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The Formation of Centres of Profit, Power and Protection

Conflict and Social Transformation in Eastern DR Congo

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Dr. Koen Vlassenroot visited the Centre of African Studies on 14 September 2004 where he as part of his ongoing research on the Democratic Republic of Congo gave a seminar on *"Conflict and Social Transformation in Eastern Congo"*. This Occasional Paper is a revised version of his presentation written together with Timothy Raeymaekers.

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Introduction[1]

In 2003, there was renewed hope that the cycle of violence that was ravaging through many parts of Africa could be brought to an end with the signing of peace agreements, new processes of state-building and the promotion of democratic reforms. One year later, most of this optimism has faded: while many peace processes have proven short-lived, most have set in motion new dynamics of conflict that are contingent on previous war situations. One reason for the failure of this 'New Peace' in Africa is that it has not adequately dealt with local conflict dynamics. Peace-builders often see armed conflicts as an object of intervention rather than as a complex outcome of (foremost local) conflict dynamics. While focusing mainly on institution building at a 'national' level, this technical and formalistic approach to peace-building thus largely ignores the underlying causes of violence that are sustained at a local level[2]. The result of this approach is that the implementation of peace accords may bring some form of stability to the urban centres (often guarded by international forces), but leaves the rural populations in the midst of unending low-intensity conflict[3].

Another reason for this failure is that the current drive towards peace in Africa has largely neglected the organisational shifts in local societies at times of conflict. In most conflict regions, however, the decrease in the competence of the state and the formation of rebel movements and militias (non-state actors that often impose themselves on large

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2   Autesserre, S., The Politics of the Peace Process in eastern Congo, mimeo, 2004. For a similar argument, see: Ottaway, M., Rebuilding State Institutions in Collapsed States, in: Development and Change, 33 (5), pp. 1000-1023.
3   Richards, P., Fighting for the Rain Forest. War, Youth and Resources in Sierra Leone (Porthsmouth: Heinemann, 1996).

territories and populations), have given leeway to the formation of new, non-state centres of authority that have in turn introduced new modes of political, social and economic control. Contrary to the dominant discourse that war-torn societies find themselves caught in a conflict-trap[4], most conflicts tend to produce new orders out of anarchy and destruction. Although these new orders are almost invariably violent, exploitative, and illiberal in character, these are "orders, not anarchy", and their development sometimes constitutes the best chance for a country or community to emerge into something worthy the expression of 'post-conflict'[5].

One method in which to evaluate the durability of these new social orders is to look at the ways local actors (militia-members, local businessmen and grassroots populations alike) try to reduce and manage risks in situations of enduring conflict[6]. It has often been argued – especially by the so-called 'war economy' theories – that war produces important opportunities for those that are willing to take the risks involved[7]. Implicit in this argument is that these opportunities often provoke important shifts in the social and economic organisation of war-torn societies. These shifts not only include new processes of local 'elite' accommodation and adaptation, but also involve different patterns of socio-economic interaction between elites, non-state armed actors and grassroots populations – giving rise to alternative forms of power, profit

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4   Collier has defined this trap as "virtuous and vicious circles of failure and destruction that increase the risk of further war". See: Collier, *Breaking the Conflict Trap: The Civil War and Development Policy* (Washington and Oxford: The World Bank and Oxford University Press, 2003).

5   Menkhaus, K., Vicious Circles and the Security Development Nexus in Somalia, in: *Conflict, Security and Development*, 4 (2), August 2004, p. 163.

6   One of the few studies on grassroots strategies of adaptation in conflict zones is offered by Korf, B., War, Livelihoods and Vulnerability in Sri Lanka, in: *Development and Change*, 35 (2), pp. 275-295.

7   Longley, C. and Maxwell, D., Livelihoods, Chronic Conflict and Humanitarian Response: A Synthesis of Current Practice, Overseas Development Institute, Working Paper 182. See also: Berdal, M. and D. Malone, eds., Greed and Grievance. Economic Agendas in Civil Wars (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2000); Keen, D., The Economic Functions of Violence in Civil Wars, Adelphi Paper n° 320 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

and protection. In our view, it is the negligence of these new local orders by peace-builders which helps to explain why many conflict zones have shifted from low-intensity conflict to violent peace after the introduction of largely exclusive peace deals and transition processes.

