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Impacts of Political Dynamics and Implications on Development in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

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Abstract

Errant rulers in Africa have showcased autocracy, corruption, looting and widespread human rights abuses. This has caused citizens to withdraw from participating in public affairs or opt out of engaging political authorities, and in some cases choose to evade politics all together. In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the leaders who have been in charge of the government often ruled in a way that they desire or saw fit. This has been the case in the DRC for the last five decades. The post-colonial DRC struggles to get through the challenges of regional security, poverty alleviation, colonial legacies and unsustainable exploitation of its natural resources. This is in spite of the fact that the country is richly endowed with numerous natural resources, which ranks the country as one of the richest in the world in terms of minerals and natural resources deposits. Further, political dynamics have played a more salient role in the country. This article, discusses the political dynamics in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and how this have influenced and affected the richly endowed country.

Keywords: Politics, Leadership, Democratic Republic of Congo, Governance, Natural Resources

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1.0 Introduction

Errant rulers in Africa have showcased autocracy, corruption, looting and widespread human rights abuses (Han, 2020). In a majority of the cases, this has made citizens to withdraw from participating in public affairs or even opt out of engaging political authorities and abandon politics all together (Parvin, 2018). There are certain essential imperatives that any state that seeks to find a working path to good governance must embrace. These are creating a nation-state that is strong, fostering good leadership, defending the role the state plays, ensuring stable and representative constitutional arrangements, capacity building, and free and fair elections (Meyer, 2018; Addink, 2019; Dahal, 2020). In the Democratic Republic of Congo, the leaders who have been in charge of the government have departed from these imperatives and have ruled in a manner they desired or saw fit (Muzinga & Awolusi, 2019; Von Billerbeck & Transy, 2019). The DRC gained its independence in 1960 from Belgium and elected Joseph Kasavumbu as its first president with the prime minister being Patrice Lumumba (Vanthemsche, 2012). Lumumba would however lose his seat due to different ideological views. The United States and Belgian governments viewed Lumumba as a threat to the current regime because of his communist ideas (Langer, 2014). Consequently, Lumumba was assassinated which resulted in ‘Lumumbist rebellions’ directed at the government in Kinshasa (de Goede, 2015).

During the rebellions in 1965 Mobutu would bring a coup which overthrew the government making him the president for a period lasting more than 30 years of tyranny. Mobutu effectively dissolved all opposition and institutions in the country. The regime was referred to as the most corrupt regime where bribery and patronage were key features in government (Eriksson & Verweijen, 2014). However, Mobutu stayed in power because of the support he had from allies. This could however end after the cold war which left the dictator without the much-needed support that saw rebellions rise up in the country (Namikas, 2019). Ultimately, Mobutu had to flee the country after Laurent Kabila invaded Kinshasa and declared himself president (Nzongola, 2004).

Kabila himself would be assassinated in 2001 after the country, plunging the country into war (Tamm, 2016; Kennes, 2020). Joseph Kabila, his son would take over power as the new president and was in office for 18 years (Weiss, 2016). Political instability in the two administrations that followed the ouster of Mobutu have had adverse effects in DRC. This instability in the leadership of the country has greatly affected governance of the country and political and economic development. The continued power struggles have brought a lot of instability into the country. A properly functioning government is lacking, and there is little control by the national government on the local governments which has deeply divided the DRC (Oostman, 2017).

1.1 Statement of the Problem

A fundamental understanding of the consequences of bad governance and a general lack of leadership in a country with vast deposits of natural resources in the world is necessary. In spite of its great potential, politics in the Democratic Republic of Congo have for a long time had a major negative impact on the country. The DRC portrays a country marred with conflict, corruption, lack of rule of law, amidst other political governance issues. The dynamics of how

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this has influenced the current state of the country and its levels of development is worth investigating.

