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South Kivu: identity, territory, and power in the eastern Congo

Project Report

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RIFT VALLEY INSTITUTE | USALAMA PROJECT
UNDERSTANDING CONGOLESE ARMED GROUPS

SOUTH KIVU

IDENTITY, TERRITORY, AND
POWER IN THE EASTERN CONGO

RIFT VALLEY INSTITUTE | USALAMA PROJECT

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South Kivu
Identity, territory, and power
in the eastern Congo

KOEN VLASSENROOT



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THE USALAMA PROJECT

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The Rift Valley Institute (www.riftvalley.net) works in Eastern and Central Africa to bring local knowledge to bear on social, political, and economic development.

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COVER CAPTION Congolese woman carrying firewood in the hills of Minembwe, South Kivu (2012).

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(December 2012)

'Strongman of the Eastern DRC: A Profile of General Bosco Ntaganda'
(March 2013)

'The Perils of Peacekeeping without Politics: MONUC and MONUSCO
in the DRC' (April 2013)

Preface: The Usalama Project

The Rift Valley Institute's Usalama Project ('peace' or 'security' in Swahili) is a response to on-going violence in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The protracted suffering of the inhabitants of this region in the past two decades has resulted in the expenditure of billions of dollars on conflict resolution. Yet the Congolese armed groups at the heart of the conflict are still poorly understood by the international organizations that operate in the DRC—and even by the Kinshasa government itself. The Usalama Project examines the roots of violence, with the aim of providing a better understanding of all armed groups, including the national army, the *Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo* (FARDC, Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo).

The Usalama research programme is guided by a series of questions. What is the history of these armed groups? Who supports and controls them? What are the relations of particular groups to the state, to neighbouring states, to business interests and to the Congolese armed forces? Why have some groups been so difficult to demobilize, while others have disappeared? And are there patterns to be discerned in the ways that groups proliferate, negotiate with the state, and then vanish again?

The project takes a primarily qualitative approach. It analyses historical sources and the small amount of quantitative data available, and traces the origins of armed groups through interviews with politicians, businessmen, representatives of civil society, and members of armed groups. The Project involves extended fieldwork by both international and Congolese researchers. The outcomes include reports on specific armed groups and wider geographical areas of conflict, and a series of seminars and workshops in the DRC.

Many of the interviews for this report were conducted on condition of anonymity. Where confidentiality was requested, identifying information in the report is limited to a number with a location and a date, e.g. Usalama Project Interviewee #105, Goma, 28 August 2012. In the course of the research, accounts of significant and potentially disputed events were confirmed by multiple sources with first-hand knowledge of the events under discussion.

Summary

The province of South Kivu has been at the heart of the conflict in the eastern DRC. It was here that the First Congo War (1996–7) started. Since the end of the Second Congo War (1998–2003), the province’s potential to cause broader regional destabilization has decreased, but violent local conflicts have multiplied, fuelled by political opportunism and local struggles over land and power.

It was around the town of Uvira on Lake Tanganyika in September and October 1996 that tensions between the Banyamulenge, a Congolese Tutsi community, and other ethnic groups escalated, triggering the first clashes in a war that would eventually topple the Mobutu regime.¹ The rebellion was led by a coalition of local and regional actors, fusing together a variety of local, national and regional interests. But this rebellion was also a trigger for further armed mobilization, military fragmentation and shifting alliances, with a multitude of armed groups making reference to a wide array of grievances.

Strikingly, since the signing of the Global and Inclusive Agreement in December 2002, which led to the official end of the Congo Wars, the number of armed groups has only increased. Some of the reasons for this are directly related to shortcomings in the peace-building effort, such as unresolved local conflicts, failed military integration, new and continuing power struggles, and the limited success of demobilization campaigns. But to understand fully why South Kivu appears to be such a fertile ground for the proliferation of armed groups, a longer perspective is needed.

This report outlines the historical dynamics behind the armed movements in South Kivu, focusing on the period before and leading up to the First Congo War. It concentrates on sources of local conflict

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1 Jason Stearns et al., *Banyamulenge: Insurgency and Exclusion in the Mountains of South Kivu* (London: Rift Valley Institute, 2013), pp. 14–20.

but argues that these can only be understood when also concentrating on wider political, social, economic, and demographic processes at both national and regional levels. While armed rebellion in South Kivu has shifted over time, and while each militia has its own history, this report traces the broader context of South Kivu's militarization.

The report highlights three crucial elements of South Kivu's history, all of which sharpened ethnic and political divisions. First, when the Belgian colonial administration integrated customary chiefs into the new administration and put ethnicity at the centre of politics, it realized a territorialization of identity. Since then, identity has been a guiding principle of social, political, and administrative organization to the detriment of migrant communities, who have lobbied unsuccessfully to obtain their own customary political representatives. Second, the upheaval of the 1960s hardened ethnic boundaries and became a key point of reference for future political mobilization. In particular, the Simba rebellion of 1964–7, which drew on political opposition towards Kinshasa and customary authorities in Fizi and Uvira, had a disastrous impact on the coexistence of ethnic groups in the province. Third, the democratization process in the DRC, which was announced in April 1990 and provoked intense political competition, hardened ethnic divisions, as local political elites appealed to identity as their main mobilizing tactic.

This climate of ethnic rivalry and unresolved communal tensions proved to be a fertile ground for violent mobilization. In regions such as Kalehe, democratization and the impact of the Masisi War in 1993 had already led to the proliferation of armed groups. In Fizi and Uvira, armed mobilization increasingly targeted the Banyamulenge and became the precursor to outright war.

The many levels of this conflict need to be reflected in a multi-dimensional response. Each armed group has its own characteristics and each needs a specific approach. But such an approach to local realities can only be effective as part of a comprehensive political process that takes into account existing grievances. And, finally, the success of any policy in the Kivus depends on the creation of accountable state institutions at local and national level that are able to carry out this reform process.

1. Introduction

On 24 March 2013, William Amuri Yakutumba arrived in a Congolese army camp with his 60-member bodyguard, declaring that he was ready to join the army and serve the nation. The move followed a public statement three months earlier that he was ready to integrate into the FARDC—although many were sceptical about his real motives. Yakutumba has been leading one of the most influential armed groups in South Kivu, operating in the *territoire* of Fizi at the southern tip of the province. With other dissidents of Bembe origin, he had created the group in January 2007 after refusing to integrate his former rebel soldiers into the Congolese army and to be deployed outside Fizi. The stated motive behind his refusal was that redeployment could only happen if the Banyamulenge, a neighbouring ethnic community, also disarmed their combatants or sent them to army integration.²

Yakutumba was just the latest in a long line of rebel leaders in the southern part of South Kivu, where conflict dated back to the colonial period and mainly drew on tensions between the Banyamulenge and Bembe communities. Bembe leaderships claimed a tradition of resistance to any outside influence, let alone occupation, from the arrival of the first Arab slave traders during the nineteenth century to the imposition of central government rule from Kinshasa in the post-colonial era.

In other parts of South Kivu, such as the *territoire* of Kalehe, armed mobilization did not begin on a large scale until the start of the First Congo War in 1996, and was subsequently connected to the dynamics of the larger regional conflict. In Fizi, by contrast, armed rebellion has a longer history. Here, the Banyamulenge had been living in conflict with the Bembe for decades as a result of competing claims over territory and

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2 For a fuller explanation of the various factors behind Yakutumba's mobilization, see Jason Stearns et al., *Mai-Mai Yakutumba: Resistance and Racketeering in Fizi, South Kivu* (London: Rift Valley Institute, 2013). Also Judith Verweijen, 'Guest Blog: Profile of Mai-Mai Yakutumba', Congo Siasa, 1 August 2011.

local power. These tensions erupted into outright violence for the first time during the turmoil that followed independence. A revolutionary insurgency movement in the western Congo led by Pierre Mulele inspired local Bembe and other leaders in Fizi and Uvira territories to mobilize disgruntled youth and start their own armed rebellion. Remnants of this late-1960s rebellion retreated to Hewa Bora in the Fizi area, carving out a quasi-autonomous territory that continued to resist state control until the 1980s.

