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The Formation of New Political Complexes: Dynamics of Conflict in Ituri
- Democratic Republic of Congo -

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Dr. Koen Vlassenroot visited the Centre of African Studies on 9 September 2003 where he as part of his ongoing research on the Democratic Republic of Congo gave a seminar on *"Dynamics of the Conflict in Eastern Congo: The formation of new political complexes"*. This *Occasional Paper* is a revised version of his presentation written together with Tim Rayemaekers.

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1.   INTRODUCTION[1]

Recent events in Liberia, the revival of civil war in Burundi, the unending conflict in northern Uganda, etc. for most western spectators seem to constitute the bitter proof that the African continent is descending further into anarchic violence – every day bringing it closer to the stereotypical image of the symbolic yet frightening '*heart of darkness'*.   For most observers, the eastern parts of the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire) are no exception to this view. Since more than ten years now, this region has been the scene of an unending spiral of violence, which has consumed the lives of more than three million people and has destructed its entire infrastructure[2]. This makes the war in Congo certainly one of the most severe humanitarian crises of this moment. Today, the brutality of the violence in Ituri, in northeastern Congo, has given the Congolese conflict even a totally new image: that of a 10-year-old boy, killing those not belonging to the same ethnic community with discomforting ease. Every day, reports about brutal killings of civilians, the burning of houses and 'cannibalistic practices' reach the homes of the western public, referring to the worrying degradation of a continent far away. Nevertheless, to wave off this conflict as a mere example of '*blind rage'* or a revival of ancient ethnic hatred seems totally inadequate, considering that the war in Congo carries elements of civil war, organized crime, as well as an invasion of standing armies of third states.

Three issues dominate the current debate on the nature and scope of the conflict in Ituri. A first argument is that the Ituri-conflict is a result of old-aged but undigested ethnic resentments between the Hema and Lendu communities. At a time when the existing economic, administrative, and social patterns that have defined the local space become increasingly unstable, subject to external penetration, and unable to offer clear contexts within which people on the ground can make daily and life-choices, ethnicity indeed easily becomes an excuse for political action and violence. Yet, explaining political action and conflict in Ituri in ethnic terms, under the assumption that ethnic divisions are the essential character of the local society,

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[2] IRC, *Mortality in the Democratic Republic of Congo: Results from a Nationwide Survey*, April 2003.

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brushes aside the complex socio-political and economic factors that gave rise to this conflict.

The same can be said about the second argument. Most recently, many observers have limited themselves to a stale description of this conflict as '*new forms of cannibalism'*. Yet while the image of a 10-year-old fighter raging through the deserted streets of Bunia (the capital of the Ituri district) may serve as the perfect metaphor of, to use Kaplan's stereotypical presentation, the descent into anarchic violence led by those young and "*loose molecules in a very unstable fluid, a fluid that was clearly on the verge of igniting*"[3], these new barbarism rationales not only support an over simplistic and very misleading view on present conflicts, they also offer policy makers convenient arguments for isolationist policies.

A last argument, which has gained much popularity among international non-governmental organisations and the western media, is that the war in Ituri (and in the DRC in general) is a perfect illustration of the shift to a new type of conflict, in which greed has become the prime driving force of those engaged. Adherents to this view implicitly accept the existence of a connection between conflict and criminality. The situation on the ground is seen as one in which "*economics fuels the violence, which fuels the economics*"[4], an argument which is in line with Paul Collier's thesis that "*it is the feasibility of predation which determines the risk of war*"[5]. This view has permeated the accounts of many, including those of privileged observers. In April 2001, a United Nations Panel of Experts, which investigates what they call the '*illegal*' exploitation of natural resources in the DRC, concluded that "*Presidents Kagame and Museveni are on the verge of becoming the godfathers of the illegal exploitation of natural resources and the continuation of the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo*" because they have "*indirectly given criminal cartels a unique opportunity to organize and operate in this fragile and sensitive region.*"[6] The impact of such

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[3] KAPLAN, R.D., "The Coming Anarchy. How Scarcity, Crime, Overpopulation, Tribalism, and Disease are Rapidly Destroying the Social Fabric of our Planet", in: *The Atlantic Monthly*, February 1994, p. 46.
[4] JACKSON, S., '*Our Riches are being looted!': War Economies and Rumour in the Kivus, D.R. Congo*, mimeo, 2001.
[5] COLLIER, P. *Economic Causes of Civil Conflict and their Implications for Policy*, World Policy Research Paper, Washington: World Bank, 2000, p. 3.
[6] UNITED NATIONS, *Report of the Panel of Experts on Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth of the Democratic Republic of Congo*, New York: United Nations Security Council, April 12, 2001, § 221.

views on the current diplomatic and aid policy towards conflict prone regions should not be underestimated: it tends to a criminalisation of conflict and a delegitimisation of rebel leaderships.

None of these views is very constructive to examine and explain the present violence in northeastern Congo. Using terms as 'cannibalism', 'greed', or 'ethnic hatreds' brings us not very close to a clear comprehension of the Ituri conflict. It even begs more questions that it answers. To better understand the conflict in Ituri (or other such places in Africa) there seems a lot more work left in terms of upgrading the level of sophistication of analysis. Therefore, rather than starting from the dominant discourses, this article wants to present this conflict from an approach that analyses the conflict from the dynamics behind social marginalisation and exclusion. The central argument of this article is that the outbreak of violence in Ituri should be understood as the result of the exploitation, by local and regional actors, of a deeply rooted local political conflict for access to land, economic opportunity and political power. Today, war is used by these actors as a means to reorganise the local economic space and control mobility within and between spaces. The result is a struggle between networks that are linking local warlords to their external sponsors and have given rise to the development of new strategies of economic control. Disorder, insecurity and a general state of impunity have encouraged the formation of new and militarised networks for the extraction of economic benefits, and references to ethnic belonging have become an integral part of strategies of control and resistance.

The argument we want to develop can be broken down in three parts. First, we want to argue that at the roots of the conflict in Ituri is a local conflict for access to land, economic resources and political positions. The political economy of social fragmentation in Ituri is the outcome of a long historic process, in which internal and external elements became intertwined. As elsewhere in eastern Congo, the Belgian colonial administration relied on one local ethnic community (the Hema) for its administration based on the principle of indirect rule, to the disadvantage of the other local ethnic communities. As a consequence, the Hema found themselves in a favoured position after independence: not only did they acquire easy access to the plantations left by the Belgian settlers, but also to political positions. Mobutu's

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principle of stratification – converting political loyalty into economic assets – required the regular recycling of the political elite, under his proverbial divide-and-rule strategy, but also enabled the Hema to consolidate their local economic and political domination. At several occasions other ethnic communities (mainly the Lendu) resisted against this Hema-domination, claiming the original historical land ownership. Until the second half of the nineties, however, these conflicts never escalated into full-scale violence. It was only after the Kabila-led AFDL-rebellion (1996-1997), and the subsequent internal political void, that local elites tried to strengthen their power-position. Their search for allies, in concurrence with the divide-and-rule tactics of Ugandan army commanders, has led to the first eruption of violence in 1999.