2.0 Contemporary Challenges in Post-colonial DRC

The post-colonial DRC still struggles to get through the challenges of regional security, abject poverty, colonial legacy and illegal natural resources exploitation (Stearns, 2011; Aembe & Dijkzeul, 2019). Policies that are geared to bring reforms tend to deal with the symptoms rather than addressing the key causes of the problems facing this country. These include historical poor governance patterns, institutional incapacities, and fragmentation of the society and different perceptions of the need to bring change in the DRC (Trefon, 2009). Additionally, there is dominance of corruption, predation and exploitation in the Congolese state administration structure. Public servants have privatized the provision of public services and choose to first address their own individual needs before offering them to the public (Titeca & Edmond, 2019). The civil society in the DRC has also failed to provide counterbalance to the governments in power. The civil society is not a powerful political force and lack homogeneity. Rather, it is a stage where the stakeholders meet to conspire and compete to get funding for projects instead of playing its role of countering corruption and providing political transparency (Trefon, 2010).

From the time the DRC gained independence in 1960, the leadership of the country has lacked three important attributes which are very essential to promote the welfare of the country. There has been a lack of a real vision for the future of the DRC, instead projects and agendas have taken over; there is gross incompetence and lack of ability to successfully implement the vision; and there is no genuine character that will ensure that the vision is realized (Nielsen & Riddle, 2009). The DRC's presidents have had unrealistic and vague national agendas for the country. The manifesto of Mobutu in 1967 known as *Le Manifeste de la N'Sele* which was aimed at making Zaire the best country on the entire African continent was not strictly implemented and degraded down into wishful thinking rather than genuine and a solid political agenda.

The leadership has often used slogans and symbolic gestures instead of a substantive action plan intended to cloud the mind of people of the DRC that progress was taking ongoing. This has also been done in the midst of violence, high corruption and nascence of accountability and responsibility. The successor to Mobutu, Laurent Desire Kabila equally had an agenda for the DRC which was to bring stability and peace to the country in addition to improving the lives of the Congolese people. However, at the time of his assassination, nothing of the sort had happened and misery among the Congolese people was the way of life. Joseph Kabila who took over the presidency has also been unsuccessful in pacifying the DRC and peace, especially in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo remains to be a mere mirage (N'Gambwa, 2011).

Mobutu openly allowed corruption, promoted violence and held the belief that he owed the people of the Congo nothing at all as their head of state (Wedeman, 1997). Mobutu rather was quoted saying, the Congolese people owed him everything (N'Gambwa, 2011). Further, Bakamana, Magesa and Majawa (2020a) provide new evidence, that politicians have for a long time used indigenous *manga* rituals as a way of acquiring and exercising political leadership in the country. This country has had a political leadership style and governance structures that have failed the country. The country has been led poorly, a majority of the citizens continue to wallow in poverty, resources are mismanaged and the process of democratization has been impeded.

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3.0 Politics and the Vast Natural Endowments

The DRC is richly endowed with numerous natural resources which makes the country the richest nation on earth in terms of mineral and natural resource deposits. The DRC has one of the biggest sources of natural wealth in the world (Williams, du Preez, Standing & Bofin, 2011). There are huge resources of water, vast mineral deposits, and rich fertile soils. The second largest block of tropical rainforest on earth is contained in the DRC which covers 145 million ha (Yanggen, Angu & Tchamou, 2010; Eba'a Atyi & Bayol, 2009).

From the forest, the people are able to find food, domestic energy, medicine, materials for building and income (Nelson, Kipalu & Vig, 2012; Taylor, 2011). The forest in the Congo plays a vital role in the regulation of both the regional as well as the global climate while logging of timber which is a major commercial activity brings in huge amounts of income for the state. Additionally, the forest harbours a huge amount of the world's biodiversity which ranks the DRC the world's fifth largest country in terms of flora and fauna. This forest also accounts for about half of the total rainforest cover on the entire African continent (Musampa, Mane, Lola, Bertzky, Ost, Miles, Kapos & Dickson, 2012). The DRC is the top global producer of cobalt ore, copper and industrial diamonds. The country had large deposits of cassiterite, tin, cadmium, tantalum, tin, silver, uranium among other many minerals (Trefon, 2009).