These dynamics of armed rebellion of the post-independence era reappeared in the early 1990s, when President Mobutu's authoritarian regime crumbled, the country experimented with democracy, and regional dynamics merged with local power struggles. Tensions between Bembe and Banyamulenge again escalated into open violence, prefacing a much larger conflict. But armed groups also started to proliferate elsewhere: the effects of the democratization process and ethnic mobilization in Masisi would eventually affect ethnic coexistence in Kalehe *territoire*, with local youth being mobilized into ethnic militias already from 1993 onwards.

It was after the start of the First Congo War in October 1996, however, that militia mobilization reached its first peak. Local leaderships mobilized youth into armed groups, in most cases under the banner of 'Mai-Mai' and as part of an attempt to stop the progress of the Rwandan-backed *Alliance des forces démocratiques pour la libération du Congo-Zaïre* (AFDL, Alliance of the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire).³ Years of state decline, the shrinking of the formal economy, and the collapse of the educational system facilitated the mobilization of youth, who saw in armed groups an opportunity for social mobility and prestige.

In many cases, traditional authorities played a pivotal role in the early days, and reference was made to a wide diversity of local grievances,

3 The term 'Mai-Mai' (from the Kiswahili *maji*, 'water') has been adopted by many community-based self-defence militias that use traditional religious rituals in their recruitment and training.

many of these deeply embedded in local histories. The most notorious and successful example of such mobilization was the Mai-Mai group led by Padiri Bulenda in the Bunyakiri area, in the North-east of South Kivu. At the helm of a broad and disparate alliance of different groups, Padiri would succeed in controlling a vast territory during the Second Congo War (1998–2002).

A second wave of mobilization would occur after the *Rassemblement congolais pour la démocratie* (RCD, Congolese Rally for Democracy) launched its military campaign against President Laurent-Désiré Kabila in August 1998, leading to the Second Congo War. Local armed groups sprung up across the eastern DRC to resist the RCD, and local youth joined them *en masse*—partly because of the overt foreign influence in the RCD military leadership, but also as a result of massacres committed by the RCD in the region. During the Second Congo War, most parts of South Kivu witnessed the creation of new militias, which gradually evolved into more structured armed movements and popular protection forces. They started collaborating with other local and foreign armed groups, mobilized considerable support from the Kinshasa government, and came to be connected to local and regional political, military, and/or economic networks. While Padiri's faction was the most successful of these, other Mai-Mai groups gained control over large parts of the hinterland elsewhere in the province, including areas around Shabunda, Lemera, Fizi, Uvira, Mwenga, and Walungu.

With the end of the war and the start of the political transition in 2003, hopes were high that these groups would either integrate or demobilize. Many Mai-Mai commanders, however, remained reluctant to give their full support to the peace process. Integration into the national army required them to deploy elsewhere in the country, cutting commanders off from their local economic and social networks. Furthermore, compared to the RCD, Mai-Mai groups lacked negotiating power and found it hard to claim major positions in the new national army. This fear of marginalization was strengthened by local disputes over power, identity, and land.

In Fizi, some Bembe armed groups refused to integrate as long as their Banyamulenge counterparts remained operational and in a position

to threaten the Bembe community. Other Bembe leaders, such as Colonels Ngufu Jumaine and Godefroid Ngomanya, were less hesitant and integrated into the new Congolese army—suggesting a less than universal fear of the integration process. Elsewhere, militia leaderships struck a more ambiguous stance, trying to benefit from the spoils of military integration while at the same time maintaining their military force. Localized power struggles, unresolved local grievances over land, personal ambitions and elite strategies, a failed military integration process, and the weak performance of the state all explain why, even when militia commanders integrated, new ones replaced them or new mobilization took place in areas such as Shabunda, Kalehe, or the Ruzizi Plain.

This report provides a historical background to current security dynamics in South Kivu by tracing the origins of local conflicts and the creation of armed groups. The examples of Fizi, Ruzizi and Kalele show the need to analyse the historical links between identity, territory, and power, which explain some of today's dominant local cleavages and grievances. One of the key dynamics behind the proliferation of armed groups in South Kivu is the direct connection between identity and territory, and between ethnic citizenship and political representation. These dynamics are not limited to the local level, but are clearly linked to national policies and power struggles.

2. Precursors of Conflict

Even a stranger to South Kivu would immediately be struck by the most salient characteristic of armed groups in the province: almost without fail, they rely on ethnicity to rally support and recruits. Yet behind this observation lies a complex history that links ethnicity to access to power and land, and turns it into a guiding principle of social, political, and administrative organization. These historical processes explain why ethnicity is one of the key local drivers of conflict and a powerful framework of reference for armed groups. Even if these armed groups have gradually become connected to national and regional actors and political and socio-economic power struggles, they continue to claim to protect their communities, and rarely transcend ethnic or clan divisions.

Ethnicity and migration

Prior to the arrival of the first Belgian administrators at the end of the nineteenth century, different forms of political organization existed in South Kivu, ranging from centralized and stratified chiefdoms in demographically dense areas to loosely organized and decentralized tributary societies.

The most centralized pre-colonial political structure was the Shi chiefdom, headed by the *mwami* (king). The economic use of space reflected the social and political structure. The core element of the *mwami*'s power was his control over access to productive land, which was regulated by a variety of social and political relations based on identity. Land-tenure systems served different functions: they integrated individual farmers living within a well-defined territory into a network of dependent relationships centred around the payment of tribute; they territorialized the ethnic community; and they confirmed the power of customary chiefs. For a farmer, his 'dependence on land ties him to his village, keeps him firmly subjected to his chiefs, and obliges him to pay ...

tribute'.⁴ Social integration—and hence security—was traded for 'loyalty and tribute to the Mwami, who received power in exchange for granting non-alienable user rights over the customary domain'.⁵

While this suggests the existence of a highly centralized Shi chiefdom in the pre-colonial era, it was only when Belgian authorities tried to impose their own administrative structures—partly through the integration and reorganization of existing customary power structures—that the *mwami*'s dominance over land was consolidated. Other ethnic communities in the province, such as the Rega, Tembo, or Bembe, had a less hierarchical and much more flexible social organization, and consisted of loosely connected clan structures, with limited references to larger ethnic belonging and territory. But here, too, identity was the starting point of the colonial administration's attempts to impose its authority, with customary chiefdoms mobilized, reformed, or even created to reinforce colonial control.

The reorganization of customary power by Belgian administrators proved particularly controversial in areas with large migrant populations. Long before the creation of King Leopold II's Congo Free State in 1885, several migrant communities had settled in South Kivu. Unlike North Kivu, where colonialism and regional political events had a major impact on migration flows, in South Kivu the arrival of migrants was mainly linked to political dynamics in the Rwandan and Burundi Kingdoms, not to colonization.

The first settlement of Ba in the Ruzizi Plain—the border area between today's DRC and Burundi—dates back to the end of the eighteenth century, when Prince Ntorogwe, a son of *Mwami* Ntare of the Burundi Kingdom, was in search of grazing lands for his cattle. The prince first

4 Elinor Sosne, 'Colonial Peasantization and Contemporary Underdevelopment: A View from a Kivu Village', in Guy Gran (ed.), *Zaire: The Political Economy of Underdevelopment* (New York: Praeger, 1979), pp. 189–210.

