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Reluctant representatives of the state:
Teachers’ perceptions of experienced violence (DR Congo)

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Abstract
My qualitative research in South-Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo suggests that teachers link experienced violence to their role as state representatives. Three elements evoke the militia’s distrust: literacy, cell phones, and mobility. Reportedly, militias assume that teachers use these elements to cooperate with the military. This article therefore understands these elements as symbols of stateness, and it demonstrates how a state with overall weak capacities can have significant meaning for teachers’ everyday lives in the form of the state-image. Thereby, the article sheds a critical light on approaches that frame teacher (re)deployment in conflict-affected contexts around normalcy and resilience. As teachers cannot escape their affiliation to the state, they live in an unsettling proximity to people who turned against them and who might again do so. Since reasons of the conflict remain unaddressed, teachers become reluctant representatives of a state system in which they themselves are structurally neglected.

Key words: violence; teachers; education; conflict; Democratic Republic of Congo; internal displacement
Introduction

Amidst a growing recognition of multifaceted links between education and armed conflicts, research demonstrates that armed groups frequently inflict violence upon teachers (GCPEA (Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack), 2018). Direct violence can lead to psychological trauma, physical injuries, and death. It diminishes the attractiveness of the teaching profession and exacerbates problems of teacher recruitment, deployment, motivation, and retention. As a result, educational access, quality, and socio-emotional well-being are jeopardized.

Documentation efforts identified context-specific reasons why teachers suffer from threats, intimidation, or violence (GCPEA, 2018). The teacher’s role as a state actor is a reoccurring motif (Lopes Cardozo & Shah, 2016; Wilson, 2001). For example, teachers disseminate the state’s ideology and schools display state symbols. However, the ambiguous nature of the state in relation to violence against teachers has rarely been analysed in detail. The following conundrum is an example of this ambiguous nature: In conflict-affected contexts, the state is often seen as fragile, failed, and ineffective. Poor teaching conditions are an example of these circumstances. Nevertheless, if teachers’ affiliation to the state is a core motive for attacks, then the state remains a crucial institution for teachers’ everyday lives. This study addresses this conundrum and demonstrates how a state in a context of “limited statehood” (Risse & Lehmkuhl, 2006) can strongly influence teachers’ lives.

I address this topic by interpreting findings from my qualitative research through the ‘anthropology of the state’ lens (Bierschenk & Olivier de Sardan, 2014; Titeca & De Herdt, 2011). Further outlining the methodology below, I analyse teachers’ narratives concerning the question ‘Why do primary and secondary public-school teachers in a conflict-affected area in Haut-Katanga, DRC, experience violence?’ The analysis uncovered a recurring narrative: teachers claimed that the local militia suspected them of siding with the state’s armed forces. This was, if at all, only marginally observable. This paper argues that suspicions of teachers-as-informants were linked to myths and popular imaginings about the state (Abrams, 1988; Hansen & Stepputat, 2001). Concrete symbols and practices of stateness placed teachers in the proximity of an imaginative state, where one is conceived to have access to everyone else who is a state agent. More concretely, the data suggest three main symbols and practices of stateness embodied and enacted by teachers: literacy and the capacity to file reports, possession of a cell phone, and mobility to collect salaries, all of which was suggestive of a proximity to more influential state agents and armed forces. These symbols and practices go beyond the more traditional signifiers of statehood – maps, textbooks, flags, etc. – which adds to the novelty of the article’s analysis.

The article focuses one aspect of the complicated relationship between teachers and the state and thereby helps to understand intricacies in teacher deployment in recurrent armed conflicts. When internally displaced teachers return to their home villages and schools, they continue to live among past or future members of armed groups. Since teachers continue to be seen as state agents, they might again become targets once conflict breaks out again. These findings facilitate a critical discussion of discourses around resilience.

The paper proceeds as follows: I present the methodology and then outline the armed conflict under study. Next, I introduce the conceptual framework. The empirical section then contains three sections: first, insights into the functioning of the militia; second, violence due to vigilante justice; and third, violence due to symbols and practices of stateness. Finally, I conclude, reflect on my focus on stateness, and elaborate on the wider relevance of this research.

Methodology

The paper is part of a research project during which I spent fifteen months in the DRC. I conducted 352 semi-structured interviews between 2013 and 2016, with actors on local to international levels. In the conflict-affected territories of Pweto and Mitwaba, I interviewed 150 teachers, principals, government, and faith-based administrators and aid workers. In addition to interviews in the rural territories’ capitals, I travelled up to 120 km further to talk to teachers. During my visit in 2015, most teachers were still displaced, but one year later they
had returned to their home villages. All teachers who shared stories of violence were male, which is due to the low overall number of female teachers in the region under study (DRC/Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2015) and to the fact that I interviewed those teachers who responded to my announced research interest. The article is thus not sensitive to gender-based violence, which has frequently been documented in DRC’s armed conflicts.