In spite of all these mineral and natural resource deposits, the country has little to show for it. The ordinary Congolese has little to show for this great mineral wealth. The political leadership of the country has failed to tap into these resources for the good and benefit of the country. The country remains a state that is very fragile in its post-colonial state that needs huge reconstruction needs and challenges that it must overcome (Huggins, 2010; Seyler, Thomas, Mwanza & Mpoyi, 2010). While there are many opportunities that are present in its large deposits of natural resources, the economic prospects of the country have always been dismal. There exists insecurity mainly from insurgent groups. This is a major concern because it has displaced millions of people, killed millions, driven violence and gross human rights abuses (Pelerin, 2010; Ndela, 2008).

Tshiyoyo (2011) points out that the Democratic Republic of Congo is richly endowed with vast mineral and natural resource deposits. However, in spite of having these endowments, the country has witnessed civil wars, political instability and turmoil, coups d'état and has had aggression coming from the countries that border it for a number of years. This has negatively affected the country and encouraged the rotting of public institutions which has seen the country being consistently ranked as one of the failed states in the world. Nsongola (2003) notes that the DRC has had a very shrived trust with democracy and like many other African nations it has seen many decades of a rule that is entirely dictatorial and extremely few instances of representatives that were democratically elected. Bakamana (2021) concurs, expounding on the deep political, and governance crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Nsongola further points out that in the DRC self-proclaimed rulers have taken over instead of leaders who are democratically elected.

Phezo (2010) notes that after the fall of Zaire's dictator, Mobutu Sese Seko, there was a breakout of intensified wars which saw millions of Congolese people losing their lives. The fall of the regime failed to bring democracy to the country. The successor of Mobutu, Laurent Desire Kabila came in and did away with the constitution and throughout his regime ruled by a decree up to when he was assassinated in 2001. After his successor and son Joseph Kabila took over, his advisors sought a review of the constitution to extend the presidential term limits and finally abolish them. Further, they gave powers to the president to control the Judicial High Council and slow down the process of decentralization. These acts were all

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aimed at ensuring that Joseph Kabila remains in office perpetually (Bakamana, Magesa, Majawa, 2020b).

4.0 Leaders Conversion Theory

The leader's conversion theory was put forward by Joseph (1991) who noted that African leaders hide under pretense that they want to bring democracy while their true goal is ensuring that the status quo remains. This creates a major obstacle for any significant democratic reforms to take place. Daft and Lane (2007) note democracy demands that leaders must be identical to the individuals who donate their power to them and give them authority to govern a country. Leadership arises from a genuine desire by people of a given state for tangible change and often these changes reflect the purposes that the people and their leaders share. Joseph (1991) points out those regimes that are authoritarian result in insignificant power in the process of ruling their society. There is no maintenance of central authority through elections conducted in a democratic manner. The leaders who are autocratic manipulate communalism to their own advantage and abuse power and state resources to ensure that they remain in office. The central locus of their authoritarian power sees such leaders using terror as a way of suffocating any arising democratic agendas. The theory further notes that the change from authoritarianism to democracy is regarded to be political changes that entail struggles to bring reformation to public institutions to make them systems that are more open and competitive.

As a way of achieving legislative power, both the executive and judiciary powers must not be centralized and controlled by one strong individual. Joseph notes that the popularity of democratic reforms resulted in such leaders being forced to accept reforms in their countries. Democracy therefore encompasses both liberal and deliberative elements and it is a system that enables the citizens to rule themselves, allows the widest freedoms sufficient for political competition that is open (Joseph, 1991).

However, a majority of the leaders in Africa pretended they were bringing democratic changes to their countries. Rather, they ensured that the status quo of the style of leadership that they embraced remained. Such leaders adopted cronyism tactics, nepotism, and neo-patrimonial maneuvers in the way in which they ruled by retaining and concentrating power. This theory further points out that there was short circuiting of democratic reforms by some leaders. These reforms which include re-legalization of opposition parties, restoration of freedoms to freely associate, assemble, express, the elimination of single party dominance, and reforms in the constitution to allow elections that are competitive were cornered.

