country's health services and food supplies (Coghlan et.al. 2004: iv). Nevertheless, the authors emphasize a close association between the percentage of excess deaths and the presence of violence in the region.

These results are truly staggering, given the relatively low-intensity media attention to the Central-African conflict. Anyhow, comparable data on Kinshasa strongly contrast with this gloomy general picture. The proxy of well-being we use in Kinshasa is child malnourishment. In the first section, we judge the interest of this indicator for the situation at hand and discuss the data on malnourishment in Kinshasa. Further, we study the direct and indirect determinants of the *evolution* of this indicator. This exercise boils down to trying to explain the rather astonishing stability in child malnutrition during these years, notwithstanding the spectacular downswing in the more "ordinary" indicators of economic development during the nineties.

We also make use here of two readily comparable data surveys in one of Kinshasa's communes, conducted in 1997 and 2002, to shed some light on the latest (war-) period. Though to an extent, each commune can evidently be considered as unique, the living circumstances in Kisenso may be

considered as representative for approximately two thirds of the *kinois* who live at the outskirts of the capital city, in communes classified as 'excentric zones' in earlier reports (Houyoux 1973, SICAI 1976, Houyoux et Niwembo 1986). A detailed overview of the survey procedures and methodological issues for each survey has been reported elsewhere (Luzolele and De Herdt 1999, Tshimanga 2003, De Herdt 2004a). Here, we focus on the comparison of the two data sets.

2. MALNOURISHMENT AS AN INDICATOR OF DEVELOPMENT.

The most obvious advantage of child malnourishment as an indicator of development or well-being[1] in Kinshasa is that it is available at a relatively low cost, it is processed within a relatively short period and with a relatively reliable quality[2]. The indicator of child malnourishment has the additional feature that it does not depend on the precise way in which people earn themselves a living. In a context where the wage mass generated by formal sector occupations is hopelessly insufficient to allow all citizens to survive (Cour 1989, MacGaffey 1991, De Herdt and Marysse 1996), this feature is far from negligible: It allows one not to have to become too confidential while enquiring about the 'miracle' of how people survive each week.

Besides being a relatively reliable indicator, malnourishment has also been validated by recent contributions to development theory. Thanks to the conceptual, theoretical and empirical work of authors like Amartya Sen and Partha Dasgupta, malnutrition has increasingly come to be seen not only as a central constituent of well-being but also as one of the better summary proxies of development at large. Being undernourished is indeed one of the basic conditions of a normal functioning in society, and thus for realising important other aspects of human well-being. In the words of Amartya Sen, one could say that it is one of the necessary conditions to realise effective freedom (Sen, 1999). Further, the percentage of child malnutrition is one of the indicators of the human capital base of a society and as such it does not only tell us about *actual* well-being but also about the possibilities of *future* well-being (Dasgupta 1993). Finally, compared to the indicators of income or consumption, the indicator of malnutrition is much more sensitive to changes in the situation of the poorer layers of society[3].

To be sure, we should immediately add that child malnutrition should always be considered as a partial indicator of development, given that it refers only to a specific dimension of development, and to a specific layer of the population. But then, this is also the case for any other possible alternative.

In table 8.1, we have presented the results of some representative sample-surveys for the city of Kinshasa between 1991-2002. The percentage of children suffering from *wasting* shows considerable variation and it tends to increase towards the end of the period considered. However, as these data are documented to be reflecting short-term events and seasonal fluctuations, it is difficult to use these data for studying longer-term trends (Arbyn et al. 1995). From such a perspective, the last columns of the table are much more appropriate. Though we were not able to reconstruct a complete data series for this period, the data we *did* find do in any case not indicate an upward sloping trend between 1991-2002. Neither the percentage of underweight nor the percentage of stunted children do vary over the period considered in a statistically significant way. The percentage of *stunted* children has even decreased between 1991-2002.

TABLE 8.1
Children suffering from malnutrition in Kinshasa, 1991-2002

	No. of cases	% of children (aged less than 5 years) suffering from		
		acute malnutrition (wasting)	underweight	chronic malnutrition (stunting)
1991	1862	6,0	22,4	26,8
1992	1832-1847	6,5	23,2	29,3
1993	1845	6,8		29,6
1994	1847	9,1		26,8
1995	1871	6,8		
1996	3415	6,4	24,1	28,0
1998	2100	6,5	24,4	27,1
1999	1648	10,5	27,7	31,1
2000	1823	5,2	23,6	26,8
2002	2238	8,8	25,9	25,4

Source: compilation of different CEPLANUT/PRONANUT - reports.

To be sure, the series on stunting does also show some important heights, such as in 1993-4 or in 1998-9. The first period refers to the aftermath of the plundering of Kinshasa in January 1993. The second height in chronic malnutrition corresponds quite well with what we know about the war context of Kinshasa in 1998. The ‘new’ war started in early August 1998 on different fronts, of which one at the Atlantic Ocean. The rebels tried indeed to strangle the country’s political hart by cutting off Kinshasa’s supply lines: they occupied the ports of Matadi and Boma, thereby making it impossible

to get imported goods to the capital city. Further, they occupied the power station of Inga, thereby causing electricity to be cut off. The consequences on the food situation in Kinshasa were dramatic: After some days, there was a serious shortage of goods like fish and meat which were normally stored in refrigerators. What's more, as a counter-insurgency measure, the regular government impeded the trucks transporting food from the interior to enter into the capital – in order to exclude each possibility that the rebels might infiltrate Kinshasa. In this way, the war took momentarily hostage a population of around 6 million inhabitants.