Baaz and Stern (2008) make a strong case for the use of narratives to understand violent acts. Whereas they drew on interviews with soldiers of the Congolese army, I focus on teachers’ perceptions. Inferring motives for violence from the interpretations of victims themselves carries fallacies (Verweijen, 2015a). I therefore explicitly refer to teachers’ narratives and do not claim to unveil all reasons for violence. In fact, I contend with Verweijen (2015a, p. 175) that “Violence is the product of multiple, complex, interacting, and overlapping processes, and these discourses may well play a part in certain dimensions without being the primary driving force.” With regard to the case under study, this means that teachers’ representation and enactment of stateness is not the main driver behind violence in the regions under study. Nevertheless, my interpretation suggests that teachers’ embodiment and enactment of stateness incited and legitimized violent acts.

**Background: An armed conflict in Katanga**

Although formally portrayed as a post-conflict country since 2003, on-going and expanding armed conflicts characterise the DRC (Larmer, Laudati, & Clark, 2013; Verweijen & Iguma Wakenge, 2015). Largely overlooked, various armed conflicts have occurred in Katanga (Berghézan, 2016). This study focuses on the two territories of Pweto and Mitwaba in an area that is best known as the ‘triangle of death’. Violence in the area occurred between 2001 and 2006, when rebel leader Gédéon Kyungu was imprisoned. It is noteworthy for this study that Gédéon “graduated from pedagogy in Manono” (unpublished document by the United Nations’ mission in the DRC). In 2011, he escaped and reignited armed conflicts, which intensified between December 2012 and October 2014. His rebel group “Bakata Katanga”\(^1\) has drawn on two “repertoires of resistance” (Marchais, 2016, p. 108): Katangese independence and Mayi Mayi self-defence.

First, they relate to the independent Katangese state (1960-63) and two secessionist Katanga (then Shaba) wars in the 1970s. This “neosecessionist movement” (Kennes & Larmer, 2016, p. 183) proclaimed its objective to fight for an independent Katanga. However, credible sources suggest the implication of high-level political actors in the conflict (Berghézan, 2016; Kennes & Larmer, 2016). Hence, one line of thinking suggests that the movement lost its value after decentralisation in June/July 2015, when Katanga lost strength as it was divided into four new provinces. Gédéon surrendered himself to provincial authorities in October 2016, without subsequent legal consequences in the DRC – despite his death sentence in 2009.

Second, the term “Mayi Mayi” (Swahili: Water Water) refers to a ritual of pouring magic water on someone to protect him from bullets. The Mayi Mayi phenomenon dates back to the Simba rebellion in the 1960s (Kennes & Larmer, 2016). Mayi Mayi groups re-emerged in the 1990s, particularly during the Second Congo War (1998-2003). Their main purpose was to defend civilians and their home territories, strongly motivated by common enemies viewed through the prisms of autochthony and nation. Verweijen (2017) names four commonalities amongst the diverse Mayi Mayi groups:

1. They are locally rooted.
2. They legitimize their actions through the (alleged) practices of self-defence.
3. They motivate Mayi Mayi. Fourth, a range of spiritual elements, such as amulets, and a code of conduct enhance group identity and garner respect from the population. However, it has long been difficult to clearly distinguish between self-defence and self-enrichment (Vlassenroot & Van Acker, 2001). Moreover, these armed groups are embedded in local and global economic, social, and political networks (Verweijen & Iguma Wakenge, 2015).

\(^1\) Meaning “cutting/separating [the province of] Katanga”.”
Most importantly for this paper, the lines between Mayi Mayi and state actors are blurred. A first significant process was the integration of some members of armed groups into the regular armed forces (Stearns & Anon., 2013; Verweijen, 2015a). On the other side of the coin, former regular soldiers at times turned into rebels, exemplified by Laurent Nkunda or the M23 movement. Furthermore, rebels can be tightly linked to politicians at various levels (Verweijen & Iguma Wakenge, 2015). Instrumentalising a rebel army – to the extent possible – in order to ensure prominent political positions has become common in the DRC, reportedly also in the region under study (Berghezan, 2016). Finally, even when discursively opposed to the state, Mayi Mayi can mimic the state through specific practices and symbols, for example, military ranks (Hoffmann & Verweijen, 2018). In sum, the relationship between Mayi Mayi and the government’s armed forces is not cut and dried but rather malleable. Why is this relevant to this article? This blurred line can become very straight and clear in popular imaginations. If teachers are associated with the state, and the state is associated strongly with the armed forces – nothing suggests that common members of the militia know about high-level political support – then teachers can become caught in “the polarization of social identities” (Wood, 2008, p. 540). The following section discusses how this polarisation can be rooted in ‘stateness’.