One of the most prominent examples of these organisational shifts and their negligence by the international community's efforts to bring about peace is the conflict and transition process in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Since the start of the transition and the official end of the Congolese war, in June 2003, the threat of conflict and instability has loomed ominously, because a number of actors have expressed their hesitation towards the peace process or have acted against their exclusion from the transitional institutions. These ongoing developments highlight the vulnerability of internationally sponsored efforts at instigating a 'transition' to peace and democracy in the DRC. Yet at the same time they remind us that important questions about the socio-economic dynamics that underlie the seemingly intractable phenomenon of war in the eastern DRC remain unanswered; indeed, many remain unasked.

These underlying social dynamics are at the centre of this article, which wants to make a strong case that efforts to end war and promote sustainable development in the eastern parts of the DRC should be grounded in attention to phenomena that lie beneath the more often discussed international and regional dimensions of the conflict. It is one of the underlying ideas that chronic violence cannot be understood purely with reference to the strategies developed by powerful local and international actors. Rather, the seeming intractability of the Congolese conflict can only be fully understood with reference to the ways in which conflict—together with a legacy of colonial and state policy that preceded

and informed it—has reshaped structures of opportunity and meaning at the level of 'grassroots' interaction. By contrast with traditional perspectives that explain the Congolese conflict in terms of dynamics set in motion 'from above,' this article stresses the need for a better understanding of the local, 'micro-level' dynamics of conflict and the organisational shifts these dynamics have produced.

1.   The Congolese War Complex

When studying the Congolese war, one cannot but emphasise the dire humanitarian consequences of this ten-year old conflict. The war in eastern DRC has generated one of the most severe humanitarian crises since the Second World War[8]. In a conflict that has involved over six African nations and more than a dozen rebel groups, more than 3 million Congolese have died either as a direct or an indirect consequence of these armed confrontations[9]. Many have lost their physical and financial belongings, while the war has led to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people, which continue to be dispersed until today[10].

One of the reasons for this humanitarian disaster was the multiplication of actors since the start of the Congolese conflict. Many individuals and

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8   Mid-2000, the UN Secretary-General reported that "humanitarian needs in the Democratic Republic of the Congo have attained massive proportions, with some 1.3 million internally displaced persons and 300,000 refugees, and a further estimated 14 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance": United Nations, *Second Report of the Secretary General on the United Nations Organisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo*, 18 April 2000, New York (S/2000/330). For a discussion of the recent evolution, see: International Rescue Committee, *Mortality in the Democratic Republic of Congo: Results from a Nationwide Survey*, conducted in September-November 2002, and reported in April 2003 – although the IRC data have been questioned by some observers. For a detailed follow-up, see the numerous weekly reports by OCHA, the United Nation's humanitarian assistance programme.

9   See International Rescue Committee, Mortality in the Democratic Republic of Congo: Results from a Nationwide Survey.

10   Mid-2004, a new humanitarian crisis developed in south-western Congo, where artisan gold miners were being brutally expelled from Angola. A UN-OCHA mission estimated the number of refugees at 80-100.000. See also: Human Rights Watch, *Angola: Congolese Migrants Face Brutal* Body Searches (23 April 2004).

groups that have been marginalised at the local (or sometimes national) level, concluded that rebellion provided them with a means of achieving some form of immediate redress against, or revenge for, their grievances. The proliferation and multiplication of foreign and local armies, rebel movements and militias has led to a very intricate and highly unpredictable situation in which the scope of violence expanded dramatically. This Congolese 'complex of war' was further consolidated by two dynamics. On the one hand, new driving forces replaced the original causes of conflict. It has been observed that in most armed conflicts, "issues which lead to the emergence of conflict are not necessarily those which cause its intractability or longevity"[11]. This is undoubtedly true for eastern Congo, where the structural elements that have caused the conflict in 1996, have been replaced by new, local and regional causes of war. On the other hand, since 1996, strategic and nationally oriented agendas have tended to 'dissolve' into more local and individual motivations for warfare, leading to a total fragmentation of the politico-military landscape[12].