5 Séverin Mugangu Matabaro, *La gestion foncière rurale au Zaïre. Réformes juridiques et pratiques foncières locales. Cas du Bushi* (Paris/Louvain-la-Neuve: l'Harmattan/Academia Bruylant, 1997).

settled in the Ruzizi Plain before extending his control from Gatumba to the northern edge of Uvira. After conflict broke out between *Mwami* Ntare and Ntorogwe's successor Rudengeza, resulting in the killing of the latter, the Barundi living in Ruzizi settled in Luberizi and disassociated themselves from the Burundi Kingdom.⁶

The origins of the first immigrants of Rwandan descent in South Kivu are significantly less well documented and until today remain the subject of intense argument, with conflicting claims about both the timing of their first arrival and their exact numbers. Alexis Kagame has traced the settling of Rwandan pastoralists in the Ruzizi Plain as far back as the end of the seventeenth century.⁷ Jean Hiernaux, writing in the 1950s, documented at least six generations of Tutsi in Itombwe.⁸ Most written sources agree that a significant influx into South Kivu occurred at the end of the nineteenth century. Some scholars have linked this influx to political turmoil in Rwanda following the death of *Mwami* Kigeri IV Rwabugiri. Others have argued that the migration was triggered by *Mwami* Rwabugiri's determination to levy additional tribute from rich pastoralists, and the resulting search for new pastures. But these migrations also point to a general pattern of mobility throughout the region, with people regularly moving from one region to another.⁹ Tutsi pastoralists initially settled around Kakamba in the Ruzizi Plain but soon moved to higher altitude around Lemera, where the climate was more favour-

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6 P. Loons, *Histoire du territoire d'Uvira* (Uvira: Archives de la Sous-Région du Sud-Kivu, 1933).

7 Alexis Kagame, *Un abrégé de l'ethno-histoire du Rwanda* (Butare, n.p., 1972).

8 Jean Hiernaux, 'Note sur les Tutsi d'Itombwe. La position anthropologique d'une population émigrée', *Bulletin et Mémoires de la Société d'Anthropologie de Paris* 7/11 (1965), pp. 361-79.

9 See also Jacques Depelchin, 'From Pre-capitalism to Imperialism: A History of Social and Economic Formations in Eastern Zaire (Uvira Zone, c. 1800-1965)' (Stanford University, PhD thesis, 1974); Georges Weiss, *Le pays d'Uvira: Etude de géographie régionale sur la bordure occidentale du lac Tanganika* (Brussels: Académie royale des sciences coloniales, 1959); Gasinzira Muzuri, *L'évolution des conflits ethniques dans l'Itombwe, des origines à nos jours* (Lubumbashi: Université de Lubumbashi, 1983).

able to cattle. It is here that they founded Mulenge village, named after a neighbouring mountain. The place would become a quasi-capital for these new settlers—and gave the wider community the name by which they would later become known: Banyamulenge.¹⁰

The area, however, was already under the control of existing customary authorities, so the newcomers could not establish their own customary structures. Access to much-needed grazing lands depended on acceptance of the authority of indigenous customary chiefs, for whom the pastoralists represented an attractive source of income. *Mwami* Mokogabwe of the Fuliiru community provided them with grazing land for their cattle in exchange for tribute. In 1924, however, Mokogabwe's exactions became harsher, forcing the Tutsi pastoralists to flee.¹¹ By that time, Belgian colonists had arrived in the area and gave the Tutsi permission to move further up to the highlands of the Itombwe *Hauts Plateaux*, prompting Mokogabwe to raid their cattle.

Settlement in Itombwe also marked a shift from a semi-nomadic to a more sedentary life-style. But there, too, Tutsi pastoral ways and their different use of land—livestock breeding as opposed to arable farming—led to clashes with agrarian societies in the area. As cattle represented wealth across ethnic lines, the Tutsi pastoralists would gradually gain a dominant economic position. In combination with their isolationist life-style, this complicated coexistence with other communities.

Territorial impact of colonial rule

Colonialism had the effect of territorializing identity—that is clearly defining identity in relation to territory—and further hardening ethnicity as the main organizing principle of local society. In an attempt to integrate and control the local population, the colonial administration attributed land to existing or newly engineered ethnic communities and customary

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 10 Gaspard Kajiga, 'Cette immigration séculaire des Rwandais au Congo', *Bulletin du Centre d'études des problèmes socio-indigènes* 32 (1956), pp. 5–64.

11 Depelchin, 'From Pre-capitalism to Imperialism', p. 71–72.

chiefdoms. Existing rural societies were restructured and hierarchized, and customary chiefs mobilized and integrated into the new administrative order. The colonial authority recognized existing ethnically defined social structures or engineered new ones as a basis for indirect rule, thus confirming ethnic citizenship as the legal source to claim rights and recognising an assumed pre-colonial order. Rather than imposing a uniform customary structure however, it created 'a different set of customary laws, one for each ethnic group, and [established] a separate Native Authority to enforce each set of laws. The result was a power with two faces—the difference between them being that while civic power was racialized, so-called 'Native Authority' came to be ethnicized.¹²

Particularly in the Ruzizi Plain and the area around Uvira, this colonial policy would produce additional cleavages and provoke tension between different communities. In 1928, the *Collectivité de la Plaine de la Ruzizi* was created and the customary authority of the Barundi recognized. The creation of this *chefferie-secteur* (chiefdom-sector)—a hybrid entity that sought to bring together similar ethnic communities in a structure with both traditional and administrative functions—provoked fierce resistance from the Fuliiru, who claimed control over the Plain. Simmering tensions between both communities would regularly lead to violence.¹³

A similar confusion and source of dispute was caused by the creation of other, smaller customary structures in the area. In the case of Itombwe, Belgian colonial rule was less a deliberate strategy to organize its colony territorially than a case of simple trial-and-error. To halt the mobility of the local population and territorialize ethnically defined structures, the Belgian colonial administration also introduced at the beginning of the twentieth century a system of *petites chefferies* (small chiefdoms). These *petites chefferies* were much smaller than the *chefferies-secteur*, and newly appointed chiefs headed these new territorial units. In the highlands of

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12 Mahmood Mamdani, *Understanding the Crisis in Kivu: Report of the CODESRIA mission to the Democratic Republic of Congo* (Dakar: Codesria, 1997), p. 4.

13 Weiss, *Le pays d'Uvira*.

South Kivu, two Tutsi chiefs (Kayra and Gahutu) were recognized by the Belgians yet without being granted a well-defined territory.

Attempts during the 1930s to reorganize the administrative organization and the merging of these *petites chefferies* into larger customary structures in the Uvira area left the Tutsi pastoralists without their own administrative entity. They became subjects of the *Chefferie de Bafuliiru*, the *Chefferie de Bavira* and the *Chefferie des Barundi* and further south, they found themselves subjects of Bembe chiefs.

This territorialization of ethnicity would produce one of the key drivers of local conflict and intensify tensions between the Banyamulenge and other ethnic communities in the area. The fact that the colonial administration did not recognize the former's territorial claims—and thus did not recognize them as 'Native Authority'—would also become a key argument in local leaders' attempts to treat the Banyamulenge as foreigners and exclude them from the political arena.

Also other regions, this territorial reorganization would introduce new cleavages. In Kalehe *territoire*, for example, two *chefferies* were instituted: the *chefferie des Bahavu*, ruled by Havu chiefs, and the small *chefferie de Buloho*, ruled by Tembo customary chiefs. Most of the Tembo-populated territory and the Rongeronge-populated *groupement* of Kalonge came under control of the Havu, with the Tembo and the Rongeronge communities largely depending on Havu customary rule. As early as the 1940s, this led to resistance from Tembo who called for customary and administrative recognition. Some Tembo leaders went further, demanding that Kalehe's Bunyakiri area should be integrated into North Kivu—leaving all Tembo, from both North and South Kivu, united under one administrative entity. In 1959, Bunyakiri was officially recognized as a *commune rurale* (rural commune), including parts of the Kalehe *chefferie*—but the decision, which would have reinforced local claims to political autonomy within the Tembo community, was never actually implemented.¹⁴

¹⁴ 'Analyse du contexte du territoire de Kalehe', Action pour la Paix et la Concorde/Life and Peace Institute, Bukavu, April 2009, pp. 10–14.