Conceptual framework: Stateness and violence against teachers in conflict-affected contexts

Intra- and transnational conflicts with high numbers of belligerent groups and rapidly shifting allegiances have replaced international conflicts with clearly delineated factions and a beginning and an end (Kalyvas, 2001). Conflicts harm education personnel and schools, prompting reflections on how to protect students, personnel and facilities, and teacher management in emergencies (GCPEA, 2018; INEE (International Network for Education in Emergencies), 2012). There are political, military, content-related, sectarian, and ethno-religious motives for attacks (GCPEA, 2018). Novelli (2009) sheds light on political violence in Colombia against members of teacher unions. O’Malley (2007, p. 27) further points to violence that is rooted in jealousy or rivalries. In addition to these reasons, several authors suggest a relationship between violence and public-school teachers’ affiliation with the state. Militias and the state armed forces have a propensity to accuse teachers of siding with the other faction (Pherali, 2013; Shah & Lopes Cardozo, 2016). Teachers are placed in a complex situation: “Rural communities have at times perceived teachers as dubious emissaries, a double-edged blessing that could be beneficial but also potentially harmful and costly” (Wilson, 2001, p. 314). What is, however, the actual and imagined meaning of ‘informant’? ‘To whom does a teacher have access?’ and ‘To whom is a teacher imagined having access to?’; ‘Are teachers heard when they inform someone?’ and ‘Do people believe that teachers are heard when they inform someone?’ In addition to the actual social infrastructure of the state, the answers to these questions may be rooted in certain state images and myths.

Recall, for example, that state actors and rebels can be closely related and overlapping. In fact, the nature of the state is elusive as it constantly morphs (Lund, 2006). Nevertheless, the state can be imagined as an entity that exists apart from society (Mitchell, 1991, p. 95). Abrams (1988, p. 81) argues that the “state-idea” attributes “unity, morality, and independence to the disunited, amoral, and dependent workings of the practice of government”. The Congolese case emphasises that the hegemonic “idea of the state” (Migdal, 2001, p. 15) can persist despite an abysmal performance in public service delivery, mainly because it still resonates “with the social imaginaries of public order” (Hoffmann & Vlassenroot, 2014, pp. 203–204). Larmer and colleagues (2013) illustrate the ambivalent relationship that many Congolese have towards the state: on the one hand they are very critical of it, but on the other hand they continue to make demands on the state. Hoffmann and Verweijen (2018, p. 16) elaborate as follows:

Despite widespread discontent with state authorities, languages of stateness remain firmly implanted in Congolese citizens’ understandings of political order. Stateness evokes a particular discourse of power, which is associated with officiality, bureaucracy, sovereignty, bounded territory, the law, and what it means to be Congolese in terms of citizens’ rights and obligations vis-à-vis the state and the nation.
Among other things, the state survives in “its visible institutions, symbols and practices” (Raeymaekers, Menkhaus, & Vlassenroot, 2008, p. 17). Hansen and Stepputat (2001) speak of the “languages of stateness”. One is the “symbolic language of authority” that contains “the materialisation of the state in a series of permanent signs and rituals”. Similar to street-level bureaucrats, teachers work around a plethora of such signs: textbooks, curriculum, flags, school buildings, letters, or stamps. Wilson (2001, p. 332) demonstrates how public-school teachers in Peru juggled the languages of stateness and of rebellion: “They might hoist the red flag in public while singing the national anthem in secret, and vice versa.” Similarly, Lopes Cardozo and Shah (2016, p. 341) describe teachers who were “strategically hiding their uniforms or raising and then unfurling the national flag”. In both cases, teachers tried to mitigate violence by negotiating symbols of stateness.

Yet, not every act of violence is linked to stateness. I broadly follow Verweijen’s (2015a, p. 173) categorisation of overlapping reasons for the Mayi Mayi’s violent practices: first, violence with the purpose of generating income and exercising social control; second, violence in the wake of vigilante justice; third, violence due to identity or opposing beliefs; and fourth, violence towards government forces, which shares similarities with my focus on stateness.

Findings
Before addressing teachers’ experience of violence, this introductory section circumscribes common events around schools in the conflict under study. The following illustrative excerpt is from an interview with a principal and teachers in the territory of Pweto in February 2015:

This primary school was created in 1991. The school receives government funding and all six teachers and the principal are paid. During the wars of the early 2000s, our village was not affected. After the Mayi Mayi attacks on October 27, 2012, we had to flee. The village was completely set on fire. We asked for buildings from a government primary school that offered classes in the morning so that we could offer classes in the afternoon. [...] Children who did not join us were not able to study. We started with 274 students in September and were only left with 92 after the attacks. We asked parents for Franc Congolais (FC) 500 per student, whereas we started with FC 2000 in September 2012. Students had to pay [to write] the exam at the end of primary school, and the administrative offices continued to demand their share of school fees, without considering that we had been displaced. We stayed for the school years 2012-13 and 2013-14 and demanded higher school fees in the second year. At the beginning of this school year, the educational administrator and the administrator of the territory requested us to return to our village.

Such has been the fate of dozens of schools in the two territories in which I conducted my research. My own findings are substantiated by the humanitarian data collection and planning tool Rapid Response to Population Movements. My cursory review showed that most reports document at least some detriment to schooling infrastructure (see also Jones & Naylor, 2014). Furthermore, interviewees recalled multiple displacements, the loss of students, reopening of schools during displacement, financial obligations to the hierarchy, and orders from the hierarchy to return. School fees are ubiquitous in the DRC and remain important during conflict and displacements. While schools and teachers usually are displaced alongside the rest of the population, my data analysis suggests that teachers perceive two particular reasons for the violence they experience: vigilante justice and stateness.