The first element of this fragmentation was the growing division within the main rebel movement (the 'Congolese Rally for Democracy' or RCD) into opposing factions, which had the effect of intensifying the armed struggle in the eastern parts of the DRC. This process of political disintegration was partly due to a total lack of cohesion (itself the result of opportunistic strategies of its main leaders) within the RCD-movement itself. The first split to emerge was in May 1999, after RCD leader Ernest

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11   Goodhand, J. & D. Hulme, *NGOs and Peace Building in Complex Political Emergencies: An Introduction*, NGOS and CPEs Working Paper, No. 1, Manchester: IDPM, University of Manchester and Intrac, 1997, p. 7.

12   This evolution corresponds with the observation of Ken Menkhaus that the conflict in Somalia has led to a "radical localization of politics". It is indeed this institutionalisation of local agendas for war that constitutes the main characteristic of many African conflicts: Menkhaus, K., Vicious Circles and the Security Development Nexus in Somalia, in: *Conflict, Security and Development*, 4 (2), August 2004.

Wamba-dia-Wamba had fallen out with the original RCD-leadership. Wamba created a rival RCD-faction, the 'RCD-Mouvement de Libération' (RCD-ML), which soon gave rise to a next internal power struggle within the RCD-ML movement itself. A second dynamic of fragmentation was the growing conflict between Rwanda and Uganda and the manipulation by both countries of their Congolese proxies. The factional split within the RCD could be explained in part by the competition between Rwanda and Uganda for the control over Kisangani and its diamond market, while the internal crisis of the RCD-ML can also be explained as the result of Uganda's divide-and-rule tactics[13]. After only one year of military struggle against the Kabila-regime, hostilities between the RCD's sponsors had led to a reconfiguration of the rebellion between a Rwanda-controlled section (RCD-G) and a Uganda-controlled offshoot (RCD-ML). This led in turn to a carving up of the Congolese territory into four separate politico-military regions, each of which were controlled by different rebel groups.

In addition to the disintegration of the main rebel movement, the entrance of new actors and the formation of new (local and regional) coalitions further complicated the armed struggle in eastern DRC. Apart from growing urban resistance by civil society and church leaders, the RCD-rebellion gave a new breath to the formation of rural militias, also known as Mayi-Mayi. Originally, most of these Mayi-Mayi groups were the result of spontaneous mobilisation and had a very limited impact on the local power-game. The process of militia-formation started as a rural reaction of youngsters against Mobutu's political system (which was held responsible for the lack of social and economic opportunities), yet came to be an important instrument of local elites in their campaign against the

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13   Human Rights Watch, Uganda in Eastern DRC: Fuelling Political and Ethnic Strife, March 2001.

Banyarwanda in North Kivu in 1993. In 1996, these militias briefly joined the Kabila-led military campaign to oust Mobutu, but turned against Kabila when the 'Tutsi influence' in Kabila's movement became too visible. Since the outbreak of the second war in 1998, Mayi-Mayi leaders also started recruiting the better educated and disenchanted urban youth (who were attracted to the alleged objective of fighting the 'Rwandan occupation'). Shared feelings of antipathy towards the 'tutsi-agressors' also facilitated the creation of stronger links between these diverse local groupings and Burundian and Rwandan militias that were operating from Congolese soil. In addition, these militias also became an attractive force for several political and economic actors as well as social movements. After the signing of the Lusaka-Accords, in 1999 (in which the Mayi-Mayi groups were not officially included), the Kinshasa-government started providing these groups with arms, which led to a serious progression of their military activity and to their subsequent control over large parts of the countryside. Finally, also local businessmen tried to mobilize these militias as part of their strategies of economic control.