Secondly, this instrumentalisation of violence in Ituri has resulted in a new organisation of the local economic space. Commonly, this strong economic dynamic is attributed to the presence of foreign (Ugandan and Rwandan) troops on Congolese territory. Corrupt army officers such as General James Kazini and Salim Saleh (UPDF) are said to have exploited the conflict for their private commercial gain. While this might be true, the so-called plundering of Congolese resources during the war has never occurred on a systematic basis. Moreover, their strong alliance with military actors abroad has also enabled local elites, in particular the Hema community, to foster new links with the regional market. It is exactly this combination, between an ethnicised political framework and a largely militarised transborder economy that has led to a redefinition of the political and economic space. This redefinition is bound to have a significant impact on the local political economy.

Thirdly, we think that the Ituri-conflict cannot be understood without placing it in its geographical context. On the one hand, the recent increase of violence in Ituri is a direct consequence of the Congolese war, in which since 1996 a multitude of local rebel-movements and foreign armies have been fighting for control and power. On the other hand, events in the neighbouring regions not only have had a direct impact on the local power-game but also risk to have a strong influence on any future pacification process.

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2.   HISTORY OF LOCAL CONFLICT

"*Violence can not be allowed to speak for itself, for violence is not its own meaning. To be made thinkable, it needs to be historicized*" Mamdani writes[7]. Indeed, conflicts should not be understood as irrational, abnormal events or as a sort of breakdown in a particular system, but as a complex of dynamics that has to be seen as an expression of the inner logic of the existing local social and political order. Even if it can be argued that the conflict in Ituri would not have led to the same humanitarian costs without the foreign military and political involvement, the first answer to the question why in 1999 the first spiral of violence erupted is to be found in the organisation of the local economic and political space.

The root causes of local tension and conflict between ethnic communities are the unequal acquisition and access to land, to the political sphere and to education, and the economic dominance of one of the local communities. The main protagonists are the pastoralist Hema and agriculturalist Lendu communities, who mainly reside in the Irumu and Djugu territories[8]. Both communities can be divided into different sub-groups: the southern Hema are also known as 'Banyoro', the northern Hema (the Gegere) integrated with the Lendu and speak the Lendu-language (Kilendu), while the southern Lendu are known as Ngiti or Lendu-Bindi.

Neither of these groups are original to the region, which has led to different interpretations of the local history of migration and, more importantly, to different interpretations about land-ownership. While it is generally agreed upon that the Lendu migration predated the arrival of the Hema-pastoralists, the colonial powers have given preference to the Hema community for the administration of the Ituri region. Both groups occupied the most fertile and resource-rich highlands of the region (Irumu and Djugu). The newly arrived colonialists soon discovered the potential that this extreme fertile soil was offering for the development of a plantation agriculture and a mining industry. Yet, in order to get access to local lands, an efficient power structure needed to be instituted.   As is the case with most power

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[7] MAMDANI, M., *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism and the Genocide in Rwanda*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2001, p. 364.
[8] The Mahagi, Aru and Mambasa territories are mainly populated by Alur, Bira, Banyari, Kaliko, Kakwa, Bombo, Twa, Nde-Okebo, Balese, Lugbara and Bamboti communities.

that is based on conquest, the first problem the Belgian settlers were confronted with was how to stabilise alien rule, which in colonial discourse "*was politely referred to as 'the native question'*"[9].   One answer was the regroupement of local ethnic communities into proto-political entities. Already in 1923, the colonial administration delimited the Hema- and Bindi-collectivities in Irumu and the Hema- and Lendu-collectivities in Djugu, aimed at the prevention of ethnic clashes. Another answer was the introduction of a system of land registration and private ownership. To do so, it carved out the necessary land from the collectively held communal lands by declaring all vacant land property of the state. The Hema were given priority in the access to education and to employment opportunities within the local colonial administration, the mines and plantations. For the Lendu, the only option was to be employed as labourers in the mines and plantations. Besides the strong impact on the local social organisation, the Belgian colonial administration also introduced the myth of intellectual superiority of the Hema. The result was a reorganisation of the local social and political fabric, and a total dominance of the Hema in the local administration and economy. Already in 1911, the Lendu-Bindi in Irumu revolted against this Hema-dominance and killed the local Hema-chief Bomera[10]. This led to a first conflict between both communities.

After independence, the Hema domination became even more consolidated. The introduction under Mobutu of the land law of 1973 declared all land - whether vacant or not - state property and discarded customary law in land transactions as a legitimate source of land rights, without according any legal status to customarily occupied lands. The enactment of this law provided a powerful instrument to further modify Ituri's social structure; throwing out the notion of diffuse property rights introduced the possibility for a class of people without land and rights to form. In essence it allowed the economic control over land to shift from colonial family-held plantations to a new class of urban Congolese entrepreneurs. Given its favoured position during the colonisation period, the Hema-elite had an easy access to the inner circles of the Mobutu-regime and could further increase its economic and political dominance in Irumu and Djugu, to the disadvantage of the Lendu. In 1966

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[9] MAMDANI, M., *Citizens and Subject. Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1996, p. 3.
[10] JOHNSON, D., *Shifting Sands : Oil Exploration in the Rift Valley and the Congo Conflict*, Goma, Pole Institute, 2003.

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the Lendu, who felt increasingly marginalized, once again resisted this Hema-dominance by attacking the local administrative authorities, whom, in return organised a strong repression against this resistance.

After the announcement by the Zairean president Mobutu of a democratisation process in April, 1990, also in Ituri local politicians, who were in search of a new power base started exploiting the longstanding yet unresolved grassroots tensions between different communities. Ethnicity proved to be the most powerful instrument for political mobilisation, since it was the perfect material basis to express the particularistic links between politicians and their constituent communities. Reference to ethnic belonging also came to be a crucial vehicle in grassroots political and economic competition, the kind of exit-strategy that was encouraged by Mobutu in order to guard his privileged power position. Local political leaders enforced the suggested exit of a particular group by mobilising others not belonging to that group. As a local report illustrates, during the democratisation process, in Ituri "*les sentiments des intellectuels trouvent de l'espace et font echo dans la masse paysanne qui se réfère à ses intellectuels politiciens. Le leadership devient plus ethnique qu'idéologique car les leaders se replient sur les membres de leur ethnie pour se positionner politiquement. Un climat de tension s'en suit et dégénère en conflit même armé"* [11]. Destined to be a self-defeating strategy in the long run for Mobutu, the divide-and-rule during the democratisation process did introduce violence based on ethnic identity as a legitimate instrument to bring about change. Nevertheless, things never ended into massacres comparable to those since 1999. Even though during the democratisation process clashes between the Hema and Lendu were reported, these were stopped "*through the mechanisms of local administration, security and intelligence, as well as successful mediation and traditional agreements.*"[12]

With the collapse of the Mobutu system, not only these local resolution mechanisms disappeared, but also new actors started dominating the scene. Since the AFDL-rebellion, different local and foreign militia started operating in Ituri, while light weapon started proliferating. Given the general state of the economy at the end of

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[11] *Programme d'Action de la Commission Permanente de Pacification*, mimeo, 11 March 2003, p. 2.
[12] IRIN, *Special Report on the Ituri Clashes*, 2002.