“Our Mayi Mayi brothers”
Mayi Mayi groups are locally rooted and tightly knit into local social webs, as Verweijen (2015a, p. 170) explains:

Such collaboration is crucial to the Mai-Mai, who depend heavily on civilians for food, financial contributions, intelligence, healthcare, shelter, and hiding places. Furthermore, they need civilians’ cooperation in spreading their legitimizing discourses, attracting new recruits and supporters, conducting business, and exercising political and administrative influence.”
For example, soldiers guarded one school compound during the day, because UNICEF funded the construction of an emergency school. When the soldiers left in the evenings, Mayi Mayi troops entered the compound. They stayed throughout the night and retreated into the nearby jungle in the early morning. They primarily came to obtain food and information from the displaced population. Reportedly, their relatives lived among that population. In another case, I asked a teacher how the Mayi Mayi would find teachers’ houses and he answered, “They are people who live here, they are our neighbours.” The following interview excerpt emphasises this point:

Researcher: And in your case, they knew you work in the education sector?
Administrator: We used to live together in the same village.
R: Ah, so you even knew the people?
A: Easily.
R: They were neighbours and everything?
A: Yes, yes. [...] They informed me that somebody entered even the sleeping room and there they killed my big brother.
R: They told you?
A: Yes, they collected five bullets [...]. The military informed me [...].
R: And there were even some of your old friends with whom you used to be close?
A: Yes, yes, even family members.
[interruption as someone walks in]
R: You were just talking about the situation, the Mayi Mayi, that they are brothers from the village and all of that.
A: They are brothers from the village. (Interview, 16.04.15)

This excerpt illustrates why so many people referred to the militia as “our Mayi Mayi brothers”. Their troops are at least partially composed of people from surrounding villages: former friends, neighbours, and family members. While the displaced population is victim to the Mayi Mayi, some displaced persons maintain contact with them, acting as informants and providing food.

However, the case of the Bakata Katanga adds nuance to the notion of “locally rooted” (Verweijen, 2015a). Some people from Pweto and Mitwaba indeed joined the Mayi Mayi and new local leaders emerged, such as the frequently mentioned Petit Beau from Mitwaba. At the same time, people from the two territories often claimed that “they are not from here”, meaning that rebel leader Gédéon Kyungu originally operated in Manono and Malemba-Nkulu, territories next to Pweto and Mitwaba. The Bakata Katanga are not a homogeneous group, and different units can originate from different regions. Joining the Mayi Mayi and operating in one’s home region can provide an opportunity to settle a score, as the following section discusses.

**Violence and vigilante justice**

Verweijen (2015a, p. 137) argues that “settling of conflicts and scores” is a common reason for Mayi Mayi violence. Indeed, according to many people I met in the field, taking revenge (règlement de compte) against soldiers or civilians was a frequent reason for young people to participate in the Mayi Mayi movement. In April 2015, a government sub-divisional educational administrator related the following story that illustrates vigilante justice:

Well, these people are too complicated, because they are from these villages, so have vested interests. [...] We had the case of my uncle, who was shot in the Upemba Park. The child of his brother participated in the Mayi Mayi movement. It was he who shot his uncle. [...] This means that when there are family members that do not get along, some might join the movement, attack the others; they bear resentments. [...] The lazy ones, the smokers, the thieves participate [...], because there they will be armed, they will have the chance to steal.

The latter aspect implies a relation between vigilante justice and robbery. Accounts of attacks on ‘wealthy’ (in local context) households underlined this link (Interviews with teachers and a chief, 23.02.15, 26.05.15). This relates to the described shift of Mayi Mayi practices from self-defence towards self-interested attacks, although the former might persist in some areas. Working on other contexts than the DRC, Srnicek (2010, p. 42) argues that “while some of these denunciations are correct, the vast majority are the results of local disputes, with
neighbours blaming each other as a means to resolve personal conflicts”. Hoffmann and Vlassenroot (2016, p. 2) emphasise that such dynamics “can set in motion vicious cycles of tit-for-tat violence”.

Teachers are not exempted from such dynamics and can be particularly affected due to practices that occur in schools. Teachers’ former students or students’ parents can take revenge against teachers due to, for example, corporal punishment or mandatory school fees (Interviews with teachers and a Catholic administrator, 18.02.15, 28.04.15). One teacher reported that a former student joined the Mayi Mayi and threatened to whip the teachers and the principal (Interview, 13.04.16). While it remained a threat, it can be interpreted as an eye for an eye revenge due to past corporal punishment. Although the teacher negated such physical inflictions, it is not unlikely to have happened at that school or in other schools (Nfudiko & Langer, 2017). Such stories were shared only rarely, which might be related to the fact that I am an external researcher and that I did not talk to parents or members of the militia. Nonetheless, it appears that the presence of militia facilitates revenge and vigilante justice, placing teachers in a particularly alarming situation as they interact with a high number of students under challenging conditions.

Another issue increasingly captured my attention: Whereas, initially, I assumed that teachers would be attacked due to their roles as educators and intellectuals, the most salient narratives were about teachers’ relationship with other state actors, as the following section reveals.