But what explains the downswing after March 1999? Why was the war so exceptionally felt just when it started, and why did the situation considerably better afterwards? This seems to be a clear indication of the remarkable resilience in the food situation of Kinshasa, despite some temporary disturbances and a general context of political unrest. The reporters of PRONANUT don't know how to explain this result themselves, except by referring to the capacity of the population to adapt itself to the crisis "by developing survival mechanisms" (CEPLANUT 2000: 36). This is true enough, but what does it mean ?

3. WAR IN A CONTEXT OF REGRESS

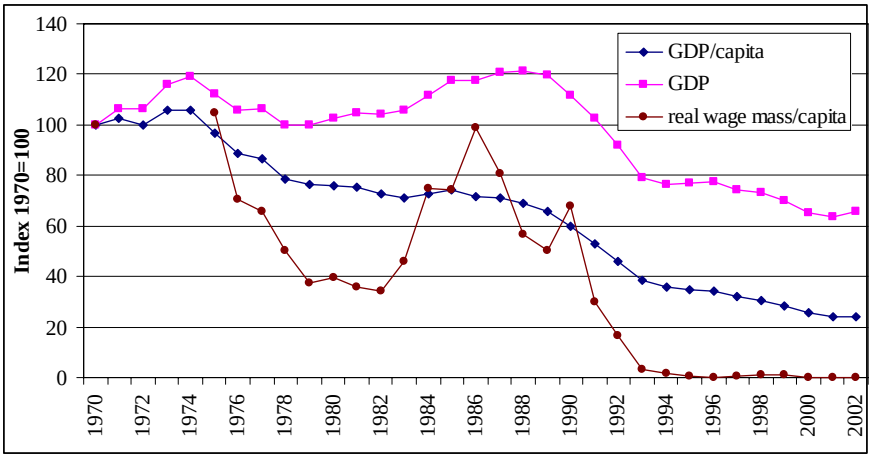
One element to emphasize before starting to come up with an answer is that we should be careful not to attribute everything to the war-situation itself. The war might play an important role indeed, both as a direct cause of misery (as measured by the IRC-surveys) and as an important factor affecting patterns of production, distribution and consumption more generally. However, the war is itself also an historical product and its effects can in our view better be understood as part of a wider political economy of the Congo rather than as an important determinant of it. The data presented in table 1. do already suggest for instance that it would be difficult to defend the stance that the kinois did somehow *need* the war to capture additional resources so as to maintain their level of well-being (as measured by under-nourishment): There is no alarming upward trend before the onset of the recent war which has been reversed afterwards.

Taking this element into account, we suggest to discuss the question on the resilience of the economy of Kinshasa within a wider framework of *socio-economic regress* which characterizes the Congo, and which also includes the war situation, but which is by no means restricted to this period. Indeed, the data on malnourishment in Kinshasa are in contrast not only with first intuitions and with the alarming IRC-data on an interior scattered by the

war, but also with the 'official' and more ordinary economic indicators like per capita GDP, who do invariably suggest a rather spectacular economic regress. In figure I, one can observe that, even if we make abstraction of the demographic growth rate of more than 3 percent, the reported economy has collapsed already in the early nineties. The main factor behind this collapse is the end of a copper economy, caused by both a fall in the international price and by the literal collapse of the copper mines themselves in 1990, after years of disinvestment in this sector (Maton 1993).

The end of the copper economy and henceforth of the main source of income to the state administration, immediately triggers the use of the money printing press in the early nineties, which is in its turn one of the direct causes of the fall in real wages. The virtual disappearance of the wage mass is further deepened by the plundering of a significant part of the formal sector enterprises, hyperinflation and monetary chaos and different other types of risk and insecurity, causing private sector employment to decline from 803000 in 1990 to 175000 in 2000.

Figure 8.1
Evolution of GDP, GDP per capita and real wage mass, RDC 1970-2002



source: own calculations, based on BNC, *Rapport Annuel* (different issues)

In a number of respects, the capital city is certainly one of the prime victims of the economic collapse of Zaire/Congo (Maton 2003): The crisis of the nineties has indeed hit the formal, industrial, commercial and construction sectors and the state administration first –thus, in the first place the urban economy. the main urban employer, the state, has virtually disappeared from the economic scene during the (early) nineties: indeed, its budget shrank from $ 1,5 billion in 1990 tot $ 200-300 million in 1997-8. The weight of agriculture in GDP has increased from around one third to over 50% during

the first half of the nineties (BNC 2003: 30). Yet, everything is relative, and so is regress in Kinshasa. Table 8.2. documents the evolution in regional inequality between 1970-1997.

Table 8.2.
Evolution in inter-regional inequalities, R.D.C. 1970-1997

	GDP per capita (index RDC=100)		Contribution to GDP (%)	
	1970	1997	1970	1997
Kinshasa	370	314	21.7	36.0
Bas-Congo	115	133	8.2	7.9
Bandundu	39	31	5.1	3.5
Equateur	46	24	5.5	2.7
Province Or.	48	30	7.7	3.8
Kivu-Maniema	43	83	7.1	15.1
Katanga	272	134	35,0	17,7
Kasai–Or.	67	80	5.2	7.2
Kasai-Occ.	53	80	4.5	5.7
Max/min	65	13	8	13
TOTAL	100	100	100,0	100,0

Source: De Herdt, T. 2000. *Surviving the transition; institutional aspects of economic regress in Congo-Zaire* unpublished PhD thesis, University of Antwerp.