Ituri perhaps is the most dramatic example of these dynamics. Here, a local and historical struggle for control and access to land has been skilfully exploited by Ugandan army elements who sought to consolidate their economic control over this resource-rich region. As of early 2004, at least 5 armed groups were actively involved in the local politico-military power game. As in the other parts of Eastern Congo, this fragmentation has led to a carving up of the territory into a series of rebel 'enclaves', consisting of a series of complex transboundary formations

between local elites, regional armed actors and global forces[14]. Qualifying these enclaves as 'shifting' underlines the importance of the informal alliances between local and regional actors that propped up the emanations of authority. At the same time, it points at the complexity of the local politico-military power-game. In some cases, the emerging alliance between rural armed actors, economic entrepreneurs and local administrative authorities has created a certain degree of political and economic continuity within these enclaves, leading in turn to a situation of (relative) security. In other regions, the continuing competition between foreign and local militias for the access to (economic and political) resources has become the main source of insecurity to the local population, creating instead a general environment of violence and despair. In most regions, however, some form of accommodation exists between these opposing factions and local elites, who appear to have found mutual benefit in the existing situation of 'no-armed-conflict-nor-peace'. It could be said that the 'smouldering' nature of the Congolese conflict carries both elements of stability and instability, depending on the access and entitlement to local livelihood options. The social transformations that have resulted from this accommodation have led in turn to the consolidation of new forms of social control, economic dominance and protection.

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14   This observation corresponds to the recent discussion by amongst others Thomas Callaghy, Ronald Kassimir and Robert Latham, of 'transboundary formations': Callaghy, T., Kassimir, R. and Latham, R., *Intervention and Transnationalism in Africa. Global-Local networks of Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). For a similar argument, see: M. Duffield, *Global Governance and the New Wars. The Merging of Development and Security* (London: Zed Books, 2002).

2. Processes of Social Transformation in eastern DRC[15]

A first element of the social transformation process in eastern DRC has been an intensified struggle for the access to land and natural resources. The competition over land became visible for the first time in the province of North Kivu in 1993, when a conflict erupted over the unequal access to arable and grazing lands between the allochthonous Banyarwanda and autochthonous Banyanga and Bahunde communities. Gradually, this conflict over land (the single most important local economic resource) came to dominate the local armed competition in the whole of eastern DRC, a competition that became progressively defined in ethnic terms. The best known of these conflicts was the struggle for land between Hema and Lendu in Ituri. However, also in other parts of eastern Congo, local disputes for economic resources came to be translated into ethnic terms. The reasons for this 'ethnicisation' have been threefold. First, access to land already formed one of the main currencies of power during colonial times; in the post-colonial era, it became one of the central elements of the political economy of the DRC. Control over land indeed represents a multi-dimensional resource: it is used as a community territory, as an economic resource, as a source of administrative revenue, and as a social asset. It is therefore significant in terms of ethnic identity-formation, the powers and revenue-streams of local customary leaders, and market penetration of rural economies. A second and related reason is that during the war, ethnicity has evolved into a crucial resource in the hands of local elites and armed actors for the mobilization of political and economic resources. On the one hand, reference to ethnic belonging has become an inherent part of local recruitment strategies by non-state armed actors: rebel groups have progressively recruited along ethnic lines to ensure their grip on

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15 This section of the article is a summary of the authors' publication *Conflict and Social Transformation in eastern DR Congo* (Ghent: Academia Press, 2004).

economic resources and the population. On the other hand, armed groups also depend on access to local markets and resources for the financing of their private and military operations. The connection between ethnicity and territorial control thus not only ensures these armed actors of a relatively stable economic reward, but also confines the communities under their control to a channelled territorial access: who controls the land, controls its people[16]. What arises from this internal dynamic could be defined otherwise as a 'territorialisation of ethnicity' around vital economic assets, whereby violent and 'ethnic' elements have gradually come to constitute the starting point for any form of socio-economic integration[17]. As the continuing confrontations between the Lendu and Hema in Ituri, the Banyarwanda and Hunde and other populations in North and South Kivu demonstrate, this growing interconnection between ethnicity and economic survival by local armed groups has not only led to a strong demarcation of (physical and 'imagined') boundaries between previously coexisting communities, but the allegiance to this violent enterprise has also become an important element in the definition of one's individual political and social position.