**Violence against teachers as state agents**

Amidst multiple causes for violence, this section focuses on stateness as a pivotal reason. Public-school teachers in government and faith-based schools are indeed state agents. In the DRC, teachers are quantitatively and spatially the most dispersed state actors. In fact, the two territories under study have experienced mass openings of public primary and secondary schools between 2004 and 2013, increasing from a few dozen schools to approximately 200 per territory (Brandt, 2017). As at November 2015, a teacher earned about US $94 despite an earlier agreement that set a much higher monthly salary. Since 1992, households have significantly complemented teachers’ salaries. Nevertheless, unregistered or unpaid teachers seek inclusion into the state system, which remains a pivotal source of income. Moreover, at the local level, educational administrators can use salaries to place pressure on teachers to return to their villages (Brandt, 2018).

In addition to providing salaries and local authorities, my research suggests that the state has another crucial implication for teachers: according to teachers’ perceptions, their role as state agents makes them suspicious in the eyes of the Mayi Mayi. A provincial educational administrator stated that “teachers and chiefs are the first ones to be visited [by the Mayi Mayi], because they provide information” (Interview, 01.04.15). More precisely, within teachers’ narratives I identify four interrelated practices and symbols that explain, in teachers’ eyes, the Mayi Mayi’s targeting of teachers. First, teachers are generally perceived as representatives of the state. Second, teachers are literate and therefore suspected of writing letters to superiors. Third, some teachers in rural areas own cell phones, which are interpreted as symbols of contact with other state actors. Fourth, teachers have a certain degree of extra-rural mobility as, for example, some leave their village to collect salaries. Since the first aspect is transversal, I focus on the latter three to demonstrate the belief of teachers that they are perceived as being in connection with non-local state agents.

**Literacy as a symbol of stateness**

An educational inspector recounted a trip to Mitwaba for the national exams. A group of Mayi Mayi interrupted him on his motorcycle. They became furious when they saw that he carried a pen. “Simply having a pen makes them think that you are an informant”, he told me in 2015. Another administrator shared a more detailed story. A former secondary school teacher, he joined the sub divisional educational office in 2010. Shortly before we met, he was supposed to go on a fourteen-day trip to visit schools in the area he supervises. He used a bike to

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2 Current US$, teacher with a high school diploma.
reach schools that were up to two-hundred kilometres away: “One gets older, even tired, but we don’t have other means of traveling.” During his trip, he heard that Mayi Mayi had attacked a principal:

He talked to them, but they don’t like to hear advice. He said ‘It’s not correct what you are doing; this is your home. The others have already left but you are still here; you have turned into thieves, you set fire to nearly all of the villages, murdered people, stole from your friends, your brothers. That is not good.’ Since they did not want to listen […], he was severely hit, and they stole almost all the goods in his house. (Interview, 16.04.15)

He confirmed that the militia intentionally turn against teachers, and I asked about the reasons for this violence:

Researcher: Why do they do so?
Administrator: They are too complicated. When it comes to teachers, for them teachers are agents of the ANR (Agence Nationale de Renseignement, National Information Agency); even I was called that – they took me for an ANR.

R: Because you told them that you work for the education office?
A: No, no. [According to] them, once you […] give them advice, they don’t want. Someone who went to school is an ANR-agent, [according to] them, because he has the capacity to inform […]

R: And in your case, they knew that you work in education?
A: We used to live in the same village.
R: So, you even knew these people?
A: Easily. (Interview, 16.04.15)

The administrator claimed that anyone who has been to school evokes the Mayi Mayi’s suspicion, even people well-known to them. The ‘capacity to inform’ turns someone into an ANR. The following excerpts add to the administrator’s statements by demonstrating why teachers might be particularly likely to be suspected of being informants:

Researcher: Did Mayi Mayi have objectives and did they directly attack teachers?
Principal: No objectives, except sometimes taking revenge; the majority are illiterates. Teachers were targeted. Some time ago, we were even afraid of writing reports; when they found you with a piece of paper, they would immediately consider you to be an agent of ANR. So over there we didn’t write any reports for our superiors. They don’t know how to read. (Principal, 27.04.15)

The teachers’ potential to write reports makes them likely candidates to act as informants. One principal put it very plainly: “Once you have a piece of paper, the Mayi Mayi take you for an ANR” (Principal, 14.04.16). The Mayi Mayi’s accusation is in fact not completely unfounded. In a letter titled “Regret and worries about the announced departure of soldiers” from 2013, a secondary school principal wrote to educational, administrative, and military authorities:

Dear Colonel,

I am deeply worried to hear that the soldiers will soon leave. The departure of soldiers, yes. But the departure of all soldiers, no. Because there are no customary chiefs, no policemen, and even the soldiers will leave, I am not happy. I beg you as a civil authority […], to leave us at least a few soldiers.