5.0 Reflections on Political Regimes

5.1 The Mobutu Era: 1965-1997

Colonel Joseph Mobutu took power after organizing a successful coup in 1965 though instigating challenges that had arisen after Congo gained independence in 1960. After Mobutu ascended to power, he refused to decentralize power despite the Congo being an enormous country. Instead of decentralization, Mobutu slowly and steadily founded a government that was both authoritarian and centralized. The country's Prime minister had all the power to make all the decisions. Mobutu desired to ensure that everything was controlled by him which he effectively was able to do throughout his 32-era of pure dictatorship in the Congo. He commenced his ideology of his by first renaming himself as Mobutu Sese Seko. The Democratic Republic of Congo was next in line which saw the country renamed into Zaire single handedly in a clandestine manner like Mobutu was giving a name to one of his

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children. Mobutu became part of the cold war which arose after the Second World War. This resulted in hi creating enemies both internationally as well as locally (French, 1997).

Mobutu's rule was regarded as a 'Kleptocracy' where government officials had a personal interest of profiting from public resources rather than the interests of the country's citizens. Government officials also lacked relations that were solid and sound and each pulled to their own side what they deemed best for their personal interests. This created a fertile ground in which corruption flourished personally starting at the top from the president. Mobutu amassed vast and huge amounts of wealth all at the expense of the country that he was responsible for governing. In his rule as a tyrant, no free and fair elections were conducted and patronage flowed freely with nepotism and bribery having fertile grounds to flourish and grow (Askin & Collins, 1993). Stearms (2011) points out that because of the conditions that prevailed at the time, the country struggled economically and public institutions slowly but steadily deteriorated.

The era of Mobutu, which had begun with many peace and prosperity promises that were empty, became coated by a deep layer of corruption and repression which resulted in unfulfilled social and economic projects (N'gambwa, 2011). Lalji (2007) notes that part of the problem that Mobutu faced was his lack of a vision for the country and gross incompetence. Another major concern was accountability because Mobutu had come into power by using force and he was therefore not accountable to the people of DR Congo. Mobutu also had a major deficit in the type of character that he had. He openly allowed corruption, promoted violence and viewed himself as owning nothing to the Congolese people. Because of this impasse, neighboring countries of Rwanda and Uganda supported Laurent Kabila who was a rebel leader and successfully overthrew Mobutu Sese Seko.

5.2 Leadership under Mobutu

Mobutu Sese Seko came into power in 1965 through a coup and immediately begun his rule by eliminating most of his political opponents and competitive elections. His government had major assistance from the West much of which was stolen by this administration that Mobutu's rule was referred to as a 'kleptocracy' (Mesquita, 2007). Further, Mesquita observes that in the dictatorship regime of Mobutu that lasted for more than three decades, there were no democratic elections and multiparty democracy was prohibited until 1990. Mobutu embraced autocracy and dedicated his rule to three major orders of disorder which were subversion, corruption and perversion.

The DRC had more than ten transition governments through the period of 1993 and mid-1997 that saw many officials recruited from the opposition's high ranks. This regime's bid to entirely consolidate power through co-opting opponents from the other political side came to its climax in March of 1993 when he formed a parallel government. For his opponents it was better to have a job under Mobutu rather than having no job at all (Turner, 1997). Zaire under Mobutu became the only nation on earth in which a head of state was in charge of leading the opposition into the government, sabotage of the economy was severe, and acts of terror and ethnic cleansing were directed against his political opponents and those who supported them (Nzongola, 2004).

Mobutu displayed a leadership style of being a tactical manipulator who employed both soft and hard power to manage political situation like a skilled diplomat. Ironically, Mobutu gave permission for other political parties to operate in the DRC. However, through his tactical manoeuvres he fought such political parties using corruption, kidnappings, secret assassination and a lot of bribery. In spite of granting sufficient amounts of freedom to human rights activists, the civil society and non-governmental organizations that had

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operations in the DRC, the total control of the media was under Mobutu. In addition, Mobutu created wrangles and wars with all tendencies of a true democracy that were being established and he even tried to create a new constitution to coordinate and run elections in the DRC (Bratton & van de Walle, 1997).

Mobutu knew that he did not have unlimited time and that any elections carried out in a democratic manner would not be in his own best interests. As a way of guaranteeing his own personal security, he used neopatrimonialism, cronyism and nepotism to consolidate and maximize his hold onto power. His leadership was therefore surrounded by close relatives and friends whom he could trust which enabled him to counter the signs of democracy that were rising up at a fast rate (Renton, 2007). Anyone seeking a promotion in the judiciary and state positions that were regarded as important such as interior security, defence, finance, or foreign relations had to be an individual who held a high position in the MPR (Pongo, 2001).