Mobutu's reign and the importance of ethnicity as a driving motive for violence, the local resentment between the Hema and Lendu from 1999 escalated and came to be linked to the higher, regional level of the DRC conflict. From then on, the conflict between pastoralist Hema and agriculturalist Lendu, even if still mainly motivated by land-disputes had to be explained in a much larger context of economic competition and privatisation of violence. With the help of local administrators, members of the Hema-community tried to extend their property-rights onto land supposed to be Lendu. Ugandan soldiers were actively involved in rekindling the conflict; training Hema youth militia and providing protection to Hema in exchange for cash payments[13]. Other UPDF-commanders started training and arming Lendu-militias. IRIN reported on the subsequent creation of the new province of Kibale-Ituri in July 1999 that *"the UPDF overall commander in DRC, Brigadier General James Kazini, appointed Adele Lotsove, a Hema, as its governor, thus triggering great discontent among other tribes in the area, notably the Nandi, the Ngeti, and the Lendu"*[14]. In addition to the regional accommodation of local conflicts, this example demonstrates the announcement of a shift away in Ituri from traditional spheres of dialogue that foresee a primary role for the elders, towards new networks premised on the use of violence and the role of youth and their links to regional allies.

The first round of violence finally erupted in June 1999. Even though already in 1998 some incidents were noted, these only announced the build-up of a large scale conflict between Hema and Lendu elites. What really caused the eruption of violence in June 1999 remains unclear. According to Lendu-sources, the violent attacks of Hema should be seen as a reaction against the attempts of some Hema-landowners to expand their holdings on the Pitsi-territory, which was said to be Lendu property. Hema landholders, supported by local officials, were said to have come to Pitsi with false land titles, which has caused a reaction of the local Lendu population[15]. Hema-sources, on their hand, have another reading of this first eruption of violence. They claim that the attacks were organised by Lendu extremists with some help of Kinshasa officials. These Lendu leaders were said to have made use of the

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[13] IRIN, *Focus on Hema-Lendu conflict*, 15 November 1999; *Collectif des ONG d'Ituri*, 7 August 1999.
[14] *Fighting rages in Northeast DR Congo*, Deutsche Presse Agentur, 23/11/99.
[15] Author's communication with Lendu-leaders, Kampala, March 2003. The conflict already began in April 1999, because a Hema-landholder (Sinja Kodjo) expelled Lendu squatters from his land near Kpandroma, with the help of the UPDF.

organisation '*Liberation of the Oppressed Race in Ituri'* (LORI), which served as their political vehicle. Even though both versions point at some of the root causes of the conflict, according to an OCHA-report the conflict in June 1999 was triggered by a number of ruthless individuals, who took advantage of an absence of local authority to impose their own agendas. A small number of unscrupulous individuals belonging to the Hema community attempted to bribe local authorities into modifying land ownership registry papers in their favour; the new land ownership papers were then used to evict the inhabitants.

Another issue is whether this violence was the result of a spontaneous uprising at a grassroot level or, on the contrary, a planned strategy from the part of the local Hema elites to expand their political and economic control. According to IRIN, the initial attacks of June 1999 were much better prepared and far more sophisticated than is generally believed. One month before the first eruption of violence, Lendu-chiefs had sent warnings to the Hema to leave their lands and crops behind[16]. In response, Hema started organising armed groups for the defence of their properties. The Kodjo Singa, Savo, and Ugwaro families mobilized UPDF-elements to protect their properties against the Lendu-attacks, turning these Ugandan soldiers into private guards for their estates and farms. The Lendu-elite, on its hand, initiated militias of self-defence at every locality. Even though the Provincial Governor in August 1999 named a '*Committee of Pacification and Follow-Up'* and in October 1999 the RCD-ML appointed Jacques Depelchin as the president of the '*Commission for Security and Peace in the Djugu Zone'*, these initiatives could not stop the conflict. By January 2000, this first wave of violence had killed up to 7000 people and displaced more than 150.000 people.

Two elements need some further attention. First, patterns of elite formation have changed drastically. Due to the absence of any political framework capable of organising social and economic interaction, novel types of strongmen have surfaced that profit from the existing circumstances of general insecurity to monopolise the control over certain markets and the population. Competition between these strongmen has led to a military and political fragmentation in Ituri, but has also affected other parts

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[16] An Irin report mentions that Lendu chiefs of Bamgusu and Mukpa (Pitsi grouping) had ordered the population of Uchubu and Juza to vacate by 18 June. See IRIN, Special Report on the Ituri Clashes.

of eastern Congo. Second, the result of this conflict is not limited to a general militarisation of rent-seeking activities, but implies a much broader transformation of the existing social and economic fabric, including the proliferation of local militias and the disintegration of local society.

3.   INTENSIFIED STRUGGLE FOR POLITICAL POWER

3.1. A War between Proxies?

The eruption of violence in Ituri in 1999 cannot be understood without placing it in its larger geographical and political context. The Congolese war can best be explained as a multi-layered conflict, consisting of at least three different, yet closely related, sets of dynamics. The most analysed of these is the regional struggle (involving at least six countries) for zones of political influence and economic control. This layer is related to the disparity of wealth between the different countries of the Great Lakes region and the relative weakness of the Congolese state. The second level of conflict is the armed struggle among the Congolese themselves, for the control of national political power. The causes for this level of the conflict are strongly linked to the two other layers and concern the political system and the access to resources. This national dimension, however, is strongly influenced by the respective links of the rebel movements and their foreign patrons. Finally, as demonstrated in the previous section, in Ituri (as in other parts of eastern Congo) there is a historical but continuing conflict between different communities that is unrelated to, but highly influenced by, events in neighbouring countries yet at the same time by the national struggle for political power.