I collected approximately fifty letters that report attacks and lost pedagogic material, that demand material assistance, request transfers, or the response of the military. Another education official explained that when teachers or principals arrive from an attacked village, he sends them to inform the territorial administrator (Interview, 15.05.16). Whether such informal appeals and reports have an impact remains unclear but they suggest that teachers can indeed become informants, which exposes them directly to threats. An educational administrator explains, “Teachers are often targeted by the Mayi Mayi because they are the ones who know how to write reports” (Interview, 19.02.15). It is, however, important to understand that Mayi Mayi are not generically opposed to the written word. As shown, interviewees repeatedly claimed that Mayi Mayi are not interested in education, have never been to school, and do not know how to read. This may be the case for some Mayi Mayi, but teachers can also use this generalisation to clearly differentiate themselves from the militia. As counter-
evidence, I collected two letters written by Mayi Mayi announcing their attacks and identifying several targeted individuals.

According to my interpretation of teachers’ narratives, Mayi Mayi consider letters as dangerous through the association with stateness and armed state forces. Stateness is here related to the contemporary Congolese state, and not state per se. This is underlined by various interviews reporting that Mayi Mayi carried symbols of the independent state of Katanga (1960-63), such as maps, flags, or coins. In order to circumvent dangerous written reports, teachers and administrators can make phone calls (e.g. Interview, 19.02.15). However, phones can also become symbols of stateness.

**Cell phone as a symbol of stateness**

The following case reveals how a cell phone can be perceived as a means to access other state actors. A principal from an area that was renowned for its Mayi Mayi presence shared his schools’ story:

> Our village used to be a Mayi Mayi hotspot. They came, we fled, for a while, they returned, they burned the entire village. Then, three teachers were whipped and tied up. We preferred to leave and come here. I asked the educational administrator to give us a building; he accepted. That’s where our school is now. The government helped us out each time we asked for help. (Principal, 28.04.15)

Thus far, the story is similar to that of many schools. Burning of houses “is a common sign in measures of popular in/justice” (Verweijen, 2015b, p. 341). The principal proceeded to discuss the particular role of teachers:

> Researcher: You said earlier that teachers were directly attacked. How did that take place?  
> Principal: Well, they [the Mayi Mayi] attacked, in the sense that you are the intellectuals. Every time they accuse us, they, well, people were tied up and whipped. (Interview, 28.04.15)

After this interview, I spoke to one of the whipped teachers. About eighteen Mayi Mayi, mainly young men, armed with firearms, bows, axes, and clubs, entered the village with a piece of paper that listed several names. The teacher recounts this moment as follows:

> Teacher: The Mayi Mayi had arrived in the village. They took all the boys to the village chief. Then they asked the question: ‘Who is Michel3?’ I said that it was me. They tied me up and started whipping me. After that, they told me to hand over my telephone. […] ‘Give us the Vodacom!’4, they said. I said I couldn’t, as I had lost my phone […]. They continued searching, saying that I was an ANR, that I was cooperating with the military. […] They told me to get all my goods out of the house; clothes and such. I possessed pharmaceutical products, about 200,000 Congolese Francs, to sell in the village. They took everything. […] They said, ‘Okay, we take you to the bush; we’ll kill you.’ After that, they gave an order to set the village on fire, to take all the goods in the village; almost everyone fled. Only my brother and I stayed; he was also tied up. They started beating us up. They said, ‘We’ll leave with you, we’ll kill you’. We went for 25 kilometres in the bush. Once we had arrived, they told us that there was no evidence. ‘People said that he [this teacher] was a Vodacom-agent, but when we asked him for his phone we didn’t find anything.’ That is jealousy. Which means that there are people with whom we are in the village who went to see the Mayi Mayi in the bush, saying, ‘That’s the one who collaborates with the military and the ANR’.

Since I went to Lubumbashi in order to buy pharmaceutical products, maybe that was the reason why they believed it. Their way of thinking, they thought that having a telephone means that you could call anyone you liked. In the bush, they made me dance, they made me smoke marijuana; we smoked, you know; over there you can’t refuse […]. Then they made me write ‘I will never be an ANR-agent’. I wrote and signed. […]  

Researcher: Do you have any idea who told them that you are an ANR-agent? Was it someone from the village?  
Teacher: Yes, someone from the village. In the village, there are some people who collaborate with them. When I returned to Lubumbashi I was told, ‘You returned just like that; the military didn’t eat’ [didn’t ask for money]. I said, ‘No, the soldiers don’t do that to everyone; they do that to someone who has a problem – not to [just] anyone’. Due to the way I explained this, they thought that I was cooperating. The Mayi Mayi themselves […] are people who

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3 Name changed.  
4 Name of mobile phone company in the DRC.
This excerpt shows that Mayi Mayi kidnapped a teacher due to his presumed capacity to use his phone to inform the ANR. Furthermore, the teacher mentions that his relative wealth provoked jealousy from people in his village, who reported him to the Mayi Mayi. Finally, he mentions a trip to Lubumbashi. Apparently, people in his village were surprised that he was not harassed by the military, implying their belief that he cooperated with them. Another teacher remembered the accusations: “That he’s an informant. That he obtains news from over there and brings them here. That he owns a mobile phone” (Interview, 28.04.15). The phone occupies a central position in this narrative. It signifies access to superiors. The teacher was seen as cooperating with other state agencies because he possessed a cell phone (“Vodacom”). The phone had thus become a key material symbol of stateness, which drew the attention of the Mayi Mayi. Overall, this case underlines that teachers are not attacked due to a generic affiliation to the state, but because of their presumed role as privileged knowledge brokers and informants. In the conclusion, I further reflect on the role of relative wealth.