Mobutu placed these positions under his direct control and awarded them to those trusted as being the most loyal to the president who were essentially friends and relatives that were very close to him. His huge appetite for nepotism and obsession with power made him to privatize tribalism and disorganize the military through using security personnel led by selected generals from Mobutu's tribe or by close family members. Consequently, Mobutu controlled the three essential security organs through his cousin (General Nzimbi Ngbale Kongo wa Bassa), his brothers in law (Bolozi Gbudu Tankipana and Baramoto Kpama Kata). The DSP in particular was purely led by soldiers from Mobutu's Ngbandi tribe (Stearns, 2011).

5.3 Outcomes of the Mobutu Era

The collapse of state bureaucracies under Mobutu Sese Seko was overseen by Mobutu himself who began to directly control markets instead of bureaucracies. State control shifted from being territorial to domination of the resources of the archipelago that were in turn used to attract powerful allies and generate income (Reno, 1998). There was fear from the bureaucracies of the ruler who instead sought to acquire their own personal interests and plundered public resources. Instead of ensuring the citizens were protected, the regime decided to cling onto power by using opposite means (Callaghy, 1984).

Insecurity became systematized through what became known as the *Hibou*, which was quite common in Kinshasa. The raids mainly done at night were conducted by masked men carrying guns who kidnapped and harassed individuals which meant people experienced a climate of fear in the capital Kinshasa. This enabled the president to extinguish all forms of freedoms and extend the number of days Mobutu had in office as he planned on how to deal with the eminent democratization process (Mwayila, 2000).

Under Mobutu's rule, the constitution was changed to serve the purpose of protecting powers of the person in office as president though eliminating or significantly reducing the basic freedoms of the citizens. The intended amendments to the constitution were to strip Mobutu Sese Seko off his power as president, even though he would be allowed to stay in power for a few more years (Nzongola, 1986). However, nothing of the sort would happen and instead Mobutu continued to hold executive power, was the head of government and commander of the armed forces of the DRC. At his own will, he dismissed or appointed members to his government, senior officers in the military, top leaders in the public service, governors among other important government officials (Kisangani & Bobb, 2010).

Mobutu made a decision of changing the country's name to Zaire, allowed misuse and exploitation by international forces, and flagged off an intentional mega scale plundering of the many natural resources of the country for himself and his individual cronies. In spite of

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this, the West led by the United States government supported him. The US president George Bush openly called him ‘one of our most valued friends’ in spite of gross human rights violations and a corruption record that was atrocious (Hochschild, 2001). This was indeed a strategy that Mobutu himself had all along used in tyrannizing the country. The desire to have a global recognition of Zaire’s sovereignty was essential to Mobutu’s political strategy, because it enabled him to attract and maintain diplomatic support and get foreign aid assistance. This global recognition was important in order to bestow prerogatives of dictators of African states that were regarded to be weak (Jackson, 1984). The autonomy received to virtually control fields of gold, diamond, timber, cobalt, coffee and arms was a reward Mobutu gave to his loyal men (Andriamirado, 1996).

Mobutu was a skilled man in incorporating creditors into his political alliance in the 1980s. According to Callaghy (1984), Mobutu was a master in manipulating the country’s relations with creditors who alternated promises with brinkmanship to ensure that the loans to his country kept coming. This worked spectacularly. In 1985, after a five-year absence, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) came back into the country and went ahead to give the country a sum of \$1.3 billion spanning a period of five years to the Mobutu government. The resignation of a senior IMF official after that came about as a result of pressure from the US on the IMF to handle Zaire with leniency which granted the country a six-year grace period to the debt payments that it had (Pound, 1990). Mobutu also openly boasted that he had close personal relations with a World Bank official. At a certain time, he took as his personal assistant an official from the World Bank who was privy to confidential information on the foreign aid assistance to Zaire which indicated the level of autonomy of these relations (Pound, 1990).