The first part of the table compares per capita regional GDP to the general average. While, in 1970, the *kinois* earned ap. 3,7 times as much as the average *Zairois*, this gap has now decreased to 3,1. Bearing in mind a decline of National GDP to one 31% of its 1970-level in 1997 (see figure I), this would amount to a real decline in GDP per capita to 27% of its 1970-level in Kinshasa. However, other regions have performed much worse: Katanga, of course, the copper province, but also the inland provinces of Bandundu, Equateur and Province Orientale. These different performances have also caused some demographic movements between regions. One of the net results of this is the increasing contribution of the *kinois* to GDP, from around one fifth to over one third of GDP. Due to the collapse of copper, Kinshasa has suddenly become the main economic centre of the country. Notwithstanding the general collapse of the state and the formal industry and everything this presents in terms of resources, the capital city dominates the country's economy to an ever increasing extent.

Moreover, we think it is safe to state that, in general, the war has made the interior suffer *more* than the city. To begin with, general insecurity has undoubtedly increased almost everywhere in the countryside, whereas cities,

and more particularly Kinshasa, have become relative islands of peace. Soldiers, true or false, regular or rebel, Congolese and others, are far less visible in the interior. Further, the interior is also the first region hosting war victims, and hosting the least privileged war victims. And those groups of refugees who would arrive in the city would in all likelihood also be assisted more rapidly by international organizations –who are in themselves also new sources of urban economic activity[4]. Finally, it's the interior that provides for most young warriors –thereby bereaving the agricultural sector of the most productive part of its labour force. In this respect, the D.R.C is clearly different from the general picture as presented by Mkandawire.

Anyhow, the increasing economic importance of Kinshasa in regional respect should not detract from the fact that, in *real* terms, per capita income in the capital city must have declined relatively *more* than average decline over the period 1970-97. Thus, the problem remains how to explain the gap between these data and the resilience of the urban economy when we look at data on malnutrition. Keeping to the classical definition of political economy as a framework analysing the interconnections between production, distribution and consumption, we discuss each of these elements in turn.

4. AN 'AL CAPONE' EFFECT ?

A first and obvious hypothesis that should be scrutinised is that GDP-data are statistical artefact: the 'ordinary' economic data as summarised in official GDP are simply under-estimating the 'real' economy (Cour 1989, MacGaffey 1991, De Herdt and Marysse 1996). Case-wise evidence does indeed suggest the existence of a non-reported economy, which is growing ever wider and penetrating ever more spheres of economic action. Mobutu's picture does rightly figure on the front page of a recent book by Bayart, Ellis and Hibou on the criminalization of the State in Africa (1999). There is also a documented link between these phenomena and the war (e.g. Marysse&André 2001, Marysse 2003).

But how does this influence livelihoods in Kinshasa, a city which is after all located at 2000 kms from the battlefield. One of the possibilities to estimate the importance of this hypothesis is to compare 'registered' income with consumption data –the alleged 'Al Capone-effect', Al Capone was convicted on the basis of this type of evidence too (Deaton 2003). On the basis of a comparison of reported GDP with data on the consumption of particular products like beer and sugar, we were able to demonstrated indeed that the 'crash' as measured by GDP might indeed have been overestimated up to the late nineties. (De Herdt 2000). On the basis of this method, we

estimated a fall in consumption levels with about 25-30% between 1990-1997.

Does the Al Capone-effect play itself out also for the years of the 'second' war period (1998-2003)? We can make use here of our own budget surveys in Kisenso. Table 8.3 depicts the evolution in effective outlays, outlays with rents imputed to house-owners, outlays per household member and scale adjusted per adult equivalent outlays. None of these indicators shows a statistically significant change in income over the period considered, even if the last indicators consistently point to a slight increase. This suggests at least that, in one way or another, the *kinois* have been able to shield themselves from a general economic regress affecting the Congo as whole.

Table 8.3.
Evolution of household outlays, Kisenso 1997-2002

	(1) 1997	(2) 2002	(2)-(1)/(1)	Test-t
(A) Effective total outlays per household	2023	1996	-1.8%	-.32
(B) Total Outlays ((A) corrected for house owners)	2032	2049	0.8%	.44
(C) Total Outlays per household member	313	334	6.7%	1.2
(D) Scale-adjusted per adult equivalent total outlays	439	456	3.9%	.75

Source: own survey results

At this point, it is interesting to compare the Zairian crisis of the nineties with an ordinary famine. Since Sen's seminal *Poverty and Famines* (1981), we know that a famine is in the first place caused by a major sudden collapse of a particular class's *legal* entitlements to food. Similarly, many *Kinois* have assisted to a spectacular reduction in their wage entitlements. Though this evolution has been documented from the early seventies onwards (Bézy et al. 1981), wages have virtually disappeared as sources of income (see figure I) especially in the early nineties, thereby attesting to the virtual disappearance of the formal economy.