Elsewhere again in South Kivu, customary chiefs resisted colonial domination—even if their position was ambiguous, as Belgian policy often ended up strengthening their power. During the early years of colonialism, *Mwami* Rutaganda of Kabare and *Mwami* Ruhongeka of Ngweshe tried to obstruct the growing impact of the colonial administration. In Kaziba, Luhwindja and Burhinyi, the *bami* (plural of *mwami*) were even hiding from the colonial powers. In Kabare, a conflict erupted in 1902 that would become known locally as the *oku lwa Bene Mwa Koke* (the war against the sons of Mwa Koke). At the root of this conflict lay the killing of the newly-arrived Belgian *chef de poste*, Lieutenant Tondeur. Two years of reprisals followed, during which the *mwami* of Kabare was forced into hiding. Eventually, a pact was signed, but in 1910 the colonial powers began to face new symptoms of resistance.¹⁵

The introduction of a plantation economy and forced labour were also sources of contention, causing several clashes between local farmers and a new class of white settlers. One example was the Binji-Binji revolt, which started in 1931 near Nduba (Ngweshe). The revolt was sparked by the punishment by the colonial authorities of Ngwasi Nyangaza, a plantation worker who fled the area. When he returned, he was speaking the language of Lyangombe, a magician who had lived in the region in the sixteenth century and taught a religiously inspired ideology centred on equity between people. His spirit, it was locally believed, could possess people through initiation and was often consulted.

Once possessed by Lyangombe's spirit, Ngwasi Nyangaza was called 'Binji Binji'. He announced the invasion of a huge swarm of grasshoppers and promised the arrival of new herds of cattle, which would be distributed among the peasant population. He ordered all farmers to leave the plantations and told them about a great vision he had received: their land would be returned and all forced labour would be abolished.

15 Alphonse Njangu Canda, 'L'effort de guerre 1914–1918: Coup de grâce porté à la résistance des Bashi', in *Les réactions africaines à la colonisation en Afrique centrale* (Kigali, n.p., 1985), pp. 223–230.

The colonial administration, understanding the threat of large-scale rural upheaval, swiftly put an end to the revolt. The chiefs themselves guarded an ambivalent position, as the revolt illustrated the fragility of their power. The Binji Binji insurrection derived its strength from the mobilization of rites, initiations, and the cult of invulnerability, all used to reinforce the promise of liberation from foreign occupation.¹⁶

¹⁶ Alphonse Njangu Canda, 'La secte Binji-Binji ou la renaissance de la résistance des Bashi', in *Lyangombe: mythes et rites* (Bukavu, CERUKI, 1976), p. 124.

3. Post-independence turmoil: The militarization of ethnicity

As in other parts of the country, the first years of post-independence in the east were characterized by political turmoil and insurgency. Strategically, South Kivu—which at that time was part of the larger Kivu province—was of limited interest and had no real impact on the national power game. But the military conflict between loyalists of Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba, who had been imprisoned by Mobutu, extradited to the secessionist province of Katanga and executed in January 1961, and Mobutu-led forces in other parts of the country would eventually inspire local political aspirations. In South Kivu, this would drastically affect relations between different ethnic communities and transform existing tensions into overt violence, forming a turning point in local politics and becoming a reference for future mobilization.

The Simba rebellion

In the early 1960s, different insurgent movements, inspired by Lumumba's nationalist ideology, spread throughout the country. In 1963, Pierre Mulele, a former minister in the Lumumba government, launched an insurgency against the regime in Kwilu region, to the east of Kinshasa. Other Lumumbists had installed the *Conseil national de libération* (CNL, National Revolutionary Council) in exile in Brazzaville. These insurgencies, which touted a revolutionary message of radical nationalism and anti-imperialism, would soon also reach Fizi and Uvira. But their success would be conditioned by local agendas and regional dynamics.

Before the rebellion, Fuliiru leader Musa Marandura had organized protests against the traditional Fuliiru authorities and the provincial government, in an attempt to modernize the administration. In early 1964, Gaston Soumialot was sent to Bujumbura by the CNL to open a military front in the east. Here, he was put in touch with Congolese nationalists such as Fuliiru leaders Louis Bidalira and Musa Marandura,

as well as the Bembe leader Jérôme Mutshungu. Soumialot also received support from Rwandan Tutsi refugees, who had left their country as a consequence of the social revolution of 1959 and had created the *Union nationale rwandaise* (UNAR, Rwandan National Union), as well as Burundian Tutsi who were opposing the rule of their *mwami*.¹⁷

Local recruits, initially mainly from the Fuliiru community, were trained and a successful military campaign followed, adopting the name *Simba* (lion) and capturing Uvira and Fizi. The *Armée populaire de libération* (APL, Popular Liberation Army), the Simbas' armed wing, was welcomed locally as a nationalist liberation movement and gained extensive popular support from various ethnic communities.¹⁸ In a short period of time, the movement took control of large parts of South Kivu, Maniema, and northern Katanga.

Lack of military capacity was partly compensated by references to magical-religious beliefs and practices that helped increase internal cohesion, strengthen discipline, and boost combatants' courage. A key element was the *dawa* (medicine), a potion produced by witchdoctors that was applied to the combatant's skin to confer immunity from bullets, strength, protection, and victory. Water was also sprinkled on combatants to purify and protect them, and the population, during combat. The water-cry '*Mai Mulele*', chanted by combatants, was meant to give them determination to fight against the much better equipped Congolese national army, which was receiving foreign and mercenary support.

The movement also became directly connected to the global anti-imperialist struggle through the support of Ernesto 'Che' Guevara. In 1965, Guevara tried to transform the rebellion into a well-structured liberation movement but soon left the region disillusioned. While the insurgency was successful in its initial stages, it unravelled just as quickly.

17 Benoit Verhaegen, *Rébellions au Congo* (Brussels: Centre de recherche et d'information socio-politiques (CRISP), 1966).

18 For more details on the Simba rebellion, see Stearns et al., *Mai-Mai Yakutumba*, pp. 13–17.

DOMINANT POLITICAL PARTIES IN SOUTH KIVU, EARLY 1960S¹

MOUVEMENT NATIONAL CONGOLAIS-LUMUMBA (*MNC-L, Congolese National Movement-Lumumba*)

(nationalist and considered a Kusu/Tetela party, as Lumumba himself was a Tetela)

REGROUPEMENT CONGOLAIS (*RECO, Congolese Grouping*)

(largely represented the Shi of Ngweshe)

CENTRE DE REGROUPEMENT AFRICAIN (*CEREA, African Rallying Centre*)

(radical nationalist; stronghold in Fuliiru community)

CEREA then split into two factions:²

ALLIANCE RURALE PROGRESSISTE-UNION DES WAREGA (*Unerga, Progressive Rural Alliance-Rega Union*)

(defended the interests of Rega but also had support from Shi in Kabare territoire)

UNION ÉCONOMIQUE DES BABEMBE À FIZI (*UNEBAFI, Economic Union of the Bembe in Fizi*)

(Bembe party that allied with the MNC-L)

1 Verhaegen, *Rébellions au Congo*, p. 265.

2 The split was directly related to the local power struggle between a new class of radical politicians, such as Musa Marandura, and traditional authorities. Marandura specifically targeted the Fuliiru traditional authorities. During the 1960 elections, radical nationalists had gained importance, which forced Mwami Simba of the Fuliiru, himself installed by the colonial administration, to go into exile in Bujumbura. The provincial authorities in February 1961 replaced him with Marandura but, two months later, the mwami returned to the region and removed Marandura with the help of moderate CEREA politicians such as Jean Miruho; A. Kabemba, *Kindu et la rébellion. Essai d'étude des événements politiques (1960-1964)* (Bukavu: ISP, 1976).