Apart from its ethnic connotation, the intensified struggle over local resources has also engendered a transformation of the social space. During the war, the artisan exploitation of natural resources –already largely present during the Mobutu era – has become one of the most important survival strategies for eastern Congo's rural populations. This is especially true for the younger generations, who traditionally form the most mobile parts of society. For them, the access to 'quick financial

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16   Pottier, J., Emergency in Ituri, DRC: Political Complexity, Land and Other Challenges in Restoring Food Security, paper presented at the FAO International Workshop 'Food Security in Complex Emergencies: Building Policy Frameworks to Address Longer-Term Programming Challenges', 23-25 September 2003, Tivoli, Italy.

17   See also Le Billon, P., 'The Political Ecology of War: Natural Resources and Armed Conflicts', in: *Political Geography*, Vol. 20, pp. 561-584.

gain' in local exploitation and trade networks not only constitutes an economic alternative to their miserable livelihoods (characterised by decreasing land access and growing food insecurity), but it also presents them with an alternative social identity. This alternative living condition – or better said, the aspiration to it – is progressively mirrored by young combatants and non-combatants alike against the modern and capitalist lifestyles of metropolitan Western societies. As one youngster told us in the gold centre of Kamituga (in South Kivu): "In society, to represent something you have to have something." ("*il faut avoir quelque chose pour être apprécié dans la société*")[18] Still, it has to be noted that this new 'ideal model' – which increasingly refers to violent and socially exclusive forms of integration – also has an important downside. In the absence of alternative exit strategies, the exploitation of gold, diamonds or coltan is increasingly engendering new patterns of physical dependency for these youngsters – some may even call it a 'daily drug' ("*une dépendance quotidienne*")[19] – especially if confronted with the meagre income it generates for their daily survival: in Congo's wartime economy, gold and diamonds merely present a way to escape daunting poverty.

A final dimension of this social transformation process has been a shift in local authority structures to the advantage of violent and armed actors. On the one hand, this shift has involved a preponderance of armed actors over 'traditional' (customary or administrative) rulers. Research in North Kivu and South Kivu has demonstrated how various rural militias have replaced customary chiefs as references of authority; in turn, these armed actors installed their own structures of political authority and

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18 Interview with young miners, Kamituga, December 2003.
19 Interview with young miners, Kamituga, December 2003.

control, which were often based on pre-war administrative structures[20]. In most rural areas, traditional decision makers such as elders and customary chiefs have either lost their position, or have had no other option than to sustain the strategies of a new generation of young combatants that are, in the pursuit of their interests, becoming increasingly powerful in the regulation of local socio-economic interaction. So, while all credible politics have been reduced to armed politics, this new logic of violence has subsequently led to a complete erosion of more traditional forms of authority and solidarity, which in itself has facilitated the formation of new sources of power.

On the other hand, this shift in local authority structures has also had a serious impact on the regulation of local economic competition. To survive economically – and face external competition – commercial entrepreneurs have often had to align themselves with local militias to protect their endangered economic enterprise – a service that is mostly returned through some kind of financial reward. In other words, the 'smouldering' nature of the conflict in eastern Congo has sometimes led to a situation of mutual benefit: while militias profit from the presence of existing exploitation and trade networks to skim off profits, they are simultaneously deployed by local entrepreneurs to protect their local enterprises. As a result, both militias and opportunistic businessmen (such as certain traders, middlemen or outright criminals) have increasingly profited from the low-intensity nature of the Congolese conflict because they can use the subsequent distortion of commodity and resource markets to monopolise local resource exploitation and trade. Obviously then, these actors have every intention to prolong their

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20   For a discussion, see amongst others: Van Acker, F. and K. Vlassenroot, 'Youth and conflict in Kivu*: 'Komona clair'*, in: *The Journal of Humanitarian Assistance*, 2000; and Van Acker, F. and K. Vlassenroot, 'Les 'Maï- Maï' et les fonctions de la violence milicienne dans l'est du Congo', in: *Politique africaine*, Vol. 84, pp. 103-116.

beneficial relationship, even after an official conflict settlement has been concluded.