Further, the analysts of famines point to the fact that a typical famine does only affect some particular, and politically marginal groups in society. Precisely because the elite in power has a stake in normalising the situation, this famine is not averted nor even detected: "The millions that die in a famine typically die in an astonishingly 'legal' and 'orderly' way" (Drèze and Sen 1989: 22). Zaire can be cited as one of those exceptions confirming the rule: The evidence of 'illegality' and 'disorder' should be interpreted in the first instance as an indication that the *Kinois* have succeeded in escaping

the plight the collapse of their *legal* entitlements might have condemned them to.

5. INTRA-URBAN INEQUALITY

A second hypothesis to explain the modest human cost of economic regress draws on the different way in which both indicators take inequality into account: given the relative sensitivity of GDP to high incomes, a decline in *average* income would not be translated in a proportionate increase in malnutrition if it is accompanied by a decrease in income inequality. We tested this hypothesis at two levels.

First, a look at the data on *household* income and consumption allows us to confirm the hypothesis. For the period 1975-1986, we can make use of a set of budgetary surveys which are sufficiently complete, representative and standardized to allow a comparison. The summary results, reproduced in table II, indicate in any case that while household outlays have decreased on average, the richest layers of the population (*in casu* the last sixtile) have suffered most: the declining inequality is thus in the first place the result of a *nivellement vers le bas*. The first sixtile has even still improved its condition.

Further, if we compare e.g. per capita consumption of households whose head has had higher education with per capita consumption of households whose head has had no education, we can observe that this ratio has declined from 1.9 to 1.4 between 1986-97[5]. These data also suggest that the decreasing inequality is mainly the result of a less complex division of labour –as a result of a declining formal economy. In a sense, we are measuring another aspect of economic regress here –which happens, in the mean time, to reduce its human cost. According to our own data-set on the period 1997-2002, the Gini-coefficient measuring household income inequality (adjusted for the number of household members) slightly increases from 0,28 to 0,303. On the basis of a more detailed analysis, it can be shown that especially the richer layers of Kisenso seem to have gone up (De Herdt 2004b). Important for us is in any case that this trend has not been too strong, and that, as it is due to an enrichment of the already richer layers, the general situation of the poor –where malnutrition must be an acute problem- has not changed too much.

The same hypothesis was also tested at the household level, where we undertook to study institutional changes –and eventually, changes in the allocation processes taking place at this level. Two different trends can be identified here: First, households are growing more and more populated.

There is an issue here of economies of scale in consumption and income, and thus of more efficiency, that is, households have, in general, become more productive in transforming inputs in outputs (De Herdt 2000). Additionally, there is also a positive correlation between household size and income level. More specifically, especially the richer households host more and more members. This has the effect of increasingly neutralising existing inter-household income inequality.

Second, households have not only increased in size, they have also changed in composition. Different sources indicate indeed that the number of 'natural' children has considerably increased during the last years. In most cases, the mother or the girl-mother of the child continues to stay at her parents' home after having given birth while the father of the child disappears from view. In this way, three or even four generations are living under the same roof, one household 'hiding' within another one. On the basis of a combined budgetary and anthropometric survey in Kisenso, one of the 12 zones of the capital, we have demonstrated that precisely these children run the highest risk of being malnourished (De Herdt 2004a). Taking into account the increasing importance of this type of children, we cannot but conclude that intra-household level inequality has probably *in*creased.

TABLE 8.4

Outlays and persons per household and outlays per person, 1975-1986

	Kinshasa 1975			Kinshasa 1986		
Sixtile	Household Outlays	No. of Household members	Outlays per person	Household outlays	No. of household members	Outlays per person
1	22,2	4	5,6	27,4	4,2	6,5
2	36,4	5,4	6,7	41,0	6,7	6,1
3	48,9	5,1	9,6	51,6	6,7	7,7
4	64,5	5,9	10,9	62,8	7,3	8,6
5	88,3	6,5	13,6	88,5	8,5	10,4
6	208,2	7,4	28,1	184,3	10,5	17,6
Tot.	79,6	5,8	13,7	75,4	7,3	10,3
Range	9,4		5,1	6,7		2,9

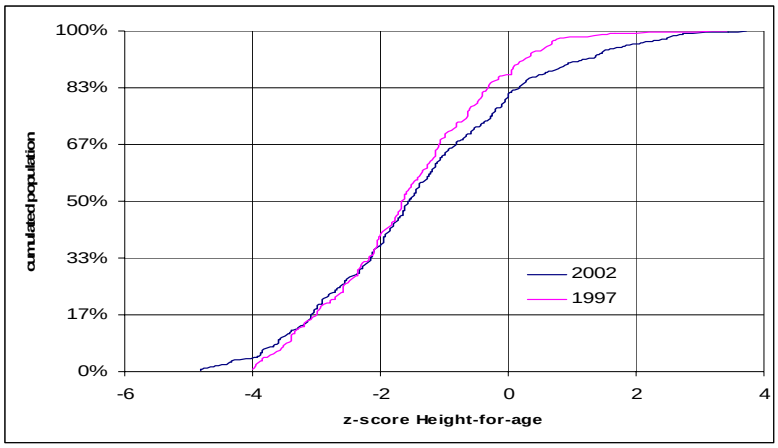
Sources: compilation of different sources, De Herdt, 2000 : 75.

It can be added here, too, that we are confronted with another sign of economic regress: once become an adult, the girls are considered capable to find themselves a man who can sustain them. On the other hand, the customary rules regulating marriage have not followed suit: as long as the marriage has not been 'celebrated', the responsibility of the father and of the father's lineage, the mother and the child are non-existent. In this way, the

men can walk away from their duties and a parental conflict is transformed into an intergenerational issue within the mother's lineage (De Herdt 2004a).