This struggle intensified after the Kabila-led and externally supported AFDL rebel-movement, in May 1997, ousted Mobutu from power. Instead of putting an end to the political crisis, this military campaign set in motion a further intensification of the regional struggle for political power and economic control. From the very start, the Kabila-led movement that was believed by many to be the solution to the harsh effects of more than thirty years of Mobutism, was struggling with clashing personal ambitions, ethnic divisions, its position vis-à-vis its Ugandan and Rwandan

supporters and, perhaps most importantly, with conflicting local and regional political logics. What could be seen as a military success, in political terms quickly proved to be a total failure. This explains why soon after the victory of the Kabila-led alliance, his eastern allies Rwanda and Uganda started preparing a new military rebel movement (the '*Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie'* - RCD) in the DR Congo, which finally began its military campaign in August 1998. The second rebellion in two years, however, was more than a simple repetition of the AFDL campaign, as former allies now became adversaries, new coalitions proved to be fleeting and economic interests became guiding principles. In eastern Congo, this second rebellion led to a multiplication of actors, objectives and strategies – and hence to a very complex and highly unpredictable situation in which the scope of violence was seen to expand dramatically.

It is within this context that the conflict in Ituri has to be explained. Soon after its creation, the new rebel movement started disintegrating – leading to an intensified struggle for the control over Ituri and a further inflation of violence on all levels of society. This process of political disintegration was partly due to a growing conflict between Rwanda and Uganda and the manipulation by both countries of their Congolese proxies, but also to a total lack of cohesion (itself the result of opportunistic strategies of its main leaders) within the RCD-movement itself. On the one hand, the weakness of the RCD paved the way for Uganda's divide-and-rule tactics. Although on the ground the Ugandan strategy seemed one of mediating between the warring parties, its army was simultaneously training and rearming the same actors. On the other hand, Ituri increasingly became a refuge where losers of the political power game in eastern Congo tried to settle[17]. This made northeastern Congo one of the targets of the emerging class of new local strongmen.

The first to turn Ituri into its political stronghold was the wing of the RCD led by Wamba dia Wamba, a leading Congolese intellectual and professor who had fallen out with the original RCD leadership. Before going to Bunia, Wamba had created a rival RCD-faction, the '*RCD-Mouvement de Libération'* (RCD-ML) and appointed Mbusa Nyamwisi (a Nande from Beni) and John Tibasiima (a Hema and former chief

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[17] JOHNSON, D., *Shifting Sands: Oil Exploration in the Rift Valley and the Congo Conflict*, Goma: Pole Institute, 2003, p. 20.

executive of the Kilo Moto gold mines during the Mobutu era) as administrators of North Kivu and Orientale Province. Nevertheless, soon after its creation an internal power struggle erupted within the RCD-ML movement between its leader Wamba dia Wambia on the one hand and John Tibasiima and Mbusa Nyamwisi on the other. This permanent tension within the RCD-ML resulted in a further administrative disintegration of Ituri. Efforts by Kampala to settle the leadership conflict peacefully failed. As a consequence, this political rivalry only had the effect of intensifying local resentment in Ituri.

In December 2000 Uganda again tried to regain its control over events and to sort out the internal division of its proxy by merging the RCD-ML with Jean-Pierre Bemba's '*Movement de Libération du Congo'* (MLC, which controlled the Equateur and parts of Oriental Province) into a new rebel movement, '*the Front de Libération de Congo'* (FLC). On 21 November, after a series of clashes between both groups, Bemba announced the withdrawal of his troops, leaving Ituri to the RCD-ML. The same month, Mbusa Nyamwisi successfully toppled Wamba dia Wamba as president of RCD-ML, while Tibasiima remained vice-president.

Even after Mbusa's '*coup d'état'*, the RCD-ML could never consolidate its power position in Ituri. Soon after he had become president, a next process of disintegration within the RCD-ML started to develop. After the signature, on 19 April 2002, of a peace agreement in Sun City between the MLC, the RCD-ML and the Kinshasa government during the Inter-Congolese Dialogue (ICD), the RCD-ML leadership saw itself as a new ally of the Kinshasa government. The Hema-elements within the RCD-ML, however, did not agree with this move of the RCD-ML president. Thomas Lubanga, a Hema-Gegere and ally of Tibasiima, openly expressed his disagreement with Mbusa's move towards Kinshasa during the ICD, which he saw as part of a larger strategy aiming at the consolidation of the Nande-dominance in Ituri[18]. As Mbusa was also increasingly siding with the Lendu, Tibasiima and Lubanga considered a secession of Ituri from the RCD-ML administration. The result was a military confrontation between the RCD-ML and Hema-militias loyal to Lubanga, which were supported by the Ugandan army (UPDF). In June 2002, Lubanga finally

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[18] Author's communication, Kampala, March 2003.

defected from the RCD-ML and created the '*Union des Patriotes Congolais'* (UPC), a Gegere-dominated militia. From its initial headquarters in Mandro (south of Bunia), it immediately started attacking RCD-ML positions. With the strong support of the UPDF, it only took the UPC one month to take over control of Bunia, which fell on 9 August 2002.

3.2. The Gegere-Monopoly

In many ways, the installation of the UPC's leadership in August 2002 marked the final stage of a well-prepared strategy from the part of some Gegere elites to take over the political and economic power game in Ituri. Leading Gegere politicians started setting out a more outspoken anti-Lendu agenda and disseminating a discourse on '*originaires'* and '*non-originaires*' in the Ituri conflict (the '*originaires'* of course being the Hema and Gegere populations). In a radical attempt to finally get rid of their majority counterparts, these Gegere intellectuals proposed to organize a systematic killing of key Lendu and Ngiti leaders and to cut all economic links between the Lendu and other communities[19]. The immediate consequence of this radicalisation was a flare up of ethnic violence. The turing point in the Ituri conflict came on 5 September, 2002, when close to a thousand Hema and Wabira were slaughtered in the most brutal manner in the local hospital of Nyakunde (a mixed Hema-Wabira community). From then on the conflict became one of militias fighting populations of different ethnic background. At both sides, militias radicalised and started attacking populations that were supposed to be supporting their adversaries.