Although these observations seem to confirm at least partially the argument of political economists about the interconnection between natural resources, trade and the prolongation of conflict[21], this relationship has not been as one-dimensional as it has often been presented. The data at hand suggest that it is generally not (only) the military that profit from this economic violence. Rather, their financial woes as well as their lack of control over the country's interior (where natural resources are exploited) ultimately make them inferior to established and pre-existing trade networks. This observation corresponds with other notions on the Congolese trade networks in general. As one observer stated, "the numerous pre-existing and sometimes highly structured informal networks were not created by military involvement, although they have been controlled by them… [The military] do however try to exploit [these] networks for their own profit, by controlling essential points of access such as airports and trading posts in order to levy taxes."[22] In general, the natural resource sector has always formed a daunting quagmire for both African rebels and governments, first because of the powerful position of various 'middlemen' that skim off the benefits of this trade, and second because

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21   For example according to Paul Collier, rebels and opportunistic businessmen commonly benefit from war because they can extort natural resource exports (amongst others through taxation, control of strategic entry and exit points, etc.) and they can monopolise the entry and information flow into commodity markets; this form of disruption is generally leading to a criminalisation and a monopolisation of trade: Collier, P., *Doing Well Out of War* (Paper prepared for Conference on Economic Agendas in Civil Wars, London, April 26-27, 1999); see also: Le Billon, P., 'The Political Ecology of War: Natural Resources and Armed Conflicts', pp. 561-584.
22   Kennes, E., 'Footnotes to the Mining Story', in: *Review of African Political Economy*, n° 93/94, vol. 29, September-December 2002.

of the persistence of powerful informal economies that by definition escape formal control mechanisms[23].

More than an 'economy of plunder' based on rebel predation, therefore, the conflict in eastern Congo appears to have led to the establishment of several informal governance structures, which are progressively setting the frame for local (socio-) economic interaction. Instead of leading to a breakdown or chaos, contemporary conflicts like the war in the DRC thus seem to bear the potential of creating new complexes of "profit, power and protection."[24] These complexes could be described as parallel governance structures that function next to the formal state apparatus (and sometimes make use of it) to foster an independent process of politico-military control, of economic redistribution and of rights to wealth. These complexes have made use of the withering state competence to consolidate themselves as new centres of authority, economic regulation and social control. However, while these complexes are almost invariably non-liberal (or informal, transboundary) and socially exclusive (ethnic, clan-based) in nature, their outcomes tend to differ according to the specific socio-political context.

A good example of the emergence of such an 'emerging complex' is the conflict in Ituri, where the subsequent Ugandan occupations (1996-1997; 1998-2003) gave rise to a military-commercial collaboration between some Ugandan army officers and certain local (Hema/Gegere) elites. Combining the advantages of a favourable political position – stemming largely from the Hema/Gegere's (post-) colonial dominance in local

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23   For a discussion, see Shaw, M., *The Middlemen: War Supply Networks in Sierra Leone and Angola* (The Hague: Clingendael Institute, 2002).

24   Ballentine, K. and J. Sherman (eds.), *The Political Economy of Armed Conflict. Beyond Greed and Grievance.* Mark Duffield takes this argument further and states that "instead of complex political emergencies, global governance is encountering *emerging political complexes* on its borders.": Duffield, M., *Global Governance and the New Wars. The Merging of Development and Security* (London: Zed Books, 2002).

politics, the economy and education – and the free hand that the Ugandan President gave to his officers to engage in privatised warfare, both these actors have used their military and economic strength to construct themselves a profitable niche in the regional political economy. Thanks to its monopolisation of trade and access to resources (i.e. land and gold) this transborder power complex has been increasingly successful in fostering an alternative and largely stateless process of legitimisation, redistribution and rights to wealth to its members. This process has not been limited to the members of the Gegere community, but eventually also affected other governance complexes in the area, including the Ugandan political equilibrium[25].