As well as suffering from growing divisions within the movement's central command, a weakly-developed nationalistic and revolutionary ideology could never transcend competition within and between communities. Rather than leading to a 'second liberation' of the country, the insurgency ended up pitting communities against each other, sharpening ethnic divisions.

Even before the start of the rebellion, ethnic divisions had fragmented the political landscape in South Kivu. Five dominant political parties relied mainly on specific ethnic communities (see box opposite).

After 1963, while the provincial government was led by the moderate faction of CERE, the MNC-L gradually extended its influence. The *mwami* of Kabare, who was removed from his official position by the provincial authorities in 1961, turned to the MNC-L and became one of its most prominent local members until the Congo's Prime Minister Moïse Tshombe promised him government support. Rega members of Unerga also allied themselves to the MNC-L after provincial authorities declared that they would attach part of the Warega *chefferie* in Mwenga to the Ngweshe *chefferie*. And in Uvira, the MNC-L gained prominence when radical CERE militants followed Marandura's turn to the Lumumbists.¹⁹

The Simba rebellion built on this growing local political opposition towards both Kinshasa and the customary authorities in Fizi and Uvira—but would never overcome existing ethnic contradictions.²⁰ Tensions between its two core communities, the Bembe and the Fuliiru, as well as intra-ethnic differences, had a considerable effect on its internal cohesion. The Bembe saw the Fuliiru as guided only by their own local agenda, unconcerned with revolutionary ideology; the Fuliiru, on the other hand, considered the Bembe arrogant and expansionist. The Shi of Ngweshe, who feared that the rebellion was merely a pretext for the

19 Koen Vlassenroot, 'Citizenship, Identity Formation and Conflict in South Kivu: The Case of the Banyamulenge', *Review of African Political Economy* 29/93–4 (2002), pp. 499–515.

20 Ruddy Doom, 'Changing Identities, Violent Conflict and the World System', in Ruddy Doom & Jan Gorus (eds.), *Politics of Identity and Economics of Conflict in the Great Lakes Region* (Brussels: VUB Press, 2000), pp. 15–9.

Fuliiru to raid their cattle, refused to support the movement and in return were targeted by its combatants. Furthermore, the insurgency slowly succumbed to indiscipline, as it increasingly attracted opportunists who wanted to settle personal scores or simply loot the population.

In 1966, the Simba were defeated by a coalition of the *Armée nationale congolaise* (ANC, Congolese National Army), mercenaries, and allied militants, and fled into the *Hauts Plateaux* around Fizi and Uvira. Their arrival would drag the Banyamulenge directly into the conflict. As early as 1965, some Banyamulenge had created an armed group called Abagiriye, to protect them against incursions of Simba rebels. Until the large-scale arrival of Simbas on the Hauts Plateaux, however, Abagiriye played a marginal role and was supported by only a small minority of the Banyamulenge population.

Citizenship and territorial claims on the *Hauts Plateaux*

The arrival of the Simba on the *Hauts Plateaux* had a twin effect on the Banyamulenge community. Its relations with neighbouring ethnic communities deteriorated drastically, and at the same time the Simba provoked its political awakening and set in motion a drive for emancipation.

Unlike its neighbours, the Banyamulenge never felt attracted to the revolutionary message of the rebel leadership. The egalitarian discourse sounded much less appealing when interpreted as '*Kngabana inka n'ababembe*', i.e. the free distribution of their cattle to the Bembe.²¹ When the Simba were pushed back into the *Hauts Plateaux* by the national army and started raiding cattle and imposing taxes, the rebellion turned into an ethno-military campaign against the Banyamulenge.²² In response, the latter established a self-defence militia, which was trained and equipped by the Congolese army. The ANC created a humanitarian corridor to allow the Banyamulenge population to escape to the Ruzizi Plain and Baraka, a town further south along Lake Tanganyika, and mobilized the self-

21 Gasinzira, *L'évolution des conflits ethniques*, p. 96.

22 Jules Gérard-Libois and Benoît Verhaegen, *Congo 1966* (Brussels: CRISP, 1966), p. 399.

defence group to drive back the Simba. This strategy proved successful: the Simba were defeated and the Banyamulenge population was able to return back to the *Hauts Plateaux*. However, while the Banyamulenge saw no other option than to seek protection from the national army, for their Bembe and Fuliiru neighbours this decision was an unforgivable collaboration with the enemy.²³

What started as a conflict between a new class of local leaders and customary dynasties, and was inspired by radical nationalistic and anti-imperialistic ideology, in the end further consolidated existing ethnic antagonisms. The Simba campaign had pitched entire communities against each other and had left deep scars on all sides. It would become a point of reference for future political competition, with memories of these events exploited to strengthen political claims, particularly in the Fizi and Uvira areas. Local ethnic resentment would thus continue to dominate the political realm.

For the Banyamulenge, the insurgency amounted to a socio-political awakening. Thanks to their alliance with the government, they were granted better access to education, social services, the army, and employment opportunities—much to the disapproval of neighbouring communities. But they also called for their own administrative entity, which would allow them to institute their own customary structures and reduce their dependency on other ethnic communities. In 1966, Banyamulenge asked local political and military authorities to create a new politico-administrative zone on the *Hauts Plateaux* of the Uvira area, the *Collectivité des Hauts Plateaux d'Itombwe*, yet without success.

During the 1970s and 1980s, local political competition centred on two key issues: the creation of an autonomous administrative entity in Itombwe and the citizenship status of the Banyamulenge. The distribution of identity cards in 1969 was an important moment of dispute. The administrator in Itombwe refused to give these identity cards to Banyamulenge, who he considered foreigners. He gained support from

.....
23 Vlassenroot, 'Citizenship, Identity Formation and Conflict', p. 504.

the *mwami* of the Vira and other administrators, but was countered by the provincial governor who referred to the provisions of the nationality law that recognized the political rights of migrant communities.

One year later, for the first time in Congolese history, a Munyamulenge, Frédéric Muhoza Gisaro, was elected to the *Conseil législatif*—the national parliament. This election gave further impetus to the socio-political emancipation of the Banyamulenge community. Gisaro campaigned anew for the creation of the *collectivité des Hauts Plateaux d'Itombwe*, which was considered by other communities as a direct threat to their customary power. In 1979, a compromise was reached on the creation of a *groupement* in Bijombo, an administrative entity subsumed under a *collectivité*, which originally comprised 18 villages, 12 of them headed by a Munyamulenge chief.

Even though Banyamulenge claims to leadership over this *groupement* were supported by the Uvira district commissioner and the provincial governor, it was a Vira traditional chief who was eventually appointed. From the perspective of the Vira chiefs, the nomination was a customary affair and thus their responsibility. Strikingly, in 1971, *Mwami* Lenghe III of the Vira had appointed Obed Sebasonera as *sultani* (head) of a newly created *groupement de Bijombo*—although the entity would not be legally recognized until 1979. The Banyamulenge would regularly reject the power of the chief—without success. The Bijombo case was a clear illustration of the explosive nature of the political context around Uvira and the further territorialization of political claims.

By the time of the elections of 1982 and 1987, a first generation of Banyamulenge had completed their university studies, and began actively to promote the socio-economic development and political emancipation of their community—in turn prompting resentment at their growing political influence and challenges to their legal status. Prior to both elections, the central committee of the ruling party, President Mobutu's *Mouvement populaire de la révolution* (MPR, Popular Movement of the Revolution) had rejected the Banyamulenge candidates because of their

‘dubious nationality’.²⁴ Although the Banyamulenge were allowed to vote, they refused to take part in the ballot. While tensions grew steadily, it was only after Mobutu had introduced a democratization process in 1990 that these tensions would escalate into open violence.

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 24 Vlassenroot, ‘Citizenship, Identity Formation and Conflict’, p. 506.