The net effect of these contradictory trends in inequality at both inter- and intra-household level is not sure and so it is important to look at inequality at the level 'where it counts', namely at the level of the individual. One (partial) way to do this is to look at anthropometric data to map the nutritional status of children. Figure II. presents evidence on the evolution of children's nutritional status between 1997-2002. It shows the cumulative percentage of children in relation to their nutritional status (in z-scores of height-for-age). While one can observe a clear increase in the nutritional status of children, the percentage of children below -2 z-scores (the standard cut-off point to define malnourishment) remains stable over the whole period (Figure 8.2).

Figure 8.2
Evolution in nutritional status : Kisenso 1997-2002



Source: survey results

Thus, we can conclude that, notwithstanding a general over-all decline in registered per capita GDP with more than 20% over the period 1997-2002, household incomes seem to have been remarkably stable, at least in the poorer urban neighbourhoods in Kinshasa, and at least in the poorer layers of these neighbourhoods. This is consistent with the stability in the data on malnourishment.

TABLE 8.5.

Composition of basket of starchy staples

2002	outlays per month		per person consumption			
	US$	%	Kcal/day	%	prot/day	%
riz	11,1	28%	329	45%	6,34	48%
maize	8,8	22%	300	41%	7,90	60%
cassava	8,6	22%	120	16%	0,58	4%
bread	10,7	27%	98	13%	2,89	22%
all staples	39,1	100%	748	100%	14,82	100%
staples/food		33%				
food/total		72%				

1997	outlays per month		per person consumption			
	US$	%	Kcal/day	%	prot/day	%
riz	8,5	21%	186	25%	3,58	27%
maize	9,1	23%	321	44%	8,45	64%
cassava	11,4	28%	229	31%	1,10	8%
bread	11,2	28%	89	12%	2,62	20%
all staples	40,2	100%	735	100%	13,14	100%
staples/food		32%				
food/total		75%				

1986	outlays per month		per person consumption			
	Z	%	Kcal/day	%	prot/day	%
riz	224,8	15%	129	16%	2,50	25%
maize	75,3	5%	36	5%	0,96	9%
cassava	751,0	50%	507	63%	2,68	26%
bread	439,8	30%	137	17%	4,03	40%
all staples	1491,0	100%	810	100%	10,17	100%
staples/food		29%				
food/total		62%				

Source: based on Houyoux et.al. 1986 and own survey results.

A third possible explanation of the relatively low human cost of economic regress has to do with changing consumption patterns: a decreasing household income does not have to be translated into an increase in malnourishment to the extent it is accompanied by a rising quality-to-price

ratio of food. This hypothesis was tested by reviewing the data on the *Kinois'* household budgets.

In table 8.5, we compare the results of a citywide representative budget survey carried in 1986 (Houyoux et al. 1986) with those of our own surveys on the particular zone of Kisenso, 1997-2002. We can observe that the average food basket has indeed changed considerably in-between the two survey periods. While cassava occupies still 50% of all outlays to starchy staples in 1986, this reduces to 22% in 2002, and consumers increasingly revert to maize and, especially in the last period, rice.

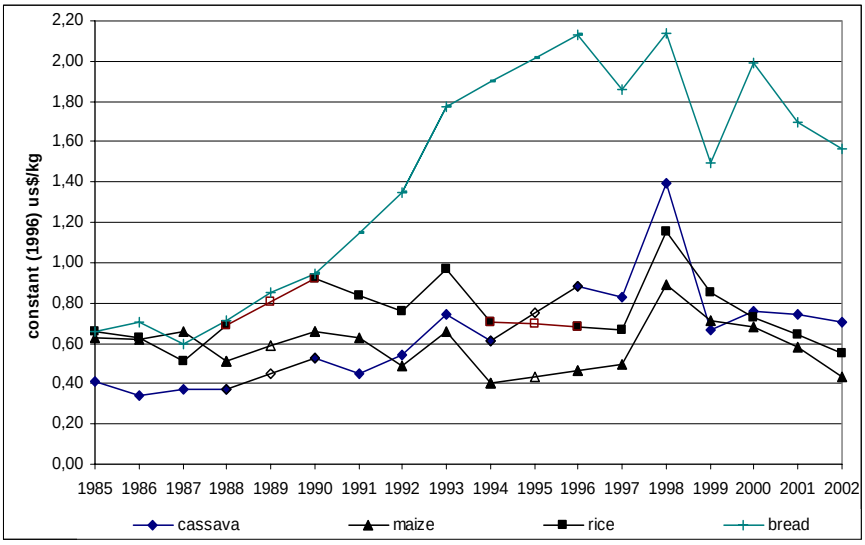
This change in consumption patters has spectacular implications in terms of food intake, as cassava is a relatively low-quality food product, as compared to both maize and rice, which perform well in terms of energy intake as well as in terms of protein delivery. By 1997, maize consumption provides for almost half of all vegetable proteins. In practice, this rather spectacular shift has been facilitated also by the slow replacement of cassava flour by maize flour as the major constituent of the popular *foufou*, a recipe already well-known in the Kasaï-provinces and among the Luba-people in Kinshasa.

