The Political Economy of Intra-State Wars in a Rentier State:
The Case of Democratic Republic of Congo

SUMMARY

This essay analyzes the causes of intra-state wars in the Democratic Republic of Congo by relying on the notion of a rentier state. Such a state dominates the economy and practically depends on the export of a major primary commodity rather than on a broad-based tax system. By tracing the Congo rentier state to the late 1880s, this paper argues that a rentier state is vulnerable to civil wars whenever the political regime is weakened as the result of declining rents. A major policy implication is an inclusive and transparent political system, the privatization of state’s source of rents, and economic diversification to prevent civil wars.

Key words: civil war, rentier state, development, Congo, Africa