In 1973, Mobutu nationalized large local firms as a political strategy that was based on collecting and accumulating revenue from entrepreneurs which was anchored on economic policies to grow the economy. In utter dismay, Mobutu oversaw the expropriation of commercial and agricultural enterprises that were mostly owned by foreigners which were then converted into political resources that the dictator used to reward his most trusted and loyal supporters. The beneficiaries of most of these state rewards lacked any managerial experience which only meant they were able to effectively plunder and bring them down (Pound, 1990). This policy that was economically destructive effectively resulted in plummeting of the country’s exports from agriculture from 28 percent of all earnings in 1965 when Mobutu came into power to about 6 percent in 1990.

According to Reno (1998), the utter shrinkage in earnings from productivity coupled with available foreign partners increased Mobutu’s reliance on foreign aid to ensure that state-owned mines were running which was the most viable source of income available. Mobutu reliance of foreigners meant that he no longer needed to ensure state bureaucracies were working; some which had indicated signs in the past of being vehicles that supported secessionist agendas. Through privately controlling many of the Zaire’s natural resources assisted by foreigners, Mobutu no longer saw the need to continue with expensive clinics, private works that were important to citizens, schools, infrastructure which all had little roles among his stock of political resources. Mobutu therefore abandoned rural areas that were seen as not contributing anything to the state revenues because of the growing pressure on Mobutu on which clients to patronize and which clients were to be jettisoned.

5.4 The One-Party State – The MPR

Mobutu established a one-party system by ensuring that all state power was concentrated in Mobutu’s MPR (Mouvement Populaire de la Revolution). The MPR oversaw gross violations

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of human rights and state ‘kleptocracy’ scandals that changed the DRC into a synonym for corruption (Nzongola, 2004). According to the World Bank (1992), about 65 percent of the entire DRC country’s budget was purely reserved for discretionary spending by Mobutu.

The Mouvement Populaire de la Revolution (MPR) agenda was to rule and never to reprint. The MPR was less of a political machine but rather a state sanctioned propaganda element (Callaghy, 1984). The political ideology of Mobutu, *le mobutism*, regarded the MPR not to be a unique political party but rather a national political party. This was aimed at ensuring that opposition was avoided as a way of enabling the people of the Congo to address the problems that the country was facing under a single political platform. Mobutu gave power to the MPR by corrupting any upcoming political party in a mischievous and systematic manner. This created the FPC that was also called as *mouvance présidentielle* which was a large coalition of different political parties that supported Mobutu and which pledged their loyalty to him. The manner in which the coalition was structured was to enable it to challenge the opposition side known as *Union Sacrée de l’opposition* (Pongo, 2001). Mobutu’s MPR therefore continued to remain string while efforts by the opposition to create democratic leadership were thwarted and shaded (Nzongola, 2004).

5.5 Development Levels under Mobutu

The rule of Mobutu in the Democratic Republic of Congo was entirely done with an iron fist that left the citizens among the poorest people on earth that were unable to properly feed themselves. The bad policies that were crafted by the regime were entirely capitalist although they were always fronted by the rule as being populist and this left the people to bear the brunt of their consequences (N’gambwa, 2011). According to Marume (1998), although Mobutu Sesse Seko was extremely wealthy, a majority of the Congolese people were wallowing in extreme levels of poverty. Mobutu became notorious for destroying the economy of the DRC because his dictatorship resulted in a total collapse of the Congo both socially and economically.

The lack of basic infrastructure during his reign was a major catalyst for famine that struck the Congo in the 1970s and 80s. Although food was grown in one part of the country but due to lack of roads would not be transported to other parts of the country. This resulted in malnutrition accounting for about 60% of the deaths in Zaire (Amy, Lisa, Adnan & Robert, 2000). The economic policies of Mobutu deliberately ignored many regions of the DRC especially in areas that lacked minerals. The tyrant further made a ridicule of the political system of the DRC by ensuring power was distributed in a single political party system over a period of more than three decades. He could declare as late as 1997 that he alone was also the official opponent of the rule in Zaire (Wilson, 2012).