4. State collapse and crisis

In April 1990, after undertaking a consultative tour throughout the country, Mobutu announced the end of single-party rule and initiated a process of democratization. This set in motion a fierce competition between old members of Mobutu's patronage network and new political elites. Mobutu skilfully exploited existing divisions to weaken his opponents. One strategy was the introduction in 1993 of *géopolitique* (geopolitics). According to this principle, the composition of national institutions had to be based on regional quotas: in contrast to the previous principle of rotation, high ranking provincial administrators from then on had to originate from the province where they were posted.

The principle of *géopolitique* soon became an instrument by which all those considered as 'not indigenous' to their region were politically excluded. In Shaba (Katanga), it triggered violent campaigns against the Luba from Kasai, and in North Kivu against the Banyarwanda, i.e. those who had come from Rwanda. In South Kivu, it was mainly the Banyamulenge who became the focus of popular vitriol. But the prospects of the democratization process also created new rifts between political elites and re-introduced ethnic politics, leading to increasing tensions between different communities.

The promise of ethnic mobilization

In South Kivu, Mobutu's announcement soon instigated a fierce political rivalry between different ethnic elites. Although in the early 1990s, a prominent local civil society was active in the province, its leaders' ambitions and ethnic rivalries eventually compromised its mobilizing capacity. Mobutu's recycling of local political elites further prevented the formation of a strong counter-force and intensified ethnic tension.

A prominent role in local civil society was played by the *mutuelles*, which had begun as ethnically-based urban associations, whose aim was to offer social assistance to their members and safeguard the community's cultural identity and reproduction. As political competition and ethnic

mistrust intensified during the democratization process, local political elites turned these groups into vehicles for their political aspirations. These *mutuelles* had to consolidate a popular power base and provide them with the necessary resources.

Perhaps the most influential *mutuelle* was *Solidarité Bashi-Bahavu* (SBB, Shi-Havu Solidarity). After the introduction of the *géopolitique*, two Rega were appointed as provincial governor and provincial director. For the ruling Shi elite, these appointments constituted a direct threat to their political dominance. Thus, the SBB became an instrument for urban Shi political elites and businessmen. Its leadership was closely connected to local civil society groups, the Catholic Church, universities, and the local branch of the main opposition party, the *Union pour la démocratie et le progrès social* (UDPS, Union for Democracy and Social Progress), led by Étienne Tshisekedi. The SBB thus represented a powerful network that could mobilize large parts of the Shi community—and in order to strengthen its power base, it also tried to bring in other ethnic groups, such as the Havu and Vira.

Mistrust, however, was also growing between different sub-groups within ethnic communities. This was particularly the case when, in 1993, Mobutu nominated Faustin Birindwa, a Shi and local UDPS leader, as prime minister. Birindwa and other prominent Shi members were promptly excluded from the opposition party, leading to its split into two factions: *UDPS-Radicale* (UDPS-Radical) and *UDPS-Modéré* (UDPS-Moderate), the latter also known as the Birindwa faction. From then on, SBB would rally around Birindwa and other Shi leaders from Ngweshe.

The same ethnic rivalries affected the cohesion of local civil society, which, instead of being a guiding platform of the democratization movement, ended up mirroring existing social contradictions. At the origins of the crisis were diverging perspectives within the provincial civil society coordination body, the *Bureau de la Société Civile* (Office of the Civil Society), over which strategy to follow after Birindwa's appointment as prime minister. Shi members of the *Bureau* from Ngweshe were in favour of supporting Birindwa's faction but others refused to collaborate with a figure they saw as Mobutu's ally. The president of the *Bureau*, a Shi

from Ngweshe, eventually lost his support and was replaced by a Rega member. This caused a rift within civil society, with Shi members leaving the civil society general assembly and creating alternative, rival civil society structures.

Land and citizenship claims

While in Bukavu the democratization process reinforced ethnic divisions between local elites, elsewhere in South Kivu it provoked communal tensions and violence. Unresolved claims to customary power on the part of several ethnic communities and the issue of political representation again took central stage in mobilization efforts in Kalehe *territoire* and around Uvira. The arrival in 1993 of large numbers of Hutu refugees from Burundi and in 1994 from Rwanda additionally complicated these conflicts.

Growing ethnic antagonism in Kalehe *territoire* was the result of amplified competition over political representation and land issues between different ethnic communities, a revival of Tembo territorial claims, and spill-over effects of the Masisi War.²⁵ A complex web of ethnic alliances and divisions would turn particularly the *Hauts Plateaux* of Kalehe into a highly contested zone.

This area had been largely uninhabited before the colonial period, due to its high altitude and cool climate. To support the development of a local plantation economy, Belgian colonial administrators had promoted the immigration of large numbers of Banyarwanda directly from Rwanda or North Kivu to settle in Kalehe. These settlers were joined by Tutsi refugees fleeing political turmoil caused by the 1959–62 revolution in Rwanda. These Banyarwanda communities did not immediately claim customary control over land. Beginning in the early 1980s, however, realising the insecurity of their own rights to land access—precisely

25 For a detailed account of the Masisi War, see Jason Stearns, *North Kivu: The Background to Conflict in North Kivu Province of Eastern Congo* (London: Rift Valley Institute, 2012), pp. 27–8.

because the area remained under control of Havu and Tembo customary chiefs—the Banyarwanda started to demand their own customary chiefs.

National politics played a part too. After the announcement of the democratization process, many Banyarwanda representatives were refused permission to participate in the *Conférence nationale souveraine* (CNS, National Sovereign Conference) in Kinshasa, which was charged in 1990 with laying out a path towards democratization. The conference also confirmed the 1981 citizenship law, which required ethnic communities to have been established in the Congo before 1885 in order to claim citizenship. This robbed the Banyarwanda of the possibility of political representation at national level, adding fuel to an already precarious situation in both Kivu provinces. Finally, the decision in 1991 to launch a registration process to determine the citizenship of migrant communities in the Kivus, in advance of local elections, triggered violent incidents in Kalehe and around Uvira.

In Kalehe, the first acts of violence erupted in July 1993 and were directly linked to the Masisi War that had started a few months earlier in North Kivu, setting indigenous communities against Banyarwanda. Tembo living in North Kivu's Walikale and South Kivu's Kalehe joined the Batiri/Katuku militias that were operating in Masisi. When Batiri fighters killed a Hutu elder in Ziralo, Kalehe, violence spread to the *Hauts Plateaux*, causing large-scale displacement and the regrouping of the population along ethnic lines.²⁶ Things were further complicated with the arrival of Rwandan refugees in 1993 and 1994. When some collaboration developed between these refugees and Hutu populations in eastern Zaire, Tutsi pastoralists were forced to leave their land and seek refuge in Rwanda. The provincial vice-governor and civil society groups initiated mediation efforts in 1995, but as the situation also started to degenerate in other areas, these efforts had limited impact.

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26 'Analyse du contexte du territoire de Kalehe', p. 18–19.

Build-up to the First Congo War

In Uvira, tensions triggered by the democratization process were exacerbated by the presence of Burundian and Rwandan refugees—creating a dangerous mix of local, national, and regional conflict dynamics that would gradually turn the area into the venue for increasing violence and would constitute the backdrop to the start of the First Congo War.

Unresolved inter-community tensions proved fertile ground for ethnic mobilization and an exclusion campaign against the Banyamulenge. Célestin Anzuluni Bembe Isilonyonyi, a Mobutist politician of Bembe origin and the deputy speaker of the *Haut Conseil de la République-Parlement de Transition* (HCR-PT, High Council of the Republic-Transitional Parliament), played a key role in linking local tensions between Bembe and Banyamulenge to discussions at the national level on the citizenship status of the Banyamulenge and Banyarwanda. In April 1995, the HCR-PT set up a commission to investigate the status of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees in the Kivu provinces. It then adopted a resolution calling for the expulsion of all Banyamulenge, referred to as recent Rwandan refugees. The same resolution further specified that any sale or transfer of Banyamulenge assets had to be cancelled and that the latter should be banned from all administrative posts.