This example is just one detailed case for the cell phone as a symbol of stateness. Research on the symbolic meaning of phones underlines the wider relevance of this finding. Pype (2016, p. 640) demonstrates how inhabitants of Kinshasa perceived mobile phones during Mobutu’s reign: “Their first experience with the mobile phone was as a political object, a tool added to the various techniques of surveillance and instruments of dystopia that were already in place.” In the case of Kinshasa, she suggests that perhaps “the association between mobile phones and secret agencies is no longer relevant, and also because nowadays nearly everybody uses mobile phones” (ibid.). Since mobile phones in the area under study were still an exception in 2015 and 2016, it is possible that the perceived link between phones and secret agencies remains strong. Moreover, this link is not only a myth after all. Educational administrators who own a phone are in touch with their superiors, and several chiefs and a religious office-holder told me that they would directly inform politicians in the provincial capital Lubumbashi about Mayi Mayi activities. While this indeed suggests that phones are a sign of stateness, these interviews also revealed unsettling details about the blurred line between state actors and the militia. A priest claimed that he personally reported his experience to a provincial minister, only to receive hush-money and clear indications that provincial elites were sufficiently informed about the conflict due to their personal implication (anonymous source), thus corroborating previous reports on such relations (Berghezan, 2016; Kennes & Larmer, 2016).

**Mobility as a symbol of stateness**

Teachers are among the few people in rural areas who obtain a relatively regular monthly salary. “Who brings cash to the interior? Civil servants. And traders”, said an educational administrator (01.04.15). A principal confirmed this statement: “Teachers don’t easily accept to cooperate with the Mayi Mayi, in terms of giving them food etc. Teachers are, after all, a middle class. When the salary arrives, there’s cash in the village. People come to demand work” (26.04.15). Due to the teacher payment reform (‘bancarisation’), many teachers had to travel to collect their salaries. This mobility has a particular meaning in the context under study: similar to the capacity to write and the possession of a cell phone, moving between the village and semi-urban areas can lead to the accusation of being a politician. Seemingly insignificant items, such as a particular type of soap that could only be purchased in town, were reportedly raising the rebels’ suspicion. Recall the teacher who was publicly whipped and who recounted his trip to Lubumbashi (Interview, 28.05.15); the fact that soldiers did not steal from him convinced his fellow villagers that he cooperates with them. Travel to urban areas can become a symbol of stateness, as the following cases further underline.

A teacher explained that while the Mayi Mayi occupied the area in which he lived, some classes functioned with only two, five, or ten students, as many families had left the village. The Mayi Mayi suspected the teachers of communicating with the authorities, because the teachers travelled to collect their salaries. Someone who left the village was considered a politician. At one point during the occupation, teachers were not paid for five months. “There was no means of arriving in Pweto” (Teacher, 02.03.15). This changed in April 2013, when the Congolese military extended its territorial presence. A principal who managed salaries in Pweto similarly stated,
“In order to collect their salaries, the teachers from that village came clandestinely; they know the terrain very well. They didn’t come every month” (Interview, 03.03.15). Leaving the village while it is occupied by Mayi Mayi is indeed a dangerous undertaking, as the following conversation with another principal makes clear:

Researcher: When you say ‘règlement de compte’ [setting scores], do you have concrete examples?
Principal: At one point, I saw that one of my teachers was taken away, just like that. They attached him to a rope just like that; they were then supposed to take him to the bush. Luckily, they broke the rope and he fled. ... The Mayi Mayi still resent that situation.
R: Do you know why he was targeted?
P: Yes, at the beginning when we fled into the bush, I sent him to the sub-provincial capital in order to collect the salaries. Then the Mayi Mayi said that it was he who brought the military. (Interview, 27.04.15)

Moving between the village and other urban or semi-rural areas can compromise teachers’ security. A final excerpt of a teacher who was in charge of collecting salaries for several schools in the sub-provincial capital supports this argument.

Researcher: So, what was it like? Did the Mayi Mayi target teachers in particular? Where there are any problems between teachers and Mayi Mayi?
Teacher: With our friends [meaning the Mayi Mayi], some of us who frequently leave here to go to the sub-provincial capital and return [are] considered an ANR, because as soon as you leave here to go to the sub-provincial capital, upon your return, you are condemned. Maybe when you were in the sub-provincial capital you went to do something else, but God is still great.
R: Condemned, what does that mean?
T: Once they condemned you, they might come and […] whip you; you will suffer.
R: Did it happen here at this school?
T: No. Lately when I collected the money in Mitwaba, during my return I passed in [...] where they set fire to a house. I was on the motorbike and passed. They started to pose questions. “Who was that?”, and people told them, “Probably the principal of primary school x”. They came looking for me. (Interview, 14.04.16)

This principal suggests that mobility between a village and a larger town can raise Mayi Mayi suspicion. The ‘stateness’ lens adds a complementary perspective to Lopes Cardozo and Shah’s (2016, p. 341) argument that salaries create obligations towards the state, but also made teachers “vulnerable to threats and extortion from separatist forces, particularly when moving to and from the school premises.”