Two other important elements have to be mentioned. Firstly, while UPC increasingly drifted away from Uganda – which it accused of a '*colonialist'* policy – it started negotiating with Rwanda about political and military support. In January 2003, an agreement of cooperation was signed between the UPC and the RCD-Goma, Rwanda's Congolese ally[20]. Secondly, this policy caused a firm reaction from the part of the Ugandans, which started accusing Rwanda of trying to stage an attack on its

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[19] HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, *Ituri: Covered in Blood. Ethnically Targeted Violence in Northeastern Congo*, July 2003.
[20] Reportedly, the agreement was made that, if Lubanga were to capture Bunia once and for all from the UPDF, Rwanda would supply him with a contract for the exploitation of the gold mines in Mongbwalu with a South African company: Africa Mining Intelligence, 15 January 2003.

western border. Uganda also accused Rwanda of backing an anti-government militia in Congo, the '*People's Redemption Army'* (PRA), which was believed to be operating in eastern Congo and supposedly made up by Ugandan opposition members. But in the end, this war of words between Rwanda and Uganda precipitated a fragmentation process that was already underway. Uganda helped organising new militias against UPC, which itself became victim of internal splits. Since March 2003 four militias are fighting each other in an attempt to gain control over the province. One of these, the '*Forces Armées Pour le Congo*' (FAPC) is led by Jerôme Kakwavu Bukandu, a tutsi-commander from North Kivu who controls the northeastern part of Ituri. The fate of the FAPC is a perfect illustration of a further shift into warlord practices. While terrorising the local population and abducting children to be enrolled in its force, the FAPC has also tried to consolidate its grip on the local economy. Currently, the FAPC is responsible for the strategic border towns of Aru and Mahagi, as well as the gold-mining area of Mongbwalu. They are reportedly collecting up to $100.000 a month in tax revenues, of which a large proportion is used to feed and clothe over 7000 soldiers[21]. Along with PUSIC ('*Party for the Unity and Safeguard of Integrity in Congo*') of the South Hema chief Kahwa Mandro, the FAPC has gathered strong UPDF support.

3.3. Nobody wants Peace

On a political level, the period following Lubanga's reign illustrated the unwillingness of local militias and regional powers to come to a peaceful solution. Due to the continuous killings and attacks in Ituri, it took more than six months before the '*Pacification Commission for Ituri'* (PCI), established under the Luanda agreement, could take off[22]. The main obstacle to the Commission remained the UPC of Thomas Lubanga. Frustrated about his exclusion from the Inter Congolese Dialogue, he practically took the peace process hostage by making excessive and unacceptable demands (for example, he demanded that Ituri be recognised as a province by Kinshasa). Apart from being completely undermined by its participants, the PCI was confronted with two main problems. First, its operations were being blocked because

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[21] AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, *On the Precipice: the Deepening Human Rights and Humanitarian Crisis in Ituri,* March 2003.
[22] For a discussion, see INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP, *Congo Crisis: Military Intervention in Ituri*, ICG Africa Report, no. 64, 13 June 2003.

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of a complete lack of resources and the incapacity of its institutions to levy local taxes. Secondly, the continuing interference of the regional powers further exacerbated an escalation of the conflict on the ground. Immediately after the installation of the Commission in April 2003, Uganda created a joint force under the command of Jerome Kakwavu to take over Bunia[23]. Simultaneously, Kinshasa sent a detachment of 700 of police officers to Bunia in an apparent attempt to contribute to the securing of the area. Nevertheless, it became quite obvious that this initiative was part of an underlying strategy from Kinshasa to recapture Bunia from the UPC. Upon his arrival in Bunia, the local commander of the Kinshasa military forces ('*Forces Armées Congolaises'* – FAC), General Kisempya, ordered all militias to group under his command or face the consequences. In the meantime, FAC and Kinshasa police also started siding with the Lendu militias, whom the Kinshasa government had been supplying with arms and ammunition through the RCD-ML stronghold of Beni[24]. Finally, Rwanda reportedly continued to supply arms to the UPC on small airstrips around Bunia.

Although this latest round of confrontations clearly demonstrated the unwillingness of the warring parties to come to peace, no decisive international action was taken to end the violence in Ituri. Instead, the United Nations mission in the DRC (MONUC) continued to support the idling IPC and tried in vain to reach an agreement between the ethnic militias in Dar-Es-Salaam. After having plead twice for the Ugandans to stay, MONUC now started pressing them to follow the provisions of the Luanda agreement, and leave Ituri. In hindsight, this proved a capital mistake. By concentrating solely on the administrative framework, the UN was not at all prepared to replace the withdrawing Ugandan troops in April 2003. Eventually, international pressure accelerated the plans for a decisive military action. In a flash of decisiveness, the US, the UK and Germany agreed to support a military intervention in Ituri, which would be led by France and would be present in Bunia from June until September 2003 – when the operation would come under a Chapter Seven UN

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[23] Due to continuing splits and skirmishes in Ituri, Kampala once again decided to intervene and put an end to Lubanga's reign in early March 2003.

[24] Although Kinshasa continued to deny its presence in North Kivu and Ituri, the Ugandan newspaper the Monitor reported the arrival of 1.500 government troops at Beni airport from Mbuji Maji at the end of May (The Monitor, 3 June 2003). When they finally came under a decisive attack of the UPC in May, the FAC left their arms and ran back to their stronghold of Beni, where FAC kept its regional headquarters. Later in June, when North Kivu came under attack of the RCD-Goma, they transferred their headquarters to Komanda: author's interview and observation, Beni, May-June 2003.

command. For the French-led intervention mission, containing the violence however proved to be an extremely difficult job. Although they were quite successful in controlling the city of Bunia, the massacres in the interior – which was inaccessible for the international troops because of their limited mandate to Bunia – continued. In the course of June, other massacres occurred in Nizi, Drodro and Fataki, and Hema and Lendu militias kept attacking each others positions in south Ituri. When this intervention mission left Bunia in September 2003, general fears of a revival of the conflict were shared amongst the local population and international observers.

4.   THE ECONOMIC DIMENSION OF THE CONFLICT

In the previous chapters, we have tried to outline the political context of the current Ituri crisis. However, our analysis would not be complete without mentioning the enormous impact this conflict has had on the social and economic level. Generally, the exploitative dimension of the Ituri conflict is ascribed to the strong presence of Ugandan (and later Rwandan) troops on Congolese soil. Described by one NGO as the "*arsonist and fireman*" of the conflict[25], the Ugandan army in particular has been accused of instigating political feuds among Congolese rebel leaders and contributing to a considerable intensification in the armed struggle between Lendu and Hema militias for their own economic gain. Supposedly, their divide-and-rule strategy was meant to secure the illicit trade in diamonds, gold and other resources by corrupt UPDF officers, whom have become involved in a systematic plunder of the Congolese natural resources. A United Nations Expert Panel, which has investigated the implication of Generals James Kazini and Salim Saleh, and of the Colonels Noble Mayombo, Kahinda Otafiire and Peter Kerim in the contraband of Congolese gold, timber, coffee, coltan and diamonds, even noted a 'hidden agenda' behind the Ugandan intervention in the DRC from 1998 onwards, namely: "*financial and economic gain*"[26]. Supposedly, this strong economic agenda has been caused by an

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[25] HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, *Uganda in Eastern DRC: Fuelling Political and Ethnic Strife*, March 2001.
[26] UNITED NATIONS, R*eport of the UN Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth in the Democratic Republic of the Congo*, New York, 12 April 2001.

instrumentalisation of the economic violence that involves not only the power circles around the Ugandan president Museveni but also a number of Congolese patrons[27].