On his return to the Uvira and Fizi region in September 1995, Anzuluni further stirred up anti-Banyamulenge sentiment. In public speeches, he called on the population to help expel the Banyamulenge. He received support from local leaders, such as the Uvira district commissioner, Shweka Mutabazi, and from Vira Mwami Lenghe.²⁷ Encouraged by Anzuluni's public statements, the district commissioner started implementing the parliamentary resolution and asked the Uvira officer for urban planning for a list of all properties and land owned by supposed Rwandan or Burundian citizens, including '*nos frères des Hauts Plateaux*' (our brothers from the *Hauts Plateaux*); to stop all construction works

²⁷ Mwami Lenghe was a strong supporter of Mobutu. According to local sources, he also supported Anzuluni to reduce the influence of Fuliiru in the Vira *collectivité*.

by these 'foreigners'; and to identify and itemize all houses that were complete but abandoned.²⁸

By early 1996, harassment of Banyamulenge had become common in the Uvira area. Shweka regularly ordered the detainment of Banyamulenge leaders and targeted Banyamulenge development associations. In July 1996, tensions would further escalate. During a public meeting in a Pentecostal Church in Kasenga, Shweka called for '*une chasse aux serpents*' (snake hunt).²⁹ One month later, Groupe Milima, a prominent Banyamulenge non-governmental development organisation, was banned and its leader, Muller Ruhimbika, was accused of political lobbying, arms trafficking, and attracting the attention of international observers to the citizenship issue.³⁰

On 9 September, representatives of political parties, civil society leaders and youth militias organized a demonstration in Uvira and asked for the immediate removal of the Catholic Bishop of Banyamulenge origin, Jérôme Gapangwa, who was accused of arms trafficking. The march was followed by riots and pillaging of Banyamulenge properties. In Bukavu, the civil society coordination organized a *Marche de la colère* (march of anger) against the Banyamulenge. Other demonstrations followed in Kalehe and Idjwi. Anti-Tutsi associations started distributing pamphlets in which the population was invited to act against the emerging threat of a Tutsi-land in the region. On 18 September, parliamentarians from South Kivu denied the existence of a Banyamulenge community in Zaire and called the population to continue its efforts of self-defence against 'Tutsi aggressors'.³¹

28 *Mémorandum des Banyamulenge adressé au Vice-Premier Ministre et au Ministre de l'Intérieur à Kinshasa*, 5 October 1995.

29 Interview with the author, Uvira, July 1998.

30 Muller Ruhimbika Manassé, *Les Banyamulenge (Congo-Zaire) entre deux guerres* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2001).

31 'Mémorandum au sujet de l'agression de cette région par les éléments armés venus du Rwanda et du Burundi', Groupe Parlementaire du Sud-Kivu, Kinshasa, 18 September 1996.

These tensions eventually erupted into overt violence. Banyamulenge youth who had been recruited by the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) in the early 1990s started returning to the *Hauts Plateaux* during early 1996. Initially, they were sent to mobilize other Banyamulenge to join the RPF. But as the situation in and around their homelands continued to get worse, and benefitting from RPF support, they started organizing armed resistance against their Bembe neighbours, targeting and killing a number of Bembe leaders.³² In response, Anzuluni, Mwami Lenghe, and other local leaders mobilized local youth into armed groups, including the *Groupe d'action et de soutien d'Anzuluni Bembe Isilonyonyi* (GRASABI, Group of Action and Support of Anzuluni Bembe Isilonyonyi). In collaboration with the Zairian army, these targeted Banyamulenge villages and indiscriminately killed civilians.

According to some Banyamulenge leaders, a delegation was sent from Kigali to the *Hauts Plateaux* in July 1996 to inform the population about preparations for a military operation aimed at stopping further attacks by the Zairian army on the Banyamulenge community. A few weeks after this visit, about 20 Banyamulenge recruits from the Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA) infiltrated from Rwanda onto the *Hauts Plateaux* to prepare for a military intervention, and to inform the population of their intentions. At the end of the following month, they were joined by an additional 50–100 armed men, also of Banyamulenge origin, but on their way to the mountains were discovered by some elements of the Zairian Army in the Ruzizi Plains.³³

A spiral of tit-for-tat massacres had begun. In early September 1996, Zairian army units broke into several churches, arrested local priests and missionaries, and looted cars, equipment, and documents. By this time, Rwandan units had started to cross into Zaire and raid refugee camps, where they clashed with the Zairian army. At the end of September, 300 Banyamulenge were killed in Baraka by a coalition of Bembe militias

32 Stearns et al., *Mai-Mai Yakutumba*, pp. 17–20.

33 Vlassenroot, 'Citizenship, Identity Formation and Conflict', p. 509.

and the Zairian army. On 6 October, Banyamulenge combatants attacked the hospital in Lamera, killing patients and nurses. A few days later, the Zairian army started looting Uvira.

On 8 October, the provincial vice-governor called for 'all Banyamulenge to leave Zaire within a week...' Those remaining, he announced, would be considered as rebels and treated as such.³⁴ Although it had already become clear that the returning Banyamulenge presaged a larger military strategy led by the new Rwandan regime, this speech was the direct trigger for Rwanda and its Congolese allies to launch a military campaign, which had been in preparation for several months³⁵. On 11 October 1996, the Chief of Staff of the Zairian army eventually declared: 'Zaire is at war in South Kivu.'³⁶

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 34 Amnesty International, 'Zaire. Lawlessness and insecurity in North and South Kivu', 1 November 1996, p. 14.

35 Although the original plan was to launch the campaign from Goma rather than to start in Uvira.

36 IRIN, 'Update on the Conflict in South Kivu, Zaire', Nairobi, 11 October 1996.

5. Conclusions and policy considerations

This report has traced the historical roots of political dynamics and areas of dispute that have directly or indirectly inspired armed groups' campaigns in South Kivu during and after the Congo Wars. Armed mobilization in this province has been the result of many overlapping factors including the need for local self-defence, elite-level competition and conflict, provincial and national power games and regional dynamics. The outcome of these processes today is a hugely diverse political and military landscape, with numerous armed groups claiming local authority, economic dominance, and/or social control. Their success is related not so much to military capacity as to their skills in forging alliances with local and national elites and regional networks, and exploiting the dividends of the different peace processes and army integration efforts.

A key element in understanding local conflict dynamics is the particular link between territory and identity, and the territorial/administrative organization based on customary chiefdoms. As part of a strategy to consolidate its dominance, the colonial administration imposed a new administrative structure that confirmed the direct links between identity and territory as the basis of local political organization. In contrast to Ituri and North Kivu, where colonial policy reinforced local competition between different ethnic communities for control over land, in South Kivu, it was the way in which the territory was administratively and politically organized that triggered local conflict. Some communities saw their territorial claims translated into new territorial entities, while other communities, such as the Banyamulenge and the Tembo, were excluded and felt increasingly marginalized. This confirmed local ethnic differences and affected social coexistence.

The political turmoil that followed the Congo's independence showed the dramatic impact of this territorialization of identity. The Simba rebellion—which to some extent expressed the rejection of customary leadership by a new class of political leaders—was never able to transcend ethnic divisions and only hardened ethnic boundaries. Furthermore, the

rebellion's impact has since been used as a point of reference for future armed mobilization. When, at the end of the 1980s, the power structure established by President Mobutu started to fall apart and he announced a democratization process, local-level political mobilization was skilfully manipulated by Mobutu and became characterised by renewed competition between and within ethnic communities.