It is to be noted that the spectacular decline in cassava consumption can*not* be understood as a phenomenon that would be typical for the kind of 'eccentric' communes like Kisenso, where there would be ample possibilities to turn towards agriculture, and thus where a significant amount of cassava would be procured from own fields. This would explain the difference between our own data and the data from surveys reported e.g. in Nkwembe (2002), PNUD/UNOPS (1998). However, at least to our knowledge, since 1986 no reliable city-wide representative budget survey has been administered in Kinshasa[1]. Precisely for this reason, the World Bank decided to finance a completely new household budget survey while preparing the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper[2]. More to the point, the phenomenon of urban gardens does of course exist, and it has probably increased in importance. But then, it would be difficult to explain why the phenomenon would have exploded so suddenly after 1997, when many other indicators show a status quo rather than a sudden collapse in incomes. Conversely, if, people would have shifted towards home-grown cassava on such a massive scale, this would imply that we would have under-estimated the 2002-outlays and correspondingly the evolution of consumption

[1] To be sure, this statement needs to be qualified on the basis of a methodological discussion on sample definition and survey methods used, and as long as this information is not available, it is prudent to qualify these survey results as 'qualitative' (Tollens 2003: 67).
[2] For an overview of this preparation process, see http://poverty.worldbank.org/library/country/41/

between 1997-2002 by the same degree. This is not very plausible, it would amount to suggesting that people would massively have adopted a new survival strategy precisely during a period where survival would not anymore be at stake. Finally, the available evidence on the relationship between urban gardening and malnourishment does not support such an hypothesis. A statistical survey in four urban communes did not detect any significant relationship between gardening and child malnutrition (AICF 1999: 29). Though urban gardens are undoubtedly an important part of survival strategies in Kinshasa, and indeed more so in the green belt of eccentric communes, they should be conceived rather as sources of income in a deeply monetarised economic system than as sources of own-consumption (Mianda 1996).

FIGURE 8.3
Price evolution of main food products, Kinshasa 1985-2002



Sources: own compilation, based on IRES, *Bulletin mensuel de l'Indice des Prix*, different issues.

This being said, it is worthwhile to undertake the exercise of tracing this change in consumption patterns back to wider changes in the urban economy of Kinshasa. Figure 8.3 shows the evolution in the price of different starchy staples over the period considered. In the figure, the price is expressed in constant US$ (1996), we judged the price index of 'IRES marchés' to be the most appropriate deflator to compare prices over time (De Herdt 2004b).

Before discussing the trends, look first at the sudden jump in 1998: it is the jump caused by the eruption of the 'second' war period, when Rwandan allies were camping before the gates of Kinshasa.

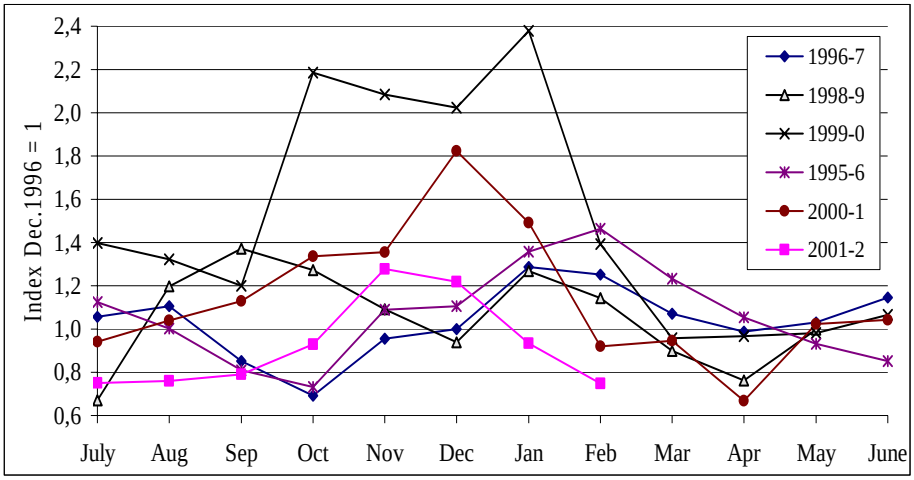
But let's concentrate on the trends now. The price of cassava increased significantly between 1985-2002: in fact it rose with more than 100%. Have there been possibilities to substitute cassava by other products? In any case, an increasing consumption of bread could not have been a solution as the price of bread *tripled* between 1985 and 1996. On top of that, this price increase was dissimulated as a decrease in the weight of a loaf of bread. Substitution by rice would have been a better alternative. Even though the price of rice slightly increased, it did not exceed the price of cassava. The price of maize not only decreased relatively to cassava, however, but also in absolute terms, by ca. 25%. One kilo of maize became even cheaper than one kilo of cassava, from 1992 onwards. In relation to cassava, the price of maize dropped to 1/3rd of its price in 1985.

All these evolutions probably reflect changes in the relative prices of transport over land and by boat. The road infrastructure between Kinshasa and its hinterland (the provinces of Bas-Zaire and, more significantly, Bandundu) has seriously deteriorated. This has affected cassava very badly, as this product is technically very difficult to handle, it perishes within 5 days and transport by boat is consequently rather risky. As a result, cassava is one of the first victims of the deteriorating transport infrastructure. Again, we can observe that, peculiarly, it is the very same process of economic regress that seems to be the major cause of a shift in food prices, and, further on, a dietary change, thereby softening the effect of economic regress on malnourishment.