A similar evolution could be observed in the region of Beni-Lubero (North Kivu), which is primarily inhabited by the Nande community. Here, the Nande's historical involvement in the informal economy was used both as an instrument to preserve their dominance in regional commerce and as a fence against patrimonialist state interference under Mobutu. During the war, a new nexus of power emerged that united the need of both the local RCD-ML rebel movement and certain entrepreneurs to block interference in local business. To a certain extent, the private protection mechanisms that resulted from this relationship between rebels and entrepreneurs even stimulated some form of social redistribution[26]. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that this 'reciprocal assimilation' between rebels and commercial elites also stimulated a deepening political and economic fragmentation. The immediate result of this process is that today, the low-intensity conflict in Beni-Lubero has been

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25 For a discussion, see Vlassenroot, K. and T.Raeymaekers, The Politics of Rebellion and Intervention in Ituri: The Emergence of a New Political Complex ?, in: *African Affairs*, 103, pp. 385-412.

26 In this context, we can refer to the reinvestment of informal trade profits by local Nande elites in the commercial centre of Butembo, where Nande traders are currently building a private airport and dam to provide the city with electricity: see Vlassenroot, K. and T. Raeymaekers, *Conflict and Social Transformation in Eastern DR Congo* (Gent: Academia Press, 2004).

traded for a situation of violent peace, in which the continuing predation by local militias and former rebel leaders has been accompanied by increasing levels of intra- and intercommunal conflict.

Finally, in Masisi a local complex consisting of an NGO ('*Tout pour la Paix et le Développement*'), Local Defence Forces and administrative control led by Provincial Governor Eugène Serufuli has enabled certain Banyarwanda elites to consolidate their political and economic interests within a single political framework. This complex offers an illustrative example of how local elites have combined foreign and national support networks to protect their local interests. Although initially backed by Rwanda, Serufuli has used this structure during the transition process to pressurise himself into a dominant political position at a national level[27]. While this project has certainly added to the internal strife in this region, the immediate reward has been a consolidation of Banyarwanda power in Rutshuru and Masisi, including an extension of cattle and grazing land.

To summarise our argument, we think that the war in eastern Congo has resulted in the emergence of various 'complexes of power', which have planted themselves on the challenges of both increasing state 'collapse' and global warfare to foster new modes of social and economic integration. Invariably, these complexes have emerged from the cornerstones of the pre-war, (neo-) patrimonialist system, namely the access and entitlement to vital economic assets. The accommodation of local elites and armed actors to enduring conflict has led in turn to a preponderance of ethnicity in the definition of political and economic belonging, an evolution that led to the development of new strategies of political and economic regulation that are almost always socially exclusive and non-liberal (or transboundary, protectionist and stateless)

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27   Serufuli currently holds the office of provincial governor of North Kivu.

in nature. At different levels, these strategies have resulted in the formation of new complexes of 'power, profit and protection' that are characterised by a militarized control over local resources, trading networks and mobility patterns, and by new forms of (regional and global) economic integration. Finally, these complexes have had a double effect on the local societies we have analysed. On the one hand, they have seriously disrupted traditional social and economic structures, leading in turn to a breakdown of the old social order. On the other hand, they represent the structural answer of a marginalized population to a situation of enduring conflict, carrying in it new elements of integration and transformation, and carried forward by a redefinition of authority at a grassroots level of society. In sum, this evolution confirms the earlier statement that conflict is not only about breakdown and chaos, but can carry the germs of a new political order.

3. State Implosion and Ethnic Politics: Two Reinforcing Dynamics

The process of spiralling state implosion and the emergence of new centres of power, profit and protection presents a number of fundamental difficulties for the formal framework of the transition process in the DRC. The war has demonstrated that interests of local elites are best served through their association with informal and stateless governance structures. As a result, the survival of local power projects does not depend so much on the willingness of their leaders to integrate in some form of national state formation process, but instead is carried forward by their success in amplifying and extending their local interests within the informal transboundary power framework.