By the mid-1990s, local elites shifted the focus of their discourse to the presence of migrant communities. In South Kivu, growing tension between the Banyamulenge and their neighbours, the further collapse of Mobutu's political regime, and the effects of regional dynamics, created the necessary conditions for the outbreak of the First Congo War. This war was the first of a sequence of local armed mobilization, of splintering of rebel groups, and of new claims to power, protection and profit.³⁷

While the initial trigger to armed mobilization was the start of the First Congo War. In 1996, community leaders helped create several Mai-Mai groups to resist the arrival of Rwandan forces on Congolese territory. Some of their recruits would eventually join the new army led by Laurent Kabila, and those left behind would keep a low profile.

The RCD campaign and the start of the Second Congo War in 1998 also caused a militarization of other parts of the province. The presence of the RCD's Rwandan backers in the DRC was the core motivation for many militia leaders to revive their structures or to create new armed groups. Close collaboration with foreign forces and elements of Mobutu's former national army provided them with some military capacity. Later, the Kabila government would mobilise these groups to open a second military front against the RCD in the east. Attempts were made to strengthen collaboration between these militias but with limited success. Padiri Bulenda, a Tembo who moved his headquarters from his home area in Bunyakiri to the area around Shabunda, was considered

37 Koen Vlassenroot and Timothy Raeymaekers, *Conflict and Social Transformation in eastern DR Congo* (Ghent: Academia Press, 2004).

by several other groups as the overall Mai-Mai commander and received considerable support from Kinshasa.

Things would change again after the start of the transition process in 2003. Its aim was to create the necessary conditions for successful state-building and peace consolidation. One of the paradoxes of this process, however, is that since its start, the number of armed groups has steadily increased. In the Kivu provinces, it set in motion new claims to political, military, and economic power, while root causes of violence such as land access, citizenship, ethnic coexistence, and resource governance were hardly addressed. Moreover, badly designed strategies to deal with armed groups added new layers to the conflict. In addition, 'instead of a political transition, the (...) peace-building effort was increasingly constitutive of a political regime that reproduces the image of a collapsed state and sustains a pattern of structural violence and privatized governance by both governmental and non-governmental actors'.³⁸

While armed groups are clearly crucial players in this pattern of 'privatized governance', they can no longer be seen as either autonomous or strictly local phenomena. Most militias have directly or indirectly been connected to community grievances. While the extent to which they are embedded in local society differs from case to case, the most powerful of these militias have *de facto* replaced the state authorities, becoming the main source of power. As such, they are attractive to local, national, and regional businessmen and policy-makers, who in turn link them to larger power games. Today, the proliferation of local self-defence groups has been replaced with competing networks, in which militias play a key role. Even the Raia Mutomboki, a grassroots response to a lack of security provision by the Congolese army during and after the transition process, has morphed from a popular self-defence force into a local power

38 Koen Vlassenroot and Timothy Raeymaekers, 'Kivu's intractable security conundrum', *African Affairs* 108/432 (2009), pp. 475–84.

and protection structure that is closely connected to larger political and military networks.³⁹

Policy recommendations need to take all these factors into account. The many levels of the conflict must be reflected in a multi-dimensional response. Key points to bear in mind are the following. First, the proliferation of armed groups is the outcome of a variable interaction between local, national and regional factors and dynamics, with armed groups being subject to different transformation processes: so even if some similar patterns can be identified in the dynamics behind existing militias, each armed group has its own characteristic and each needs a specific approach. In some cases, armed groups can thus be causes of insecurity, while in others they are its symptoms. Second, addressing these local realities can only be effective as part of a comprehensive political process, a process that addresses at the same time short-term security priorities and the causes of violence. This needs to take into account existing grievances and promote reconciliation through administrative reforms that counter the links between identity, territory and political power. Finally, the success of any policy in the Kivus depends on overcoming resistance at the centre; it cannot take place without the creation of accountable state institutions at local and national level that are able to carry out the necessary reform process. A decentralization of decision-making, as outlined in the constitution, should be key component of this reform process.

³⁹ See Jason Stearns et al., *Raia Mutomboki: The Flawed Peace Process in the DRC and the Birth of an Armed Franchise* (London: Rift Valley Institute, 2013).

Glossary of acronyms, words, and phrases

AFDL	<i>Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Congo-Zaïre</i> / Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire
APL	<i>Armée populaire de libération</i> / Popular Liberation Army
<i>bami</i>	chieftains; plural of <i>mwami</i> (q.v.)
Banyamulenge	people from Mulenge in the <i>territoire</i> of Uvira, South Kivu (plural)
<i>brassage</i>	integration of militias into Congolese army; lit., ‘brewing’ (French)
<i>Bureau de la Société Civile</i>	Office of the Civil Society
CEREA	<i>Centre de regroupement africain</i> / African Rallying Centre
<i>chefferie</i>	chiefdom, the highest level of customary administration; at level between <i>groupement</i> and <i>territoire</i> (q.v.); <i>secteurs</i> and <i>chefferies</i> are also called <i>collectivités</i>
CNS	<i>Conférence nationale souveraine</i> / National Sovereign Conference
<i>Collectivité</i>	administrative entity at level between <i>groupement</i> and <i>territoire</i> (q.v.); <i>collectivités</i> can be a <i>secteur</i> or a <i>chefferie</i>
<i>Conseil législatif</i>	national parliament
<i>dawa</i>	medicine (Swahili); a protective amulet or potion
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
<i>géopolitique</i>	geopolitics; political principle introduced by Mobutu in 1993 according to which high ranking provincial administrators had to originate from the province where they were posted
Global and Inclusive Agreement	peace agreement signed in December 2002 in Pretoria, officially concluding the Inter-Congolese Dialogue (signed in Zambia in 1999) and ending the Second Congo War
GRASABI	<i>Groupe d'action et de soutien d'Anzuluni Bembe Isilonyonyi</i> / Group of Action and Support of Anzuluni Bembe Isilonyonyi

<i>groupement</i>	administrative entity at level between <i>village</i> and <i>collectivité</i> (q.v.)
HCR-PT	<i>Haut Conseil de la République-Parlement de Transition</i> / High Council of the Republic-Transitional Parliament
IDPs	Internally displaces persons
<i>Mai-Mai</i>	community-based self-defence militias; from <i>maji</i> , 'water' (Kiswahili)
MNC-L	<i>Mouvement national congolais-Lumumba</i> / Congolese national movement-Lumumba
MPR	<i>Mouvement populaire de la révolution</i> / Popular Movement of the Revolution
<i>mutuelle</i>	ethnically-based urban associations/self-defence groups
<i>mwami</i>	king (Kirundi, Kinyarwanda, Nande and Shi languages, and several other Bantu languages)
<i>oku lwa Bene Mwa Koke</i>	war against the sons of Mwa Koke (Kibembe)
RCD	<i>Rassemblement congolais pour la démocratie</i> / Congolese Rally for Democracy
RECO	<i>Regroupement congolais</i> / Congolese Grouping
RPA	Rwandan Patriotic Army
RPF	Rwandan Patriotic Front
SBB	<i>Solidarité Bashi-Bahavu</i> / Shi-Havu Solidarity
<i>secteur</i>	sector; administrative entity at level between <i>groupement</i> and <i>territoire</i> (q.v.); <i>secteurs</i> and <i>chefferies</i> are also called <i>collectivités</i>
<i>Simba</i>	lion (Swahili)
<i>sultani</i>	head of a <i>groupement</i> (q.v.)
<i>territoire</i>	administrative entity at level between <i>collectivité</i> and district
UDPS	<i>Union pour la démocratie et le progrès social</i> / Union for Democracy and Social Progress
UNAR	<i>Union nationale rwandaise</i> / Rwandan National Union
UNEBAFI	<i>Union économique des Babembe à Fizi</i> / Economic Union of the Bembe in Fizi
Unerga	<i>Alliance rurale progressiste–Union des Warega</i> / Progressive Rural Alliance–Rega Union

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SEEKING PROTECTION AND THEREBY OBLIGED TO ORGANIZE
THEIR OWN SECURITY.

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