Mobutu changed the law in Zaire and gave the state all the rights to minerals which he later enforced through the selected trade routes and used the military to control the land rich in resources. Unbelievably, he allowed both the leaders of the military and entrepreneurs to openly compete as a way of developing personal territories in order to commercially profit through exploitation of minerals such as diamond trades, coltan, gold and forest products such as timber. Consequently, the country lacked any substantial investments in transportation infrastructure and public services which created fertile grounds for smuggling both nationally and regionally across the country (Wilson, 2012).

Mobutu would also take profits derived from extraction of the country’s national resources and foreign exchange earnings through exports for his own personal keeping and used foreign aid to further enrich himself. The Zairean economy was further plunged into a deficit in addition to being in a famine. By the year 1984, his personal wealth had

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accumulated to more than five billion dollars which was an amount equal to the entire national debt of the DRC and this money was accumulated in his own bank accounts. This man raped the economy of the Congo which ultimately made the country bankrupt (Wilson, 2012).

6.0 False Hope in the New Dawn of 1998

Laurent Kabila had already in the 1960's led a group of insurgents against Mobutu's dictatorial government with their operations being majorly done on the eastern Congo. The group led by Kabila's was among the numerous rebel movements that had rose up with an aim of promoting the ideologies embraced by assassinated Congo's first prime minister, Patrice Lumumba (Turner, 1997). Mobutu had however managed to subdue the insurgencies through aid from the West and any surviving group such as Kabila's did not appear to show any threat to his regime (Turner, 1997). But Mobutu was wrong.

After the Rwandan Genocide of 1994, things dramatically changed. An excess of more than one million Rwandese Hutu sought refuge in eastern Zaire, which was already witnessing numerous conflicts caused by political representation and usage of land. As a strategy for breaking out of its diplomatic isolation, the regime of Mobutu supported the Hutu which created aggression and enmity with the Rwandese government that was majorly Tutsi. The Tutsi community of south Kivu formed an uprising in 1996 and had the full support of the Rwandese government. Towards the later part of that year, the major alliance of Tutsi of north Kivu, Banyamulenge and Lumumbists all headed by Laurent Kabila were controlling a majority of the eastern region of Zaire. After a campaign lasting slightly more than a year, a new armed coalition led by Kabila took over Kinshasa with Mobutu Sese Seko fleeing into exile (Turner, 1997).

After taking over from Mobutu, Laurent Kabila sought to bring both peace and stability into the DRC. The Congolese citizens were assured by him that their lives were going to improve (N'gambwa, 2011). However, according to Lalji (2007), during Kabila's regime, it was impossible to attain peace in the DRC. State militias from neighbouring countries such as Uganda, Burundi and Rwanda became disloyal to Kabila and chose to support rebel forces independently in the east in addition to putting their armed forces in the volatile region. The entry of peacekeepers from Angola, Zimbabwe, Namibia and Chad further worsened the situation, which brought disorder in the country. This created a conducive atmosphere in which the natural resources found in the DRC were gluttonously squandered.

Kabila and Mobutu turned out to be two dictators that merely succeeded each other and both had many similarities in their styles of leadership. The expected change into a democratic society turned out to be a transition of dictatorship (Kabuya, 1998). Afoaku (1999) points out that after Kabila ascended into power, he begun to show mobutist tendencies and behaviour that included public funds misappropriation, nepotism, tribalism and the torture and oppression of the opposition.

6.1 Laurent Kabila's Leadership Style

Kabila monopolized state power by preventing the opposition from openly operating in the DRC. His choice to show favoritism to his allies in Rwanda, in his governance of DRC tarnished the relationship he had with his fellow countrymen. Kabila was accused that he had let the eastern part of the country to his friends in Rwanda (Haskin, 2005; Kisangani & Bobb, 2010). As a way of improving his relations with his people, Kabila had to expel his partners from Rwanda which resulted in him breaking the famous *Lemera agreements* that he had entered into with his partners. The failure to honour these agreements that had big promises

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of giving huge rewards of DRC's resources to his allies from Rwanda sparked major hostilities between Rwanda and the DRC that went on for many months (Ngoy, 2007).