It is evident that the reference to these exclusive and stateless patterns of power largely contrasts with the inclusive and formal state formation proposed in the Congolese transition process. Starting with the signing of the Lusaka cease-fire agreement in 1999, and culminating in the inauguration of the Transitional Government in June 2003 in Kinshasa, this process has been carried forward by the international community as a guarantee for national and regional stability. Until today, this process has nonetheless concentrated largely on the implementation of political agreements at a national level. This has included the foundation of a Transitional Government and other political institutions, as well as a number of financial initiatives to get the national economy back on track. But although this transition has undoubtedly reached a number of successes (the most important of which are the reaching of a military stalemate and an all-inclusive power-sharing agreement in the country's capital), some contentious and unresolved issues nonetheless demonstrate a more general problem of accepting this internationally induced drive to peace and democracy. A recent update of the transition in Kinshasa and the east of the country clearly indicates this contrasting dynamic. According to the update, "the continuing existence of parallel structures in the capital, Kinshasa, creates a great deal of confusion and also regularly leads to open conflict in the [eastern] provinces. Most, if not all, tense situations (...) are attributable to political infighting in the Transitional Government. This lack of unity among the members of the Transitional Government has a very important, negative impact in the Kivu provinces, not least because there are still numerous ethnic and political tensions."[28] Such parallel structures have included the continuous by-passing of the new military hierarchy through informal agreements. For example, there currently exists a parallel unit in the

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28   Romkema, H., *Update on the Transition. The Case of the Kivu Provinces*, ISS Situation Report, Pretoria, 7 May 2004, p. 2.

president's office called the '*Maison Militaire*', which gives parallel orders to ex-government soldiers and some Mayi-Mayi groups. Similar to these dynamics in the state capital Kinshasa, the "calabash of seething political and ethnic tensions"[29] in the eastern provinces has been generating new alliances that are increasingly confronting the formal transition framework in Kinshasa. The events of June 2004 are a sad example of this dynamic. In the eastern Congolese city of Bukavu, a number of army commanders that felt excluded from the transition process or rejected this process out of fear for prosecution for former war crimes, joinded hands and demanded for a change of the command of the 10th military region. This mutiny thus risks offering a perfect mobilisation ground to a number of actors that do not support the transition process or want to reposition themselves.

It could be feared indeed that the combination of transition and continuing insecurity in the east could reignite the 'smouldering' power struggles between local and national political entrepreneurs. While the international community seems to be focused on creating a number of 'islands of stability' in Congo – which would include the capital along with a number of strategic provincial towns – the entire interior of the country thus risks being left behind in a general state of chaos, where historical land conflicts, border disputes, and communal resentment will continue to be exploited by political entrepreneurs who are in search for a local power base. In the meantime, dispersed armed actors continue to profit from the extortion of agriculture, trade and exploitation activities – which provide the main means of living for eastern Congo's impoverished populations. In other words, the present peace process risks bringing

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29 R. Lemarchand, The Democratic Republic of Congo: From Collapse to Potential Reconstruction, Occasional paper (Copenhagen: Centre for African Studies, 2001, p. 25).

peace to the urban populations while leaving the rural populations in the midst of unending low-intensity conflict.

Conclusion

The current drive towards peace and democracy in Africa has once again received a moral backlash due to continuing conflict dynamics in many African war zones. These areas include the Democratic Democratic Republic of the Congo, a country ravaged by a decade of warfare and sustained humanitarian crisis. It is the opinion of the authors that the failure of the international community to implement peace in the DRC is largely due to a misreading (or one might sometimes say no reading at all) of local conflict dynamics, which are sustained not only by the interests generated by prolonged warfare, but also and foremost by the social transformations that have occurred as a result of the accommodation and adaptation of grassroots populations to a situation of spiralling state implosion. The conflict in the DRC has led to the emergence of new 'complexes of power', which have taken on this double challenge of state implosion and prolonged warfare to foster new strategies of social, economic and political integration that are essentially illiberal (informal and transboundary) and socially exclusive (or ethnic) in character. Until the peace building interventions thoroughly acknowledge and integrate these strategies, it has to be feared that the 'transition' to peace and democracy will remain radically opposed to the real transformations that continue to define the lives of ordinary citizens in many parts of this war-torn country.

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