Figure IV allows to look into some more detail as concerns the evolution of maize. During the representative pre-war years (1995-6, 1996-7), the yearly price cycle of maize is rather flat, it attains a minimum in October (end of the dry season) and culminates in January-February, when the price is doubled, relative to October. The 1998-cycle shows a first discontinuity, as prices suddenly rise in August-September October: precisely the 'real war years' of Kinshasa. But by mid 1999, MLC rebel troops begin to occupy the northern province (Equateur), a region which was very important as a major provider of maize, via the Zaire river. This region could always 'profit' from the difficult supply of Kinshasa by road in the rainy season (November-February). In figure 8.4 we can clearly observe that, while the remainder of the cycle 1998 remains unchanged, it is precisely in early 1999, when the rebels occupy the North, that the seasonal price cycle is broken for at least three consecutive years: maize becomes a scarce product during October-

December, the period of heavy rainfall and transport difficulties. Finally, by early 2001, the seasonal cycle seems to have been completely reversed: it stays high in November-December, but it reaches unprecedented minima during periods where, traditionally, there was very few maize on the markets. This reversal suggests, on the one hand, that very little traffic is arriving from the 'occupied' Equator Province[6], but on the other, that some alternatives must have become available.

FIGURE 8.4
Real maize price on Kinshasa markets, monthly evolution during consecutive cycles between 1996-2002.



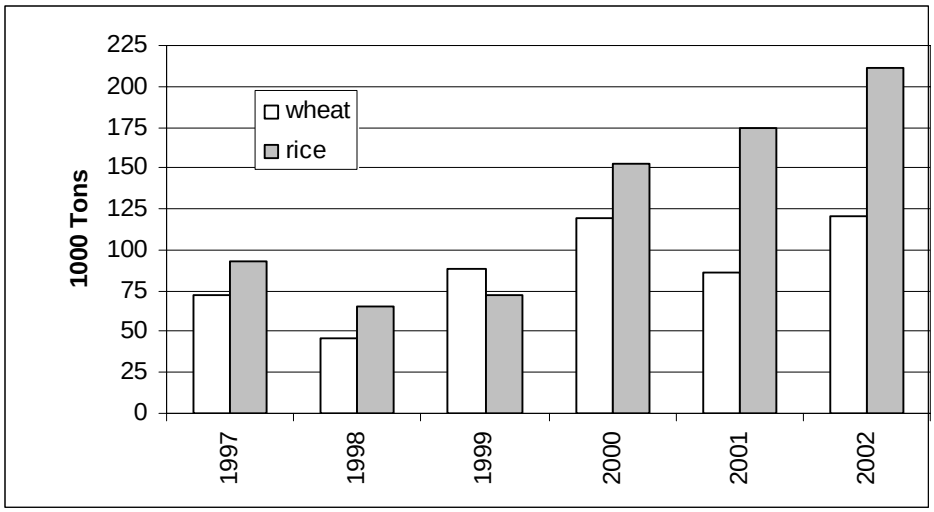
Source: Based on price data gathered by the Economic Section of the US-Embassy. Deflator = General Price Index of this Statistical Service.

One of these is probably the more nearby province of Bandundu. To begin with, it has been estimated that, because of the war circumstances, much river traffic has been 'deviated' in a fairly short period from Equator province (71% of all boats arriving in Kinshasa in 1996) to Bandundu (76% in 1999), with only a slight decrease in total volume transported (201 000 tons in 1999, against 224 000 tons in 1996) (Bescoplan/Gret 2000). Further, Bandundu has also been favoured as one of the provinces where the European Community invested heavily in road infrastructure (Tollens 2003).

Thus, it is probably no coincidence that the data on malnutrition began to decline by end-2000 only, i.e. when maize became, again, available on the markets. On the other hand, it must be said as well that maize could not have done the job by itself: the off-season price in October-December must be a serious problem for the *Kinois*. One of the answers to this problem is

probably the increasingly interesting position of rice in the food market. Rice is mainly imported, via the port of Matadi. Though this city has seriously suffered from the war, end 1998, the port has been reactivated since. The latest data show, in any case, a spectacular increase in rice imports:

FIGURE 8.5
Imports of wheat and rice, Matadi 1997-2002



Source: own compilation, based on ONATRA, *Rapport Annuel* (different years).

These data are also in accordance with the observation that, precisely during the 'difficult period', when maize is scarce in Kinshasa, people begin to substitute maize by rice. They have recently even begun to mould the rice, so as to be able to use the rice flour as an alternative to cassava or maize flour in the classic *foufou.* This recipe has become known as *'je regrette'* in Kinshasa: *'I regret, the economic conditions do not allow us to offer you foufou based on cassava or maize flour'*.

It is important in any case to interpret these data from the perspective of the war economy in which Kinshasa is involved. The declining importance of cassava testifies to the increasing de-linking between Kinshasa and its immediate hinterland. Instead, there has been a shift towards a more remote hinterland accessible by boat, though this remoteness does also suggest a higher vulnerability to the vagaries of the war, as demonstrated with the case of the Equateur province. On the other hand, 60%-70% of calorie intake and protein consumption are actually provided by rice and bread, i.e.

two imported commodities. This must be the strength as well as the weakness of Kinshasa: being the gate to the outside world, it has been able to survive thanks to its insertion into the global economy. The long-term consequences of this change still have to be awaited, however.