4.1. The Instrumentalisation of Economic Violence

The recent intervention of UPDF in northeastern DRC (1998-2003) has its precedents in the previous period. During their campaign against Marshal Mobutu (1996-1997) UPDF commanders had discovered a veritable '*Mini Eldorado'* in the east of Zaire[28]. In Kisangani and Ituri, both flourishing diamond and gold centres, UPDF officers started exploiting Congolese minerals for their own benefit. Although this exploitation initially was not done on a systematic basis[29], the Ugandans quickly learned how to turn their occupation into a profitable enterprise by developing a lucrative '*modus vivendi'* with the local business community. The result of this modus vivendi was that local Congolese patrons, even if they did not benefit directly from the war, could continue their economic activity in a more or less normal manner and could even profit from it if they were able to acquire a position in the military trade mechanism. In turn, Ugandan traders profited from the occupation by selling goods such as soap and clothing to ordinary Zairians.

At the same time, a number of corrupt UPDF officers used both the campaign in Zaire and the continuing offensive against the '*Lord's Resistance Army'* in northern Uganda to acquire an ever more preponderant place in the Ugandan political and military landscape. In 1997, president Museveni had assigned the management of the national defence budget to Gen. James Kazini and Salim Saleh, which enabled both officers to haul in several defence contracts as well as vast under-the-table commissions. In one such case, Salim Saleh reportedly cashed in a bribe of between

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[27] PERROT, S., « Entrepreneurs de l'insécurité: la face cachée de l'armée ougandaise », in : *Politique africaine*, 75 (Oct 1999), 60-71.

[28] Ibidem.

[29] During the 1996-1997 campaign, the smuggling activities of the UPDF were mostly organized on an individual basis. An example of this is the Ugandan Col Peter Kerim, who was caught stealing two pick-up trucks loaded with fuel from a Zaïrian businessman. Following this incident, Kerim was forced to go on terminal leave. Nevertheless, he managed to reappear as a trainer for Jean-Pierre Bemba's MLC and commander in Mahagi District in Ituri during the second war in 1998: UNITED NATIONS, R*eport of the UN Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth in the Democratic Republic of the Congo*, New York, 12 April 2001. See also: *Porter report*, November 2002.

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800.000 and 1.300.000$ for the procurement of four MI-24 helicopters from Consolidated Sales Corporation, a company registered in the Virgin Islands[30].

The careers of Salim Saleh and James Kazini became symbolic for the corruption and malpractice that accompanied Uganda's second military adventure in the DRC. Secured by their political position at home, these officers quickly developed into '*entrepreneurs of insecurity*': corrupt individuals for whom the maintenance of insecurity was their primary source of enrichment[31]. The result was that, from 1998 onwards, the exploitation of Congolese resources became much more systematic. Led by their corrupt officers, UPDF soldiers started to exploit gold in the Kilo Moto area[32]. In the most lucrative concessions, the mining guards were quickly replaced by UPDF and RCD-ML soldiers, who started organising the local gold diggers in and around the mining camps. Gradually, the control of gold operations became more systematic, with individual soldiers guarding bridges and strategic roadblocks, and levying taxes from the local miners[33]. In addition, UPDF officers started to set up businesses to channel their profits. Salim Saleh, whom already had a large share in mining operations in Uganda, opened a trading post for the commercialisation of gold and diamonds in Kisangani[34]. He also set up various aviation companies that

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[30] The deal, which involved "*a complex network of arms companies in Belarus, brokers in the UK and Uganda, a Russian arms dealer, an offshore company in the Virgin Islands, bank accounts in London and New York, and a money guarantee by a bank that no longer existed,*" eventually costs Ugandan taxpayers more than $6 million: WOOD, B. & J. PELEMAN, *The Arms Fixers*, 2000.

[31] PERROT, S., "Entrepreneurs de l'insécurité: la face cachée de l'armée ougandaise" .

[32] It is important to note that, by that time, gold mining had become an entirely artisanal activity in Zaire. Since the liberalisation of the minerals trade in 1982-3, the Mobutu government concluded practically no mining contracts with foreign companies. In 1996, ten days before the start of the AFDL campaign, part of the Kilo Moto concession was sold to the Canadian conglomerate Barrick Gold Corporation. Another lucrative concession based at Mongbwalu (North Ituri) and formerly owned by the Belgian-Canadian group KIMIN, went to Ashanti Goldfields from Ghana. The fact that these lucrative concessions were sold on the brink of the coming rebellion and that Barrick counted a number of western presidents on its board of directors (amongst others Bush senior), raised suspicion as to whether these gold giants might have calculated – or at least been knowledgeable - of the course of the war in Zaire: PELEMAN, J., *Zaire. Privatisering van de machtswissel*, IPIS brochure, 1997.

[33] According to the UN panel, the arrangement between soldiers and miners was that every miner would leave one gram of gold a day at the entry/exit point: UNITED NATIONS, *Report of the UN Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth in the Democratic Republic of the Congo*, New York, 12 April 2001, § 59.

[34] The post was called Calebs International, after Saleh's native name Caleb Akandwanaho . As an investment holding, Caleb International holds shares in a number of Saleh's other companies such as Efforte and Greenland Investment, according to one official witness in Uganda : interview Lt Muhoozi Kainerugaba, transcript Porter Commission, 2001.

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operated commercial flights from Uganda to the DRC[35]. Congolese rebel leaders such as Mbusa Nyamwisi, Atenyi Tibasiima (RCD-ML), Roger Lumbala (RCD-National) and Jean-Pierre Bemba (MLC) all had to facilitate Saleh's and Kazini's illegal dealings in diamonds, coltan, timber, counterfeit currency, gold and coffee. As the Ugandan acting Defence Minister Stephen Kavuma admitted: "*Our soldiers have had to forfeit what one would have thought are automatic benefits to a soldier on a mission abroad.*"[36] Said otherwise: for the UPDF command, the pillage of Congolese resources became not only a systematic but also a justified activity.

4.2. Beyond the Plunder Logic

Apart from the debate on the criminal implication of UPDF officers in the DRC, however, an important aspect of the conflict is often neglected. Even if economic motivations have been preponderant in the motivations of the occupying forces in the DRC, the limited emphasis on this economic dimension risks to disregard the political and economic implications of the conflict on a local level. As we illustrated before, the politics of fragmentation between the different ethnic communities in Ituri during the Mobutu and inter-war era has also contributed to a significant ethnicisation of the local political space. On the economic level, however, the existing transborder networks benefited increasingly from the absence of a central authority to exercise their informal economic activity. This strong alliance between an ethnicised political framework and a militarised informal economy has certainly contributed to the emergence of a new type of political economy, which is increasingly operating beyond the competence of territorially defined armies, governments and populations – and which has considerably altered the political and economic relations on a local level.