Conclusion
In this paper, I analyse teachers’ perceptions of experienced violence in a recurrent armed conflict. My findings suggest that teachers believe the following to be reasons for violence against them: vigilante justice, vigilante justice in relation to their position as teachers, their ability to write and file reports, owning cell phones, and mobility. The latter three aspects expose teachers to accusations of informing other state agents about Mayi Mayi activities. The article does not suggest that teachers suffer more than others do. Vigilante justice and forced displacements have affected millions of Congolese. Nevertheless, the article presents particularities about teachers. I advance the argument that teachers’ position as state agents reinforces the suspicion that they may be in touch with any other state agent. This suspicion is partially rooted in an imagined state (Hansen & Stepputat, 2001). The mentioned items and activities – pen, letter, phone, etc. – do not carry stateness as an inherent characteristic. A range of aspects endow these otherwise rather innocent items with stateness: an ongoing armed conflict, polarisation of identities, the imagined state in which teachers can have easy access to relevant state actors, and the myth that these state actors are completely distinct from and opposed to rebel groups. Teachers’ narratives suggest that this myth exists in the eyes of the Mayi Mayi, who knowingly or unknowingly set the myth in motion, as suggested by Hoffmann (2015). It would, however, be false to only describe this as a myth; teachers occasionally do act as informants, and the Congolese military has fought the Mayi Mayi.
Moreover, teachers are targeted for the same reasons for which they are esteemed. They experience violence due to their affiliation with a state in which they have long been marginalised and neglected; teachers have become reluctant representatives of the state. Furthermore, while internally displaced teachers have intrinsic reasons to return to their home villages, even after they return, teachers continue to represent the state apparatus. Once they have returned, they continue to live in uneasy relationships with people who opposed or attacked them in the past and might again do so.

While the stateness lens offers a compelling way of understanding violence against teachers, there is a risk of over-estimating the effect of stateness on violence. I suggest three main aspects that can complement the focus on stateness. First, the analysed symbols and practices can also be seen as “markers of cosmopolitan difference” and “upward mobility” (Shaw, 2018, p. 109); they can differentiate teachers from other people, especially in poor and marginalised regions. Status can turn teachers into outsiders; or, less statically, I could say that their status as ‘outsiders’ becomes salient and can be mobilised against them under certain circumstances. This implies that teachers have to “handle the social gulf between themselves as professionals representing the state and the situation they encounter in the communities where they teach and to which they might well belong” (Wilson, 2001, p. 5). Such a portrayal of teachers could also help to present teachers as more active agents (Lopes Cardozo & Shah, 2016) and do justice to the fact that, for example, some might intentionally act as informants. Second, along similar lines, teachers’ ethno-territorial identity could be considered more strongly (Hoffmann, 2014). Do they come from the village where they teach? Do they belong to the local majority ethnicity? How ‘local’ are they? In fact, ethno-territorial disputes have marked Congolese and Katangese history (Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2007). This view might help to shed another light on issues of ‘outsider’ status and statements such as ‘they do not come from here’. Future research could explore how past conflicts over identity frame current understandings of belonging and how this interacts with violence against teachers. Third, understanding violence against teachers from the militia’s perspective remains a necessity. For example, violence against teachers could be considered vis-à-vis the armed groups’ wider strategies of control.

Notwithstanding the specificities of this case study, these findings have a wider relevance beyond the Katangese and Congolese context. They help to better understand violence against teachers, and they shed a critical light on contemporary prevalent frames in the field of education in emergencies. In line with Lopes Cardozo and Shah (2016), this paper questions the framing of teachers as resilient actors who contribute to the reconstruction of normalcy after armed conflict. Similarly, it seeks to go beyond a functional understanding of the provision of education as “an important component of building strong state systems that are responsive to citizens” (Winthrop & Matsui, 2013, p. 4). While these views merit attention, they present an incomplete picture. Framing the delivery of education in terms of resilience or as a facilitator of state legitimacy has three major negative implications. First, ‘strengthening’ a ‘weak’ state where state actors are partially responsible for the endurance of armed conflict “may well exasperate human rights violations and further undermine education systems” (Novelli & Lopes Cardozo, 2008, p. 485). Second, such framings overemphasise state practices to the detriment of state images. Bearing the state image can have significant negative implications for teachers’ everyday lives. Third, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre’s annual report (2018, p. 51) shows that 72.8% of 8.5 million IDPs “estimated to have reached provisional solutions” returned to vulnerability. Similarly, teachers often return to a crude normalcy, and their resilience should not negate the overall structural and direct violence to which they are subjected. Research on the politics of education and conflict could gain from taking stateness seriously in all its ambiguity and mythical character. For practitioners, these insights do not provide easy solutions. They can hardly be translated easily into standards and guidelines. Nevertheless, I believe that they draw a more holistic picture of the realities of internally displaced teachers.
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