Kabila had no diplomacy whatsoever and any strategies to cover up his actions. His opponents were openly eradicated, institutions manipulated and organizations collapsed and anything or anyone who was perceived as an obstacle to his orthodox style of leadership was done away with. While in office, Kabila chose to deliberately opaque human rights organizations and the media instead of ensuring that they operated freely in an environment that was conducive. Organizations fighting for human rights were suspended with their leaders either being imprisoned or fleeing the DRC. Kabila terrified journalists and employed tactics of intimidating them such as arresting them. In his first year in office as president, Kabila arrested and questioned at least twelve advocates for human rights who had dared to criticize or question his regime. Leaders of non-governmental organizations were neither spared because they were, banned, arrested or molested when they criticized Kabila's regime and the institutions that served his regime (Stearns, 2011).

Kabila also sought out to butcher the constitution of the DRC. Through his mischievous tactics, he modified and amended the constitution as a way of buying him some more time while effectively obstructing the democratization process (Nzongola, 2003). The idea of his leadership being questioned was unacceptable to Kabila. He sought a new constitution in the DRC in which elections had to be conducted under his careful control as a way of branding him with some form of legitimacy (Furley & May, 2006).

7.0 Politics under Joseph Kabila

Kabila seem to have taken an approach to governance that is more reconciliatory especially when it comes to regional dynamics (ICG, 2010). A contested approach is the type of relationship he had had with Rwanda. Due to the insecurity concerns, he held bilateral talks and commitments with the government of Rwanda which has been regarded as contentious. His ties to Rwanda have earned him negativity and political detractors which has affected his popularity and political support in a negative way (Stearns, 2011).

After winning his first democratic elections, Kabila brought hope among the Congolese people with his agenda for the country's development known as '*les cinq chantiers*' (Doss, 2014). The agenda was built on five main pillars of infrastructure, education, health, water and electricity, housing and creation of jobs. However, little has been achieved, with a majority of the population still wallowing in poverty which has raised calls for change at the top as a way of transforming the socioeconomic status of the Congolese people (Doss, 2014).

The 2006 constitution of the democratic republic of Congo stipulates that a president can come into office through universal suffrage for a term period of five years that is only renewable once. President Kabila at the beginning of his second term in office started a number of national consultations as a symbolic gesture of offering a hand to the losers of the general elections in 2011. As a result of these negotiations, a coalition government between the ruling party and a majority of the opposition parties was formed in December of 2014. The coalition was to come to an end in 2016 but the incumbent president Joseph Kabila made calls carry out a national dialogue that was aimed at discussing the political future of the country beyond 2016. The opposition refused to negotiate power with the government in power although the ruling coalition made local and international attempts arguing that dialogue was necessary if the country was to avoid future outbreaks of violence. Although the opposition boycotted the dialogues, a negotiated agreement was signed by the government which was majorly signed by a few personalities that were ready to compromise (Mbombo,

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2017).

Street protests in late 2016 saw calls for Joseph Kabila to step down although the constitutional courts ruled in his favour. The government however used security forces to pre-empt actions that appeared popular among the people. The stalled talks between the opposition and the government were however revived by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (CENCO) in 2016 (Gettleman, 2017). Despite the DRC being able to avert bloodshed, there was a lack of political will to successfully implement the agreement. Current power struggles continue to be witnessed in the country between the opposition and the president whose constitutional term limit is over (Mbombo, 2017).

8.0 A New Path: Felix Tshisekedi

However, there is hope on the horizon with the swearing in of President Felix Tshisekedi after a democratic electoral process. This spells new hope for the country and greater aspirations that the country can start a new path for itself and overcome the fundamental challenges that have been faced for a long time. After more than half a century of undemocratic transfer of power, the new way of transferring power in the country now indicates that perhaps hope has finally come and things will finally begin to change in the country.

9.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

The article has discussed the political dynamics in the Democratic Republic of Congo and how this have been influenced by leadership. The combined effects of politics and leadership on democracy in the country have been espoused on, and it has brought to play how the leaders in charge have run the affairs of the country. Strides towards improving the situation have been made. The most significant being the change and democratic transfer of power in the country for the first time in 2019 since the DRC gained independence. This is an indicator of the willingness of the country and its people to steer the nation to greater heights and overcome the challenges that have bedevilled the country for so long.

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