An example of this trend is the Victoria Group[37]. This fictitious company founded by Generals Kazini and Saleh and a number of Lebanese traders to centralise their smuggling activities of Congolese minerals, became the main platform for both the

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[35] One of these companies was Air Alexander (director: Jovial Akandwanaho). Until 1998, the other shareholders included a German citizen, Wolfgang Thome, and Saleh's ten years old son Alexander Mahuta: Porter report, November 2002.
[36] Transcript of the Porter Commission, 2001
[37] See also: RAEYMAEKERS, T., *Network War. An Introduction to Congo's Privatised war Economy*, IPIS, November 2002.

UPDF command and leading Congolese patrons in Ituri to take control over the local political and economic space. In 1999, General Kazini attributed a monopoly to the Victoria Group for the commercialisation of Congolese resources in the areas under UPDF occupation. This move is demonstrated by a letter Kazini wrote in July of that year to all tactical headquarters of MLC and UDPF in north-eastern Congo in which he stated that "*the company Victoria has the [sole] authorisation to do commerce in coffee, diamond and gold in the region under your command.*"[38] The issuing of this letter was all the more significant because it coincided with the appointment by Kazini of Adèle Lotsove Mugisa as the new governor of the illegally created province of Kabale-Ituri (cf supra). As we indicated, the appointment of Lotsove was interpreted both in and outside Ituri as a veritable 'coup d'état' from the part of the Hema community. As a former servant under the Kabila administration, Lotsove was known for her fierce stance in the management of local land conflicts (it even gave her the nickname "the *Jeanne d'Arc* of the Hema"). Her appointment also set up a storm in Kisangani, which technically controlled the Ituri district. In a statement which was clearly "*inflammatory, and calculated to upset the appointed administration [of the RCD-Goma]*"[39], Kazini was obviously conspiring against the acting governor in Kisangani to take control over the mineral rich areas under his protection[40]. Finally, it is also revealing that Kazini copied his letter to the Victoria group, which made it look as though he was reporting that he had obeyed its instructions[41].

Next to the regional accommodation of the conflict in the DRC (some sources affirm that the operations of the Victoria Group have instigated the Kisangani wars between Rwanda and Uganda) this example illustrates a considerable shift in the management of the political economy of Ituri. In particular, it demonstrates the emergence of an alternative power structure, which goes hand in hand with the ethnicised message of the Hema political leadership. Politically, the installation of the Hema administration under Adèle Lotsove intensified the essentially ethnic discourse of the "*Ituri for the Iturians*" that was initiated by local politicians such as Atenyi Tibasiima in reaction to the recuperation tentatives of Mbusa Nyamwisi in the late

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[38] *Porter report*, November 2002.

[39] Ibidem.

[40] That the governor was not at all sympathetic to this measure, is revealed by the phraseology of General Kazini's letter to him: "*Let me hope that I have been clearly understood*": Ibidem.

[41] Ibidem.

1990's. Secured by their foreign backers, the duo Tibasiima-Lotsove could now lay the basis for their message of ethnic hatred, which would reach its brutal summit during the reign of Thomas Lubanga from August 2002 onwards. Economically, the monopolisation drive of the Victoria Group largely benefited the existing transborder economic networks of a limited number of Hema traders, who used this new power relation to extend their economic operations both within and beyond Ituri's borders. In addition, the rebels set up an ingenious system of pre-financing activities, in which a number of Hema traders were exempted of export taxes for their products in return for pre-payments to their political leaders such as Atenyi Tibasiima[42]. One of the main beneficiaries of this system was the Savo family, an important Hema family that was already mentioned as the main instigator of the conflict in Djugu (cf. supra). According to the UN Panel, "*the Savo family group… carry agricultural products, wood and cattle from Bunia to Kampala exempt from UPDF toll barriers and export taxes*"[43]. In this context, the UN's argument that the UPDF might have had a 'hidden agenda' before entering the second Congolese war in 1998 – namely economic and financial gain – hereby acquires a rather different dimension. In fact, the war proved to be a perfect opportunity for the leading economic elites in Ituri to consolidate their position and expand their economic and political power. Their strong alliance with the local political administration also enabled them to get rid of internal competition, for example from the Nande traders – who traditionally had a strong presence on the Ituri markets. In Mahagi, Bunia and Aru, Nande from North Kivu had for a long time been trading goods with Sudan and Uganda, some of which came as far as the Middle and the Far East[44]. The combination of a favourable administration and a foreign military back-up now enabled Hema traders to undercut these existing links. While some UPDF were reportedly offering whole tracts of land to Hima families from Uganda in the naturally protected areas of North Kivu (hereby increasing the

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[42] The system has been explained by a Ugandan businessman in front of the Porter Commission: "*It [the Trinity group] is not registered officially, so the people who run the company are the movement of Congo rebel leaders… These leaders, they don't have money but they have a lot of operations which are going on. So they get the business community and then they ask like a favour that we want a deposit, say like $50.000 in advance. It is just like gambling. Today Mbusa [Nyamwisi, president of the RCD-ML] will issue a letter, tomorrow [Jean-Pierre] Bemba [president of the MLC] will refuse, then your letter is cancelled and they don't refund your money.*" Interview Sam Engola, transcript Porter commission, 2001.
[43] Report of the UN Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, New York, 13 November 2001, § 116
[44] For a deeper discussion of these Nande trading networks, see MACGAFFEY, J., (ed.), *The Real Economy of Zaire. The Contribution of Smuggling and Other Unofficial Activities to National Wealth,* London, James Currey, 1991.

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pressure on the local Nande population)[45], the Hema administration in Ituri continued to privilege their economic patrons in their transborder trading activities and eventually link their economic enterprise to "*some of the world's most remote areas to the technological heartland of metropolitan society.*"[46] In turn, the illegal trade in gold, diamonds and other resources served as a financial basis for a new generation of political leaders, who sent out radical messages to the other communities in Ituri not to mingle in their affairs. To prove their point, the UPC, led by Lotsove's cousin Thomas Lubanga, started executing Nande during their offensive on Bunia and Mambassa[47].