7. CONCLUSION

We can conclude from all this that the Zairians generally, and the inhabitants of Kinshasa more specifically, seem to have been able to demonstrate their capacity at guaranteeing at least their survival without being assisted by a state, and in particularly difficult circumstances. It must be added immediately too, however, that, just like economic development, economic regress is clearly a multi-dimensional phenomenon, being the net effect of different forces which sometimes work together, but sometimes also contradict each other.

We identified, three main tendencies that explain how the inhabitants of Kinshasa –or at least the children- have been able to cope with economic regress. First, the economy has been more and more informalised, and, consequently, it is difficult to read an economic downturn of the 'real' economy in the 'official' economic data. Further, the data show an evolution, of the medium to long run, from a profoundly unequal colonial economy towards a more and more equal post-colony. This tendency is partly counteracted, to be sure, by new sources of inequality, e.g. within the household economy itself. Finally, the effects of the economic crisis on child malnourishment have probably been limited by a progressive replacement of cassava, low in calories and proteins, towards maize. This change has probably been the outcome of a gradual reversal in relative prices, caused by the increasing difficulties of transportation by road –which affects mainly cassava. This change implies in any case an evolution towards a richer diet, in terms of calories and proteins.

As concerns the war period, we have observed, first, that, again, the *Kinois* seem to have escaped the plight we would *prima facie* convict them to, on the basis of the information we have about the Republic more generally: data on and related to malnourishment do not point to a major decline. This is further confirmed by data derived from a budget survey in one of Kinshasa's poorest communes. These data suggest that, over-all, household budgets did not change between 1997-2002, whereas registered per capita GDP has declined with another 22% over the same period. Further, whereas inequality between as well as within households seems to have slightly increased, this trend doesn't seem to have effected the poorest layers of

society. Finally, we note, again, the rather spectacular accommodation of urban tastes to changes in relative prices of starchy staples. Cassava consumption has been subsituted to a significant degree by imported rice. This suggests the increasing importance of Kinshasa as a node in the global economy.

Thus, Mkandawire's hypothesis that the terrible toll of contemporary African rebel movements is paid by the peasants is certainly confirmed by the case of the Congo. On the other hand, we cannot underwrite his hypothesis about the rising urban inequality as the main, or as an important cause of the current war. According to the survey data, urban inequality has even decreased in Kinshasa, until during the recent war years. Further, as far as Congolese are involved in the rebel movements themselves, they are foremost recruited in the countryside, not in the capital-city –though this doesn't hold necessarily for the warlords themselves. In this respect, Ellis' counterargument about the complexity and relative uniqueness of each situation is undoubtedly more to the point. More particularly, we argued that the relationship between the war and the city is difficult to conceive without contextualising both. In casu, it is a context of unprecedented socio-economic regress, informalization and criminalization of the state, accompanied by a rising level of urbanization.

To conclude, it is indeed probable that the war, which is just another step in the process of economic regress holding the D.R.C. in its grip, is lived by Kinshasa merely as an 'interior' phenomenon, which requires, certainly, proper coping strategies, but which does not (yet?), indeed, affect the daily life of the citizens. Between current Kinshasa and the ancient city-states cited by Weber there remains, to be sure, a world of difference, and there is no visible signal that points to the current war as an important element in the formation of a future state, as suggested by Bayart. But in any case, the Weberian hypothesis is relevant in that one should not confound the country with the capital, nor the capital with the country. Just as economic *development*, and perhaps even more than development, economic *regress* should be understood as a multidimensional, complex and potentially diversified concept, being the end-result of several partly contradictory movements. The people are suffering from the war, yes, but more than ever, "people" and "suffering" should be discussed as plural concepts, in time as well as in space.

ENDNOTES

[1] Technically speaking, child malnourishment can be measured in a variety of ways, ranging from taking blood samples over measuring food intake to measuring arm circumference (see Osmani, 1993). Here, we define children as 6-59 months olds. The percentage of children suffering from acute malnourishment is defined as the percentage of children weighing less than the median child of the same height minus two standard deviations and/or exhibiting physical signals of malnourishment. The percentage of children suffering from chronic malnutrition is defined as the percentage of children whose height is less than the height of the median child with the same age minus two standard deviations. Finally, the percentage of children suffering from underweight is defined as the percentage of children weighing less than the median child of the same age category minus two standard deviations. For a critique of these malnourishment lines (why precisely the median minus two standard deviations ?) see elsewhere (De Herdt 2000).

[2] In Kinshasa, the indicator is quite regularly reported by CEPLANUT (actually PRONANUT), a state parastatal which has been able to find at least one private sponsor, each year from 1991 onwards, to undertake a city-wide representative survey.

[3] This argument reflects a voluminous debate on the way in which, and to what extent, if at all, an indicator of economic development should take inequality into account. Suffice it to say, here, that, theoretically, measures exist to take inequality into account without having to exit the income space (Sen & Foster1997). In the present context of Congo-Kinshasa, however, is possibility is just theoretical.

[4] See the categorization of *déplacés de guerre* in FAO 2000. The number of internal refugees is estimated at 1,5 millions. The most alarming categories are the *asservis* and the *déplacés-asservis*, who are hosted in the villages and receive food aid in return for work on the agricultural fields.

[5] We compare here results of the city-wide representative survey by Houyoux et al. (1986) and our own 1997-survey in Kisenso, one of the 12 zones of Kinshasa. (De Herdt 2000: 81).

[6] Case-wise evidence suggests that some boats might pass through, as they would officially be heading towards Congo-Brazzaville.

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