To conclude, the argument that the UPDF might have had a hidden agenda before entering the Congo in 1998 seems a bit exaggerated if we calculate the profits of their campaign for the Ugandan state. Apart from 1996-1997, when gold exports from Congo peaked to unprecedented heights, the Congolese mineral trade never generated considerable profits for the Ugandan treasury. In 1998, official gold exports dropped to 19 million USD, which is almost six times less than the previous year. In the following period, these exports never reached the same levels as during the first stage of the occupation[48]. Instead, the so-called plunder of Congolese resources has been largely organized on an individual basis, centering around a number of corrupt officers whom did not benefit the Ugandan state or people at large. Contrary to the Rwandan strategy, which was more systemic and pyramidal in nature (president Kagame once said that the war in Congo was self-sustaining), the transborder economic network of UDPF relied on a small core of Banyakole officers and extended family members of the president. For the Ugandan presidency, this evolution did nonetheless contain a considerable danger. Although president Museveni seems to have opted for his own "regime security" in Congo by offering his officers a free hand to plunder in return for his political patronage, it could have been a dangerous decision for him to order the withdrawal of UPDF troops from Congo

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[45] It is alleged that Gen Kazini offered land to 300 Ugandan Hima families and their 3.500 cattle in the parc of Virunga at Karuruma: *Point de vue de la société civile du Grand Nord sur les interventions militaires de l'Ouganda en République Démocratique du Congo*, 25 juin 2001.
[46] DUFFIELD, M., *Global Governance and the New Wars. The Merging of Development and Security*, London & New York: Zed Books, 2001.
[47] Situation des Droits de L'Homme en RDC, Discours de Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello, Haut Commissaire aux Droits de L'Homme au Conseil de Sécurité, New York, 13 février 2003.
[48] In 1999-2000, Uganda officially exported around 10 tonnes of gold a year: UN § 99.

against the will of his commanders[49]. Powerful as they had become from their continuous occupation, officers like General Kazini could pose a real threat if they could not be integrated in the president's own agenda. It is therefore not surprising that a number of important reports about corruption and malpractices in the UPDF were being made public right after the UPDF pullout in April 2003. In May, the so-called 'Chopper Report' – which bore the results of a judicial inquiry into the purchase of MI-24 helicopters for UPDF by Salim Saleh in 1999 – accused the brother of the president of "*the highest form of corruption and self-interest*", and demanded that further steps be taken against him[50]. The "*judicial inquiry into the illegal exploitation of Congolese resources*" by UPDF officers (commonly known as the Porter commission) has to be understood in the same context, namely as a political attempt to counter the growing powers of the UPDF command in the DRC. Not long after its publication, Museveni fired General Kazini as his military adviser on Congo and replaced him by Colonel Peter Kerim, who is commonly known as a more moderate servant on military matters. Nonetheless, eight years of Ugandan occupation have significantly altered the political and economic landscape in northeastern DRC: without doubt, the destruction and divide-and-rule strategies of the UPDF are likely to be felt for a long time to come.

5.   CONCLUSIONS

For many reasons, the conflict in Ituri can be seen as a good example of present-day conflicts. First, at different levels, war has evolved as an alternative way to gain profit, power, and protection. With the local economy in complete tatters and the region flooded with small arms, the absence of any authority capable of regulating the economic, political and social competition has encouraged the militarisation of economic relations and has led to some important shifts in the organisation of the local economic, political and social space. Warlordism however is not limited to local actors, but includes many of the past (ex-FAZ, ex-FAC) and current (RPA, UPDF) commanders involved in the subsequent phases of the conflict in Ituri. Second, the

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[49] CLARK, Explaining Ugandan intervention in Congo: evidence and interpretations, in: *Politique africaine*, Vol. 75, October 1999, pp. 60-71.
[50] *Report of the Judicial Commission of Inquiry into the Purchase of Military Helicopters*, published in May 2003.

enduring context of war and state implosion has created possibilities to link grassroots realities directly to regional political dynamics. Regional forces thrive on the continuing weakness of the Congolese state, partly enforced by them, to create an open war economy. Commanders – former and current, Congolese and foreign - that stepped forward from this background of repeated wars have emerged as new strongmen. To be successful war entrepreneurs and consolidate their hold on the ground, they need to recruit the network of local militia for their own economic and/or political endeavours. Rather than developing a shared ideological reference that may be of use in a renewed process of state-building, these networks are mobilized and divided in a continuous process of change on the basis of ethnic and/or pecuniary considerations. As a consequence, local elites – through their coalitions with foreign and national army commanders – were able to reposition themselves in the local political and economic power-game. The intensified competition between ethnically underpinned networks (eg. the Nande and Hema networks) perfectly illustrates the emergence of new and innovative political projects that are being linked to parallel economic activity.

Perhaps the most important characteristic of the Ituri-conflict, however, is the destruction of the local social space. Reducing the explanation of the current crisis to an ethnically underpinned message – in essence a strong expression of being anti-Hema or Lendu – today is generally sufficient to convince youngsters of joining (or forming) militia. Hema-elites justify their use of violence as a strategy of self-defence. Given their minority position, they argue that the best way to protect themselves is to fully control the Ituri-province. Lendu-leaders, on their hand, explain the existence of Lendu-militias as a reaction against their historical marginalisation and the Hema-dominance. Even if for both groups these seem to be very rational arguments for the use of violence, the result is a total disintegration of the local society and the growing use of violence against parts of the local population itself. The latest rounds of violence indicate that instead of combating each other, militias are increasingly attacking and massacring the population, which is seen as the ultimate supporter of their enemies' attacks. Dehumanisation of those not belonging to the same ethnic group goes hand in hand with the reliance on rituals such as the consumption of human body-parts of the '*enemy'*. While these elements are seen by many observers as bitter proof of the retribalisation or barbaric nature of the local

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society, they merely point at the further social disintegration that has affected all layers of the local society. What the next phase of this conflict will be can only be guessed. For some analysts, however, the enduring cycle of violence recalls to the psychology leading to the Rwandan genocide: "*the many casualties and civilian displacements reinforced a destitution that became the engine for the massacres. Fear of attacks based on rumours led to pre-emptive strikes followed by reprisals. The trauma of violence also led to an escalation in ritual killing among both communities. (…) Dehumanisation of the enemy became a justification for extermination. Ethnic stereotyping gave way to genocidal intent*".[51]

These observations force us once again to address the internal dynamic of the Ituri-conflict. The present violence in this part of the DRC, clearly demonstrate that rather than explaining it in terms of greedy army commanders, cannibalism or ethnic hatred, there is a need for new ways of thinking not only about the origins and dynamics of present-day conflict, but also about the underlying logic and outcomes of war. The

presented analysis of the conflict in Ituri certainly leads to a number of important observations. First, a focus on the local socio-economic dimension helps to better understand how local elites and grassroots societies themselves have coped with a situation of enduring conflict and insecurity. The conflict in eastern DRC has also led to important *social* processes, which are characterised by a shift from patrimonial to military control over resources, an intensified struggle for land access, a growing importance of armed militias in local authority structures and a total 're-tribalisation' of politics and society. Secondly, this analysis helps to reintroduce the concept of local 'grievances' into the debate on recent conflicts in Africa. It is hoped that our analysis of the conflict in Ituri might contribute to a better understanding of conflict and war yet at the same time might give humanitarian organisations and diplomats a much needed   second   breath.

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[51] INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP, Congo Crisis: Military Intervention in Ituri, p. 6.

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