



RIFT VALLEY INSTITUTE | USALAMA PROJECT
UNDERSTANDING CONGOLESE ARMED GROUPS

ITURI

GOLD, LAND, AND ETHNICITY
IN NORTH-EASTERN CONGO

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Ituri

Gold, land, and ethnicity in
north-eastern Congo

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THE USALAMA PROJECT

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COVER: Mourners gather to bury the eight-month-old daughter of an artisanal gold miner, Mongbwalu, Ituri (2004).

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Map 1. The eastern DRC, showing area of detailed map on the following page



Map 2. Ituri, showing the district's territories and Lake Albert

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Preface: The Usalama Project

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

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

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

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

Previous RVI Usalama Project publications

Reports

From CNDP to M23: The Evolution of an Armed Movement in Eastern Congo

North Kivu: The Background to Conflict in North Kivu Province of Eastern Congo

PARECO: Land, Local Strongmen, and the Roots of Militia Politics in North Kivu

UPC in Ituri: The External Militarization of Local Politics in North-eastern Congo

All titles are also available in French

Briefings

‘M23’s Operational Commander: A Profile of Sultani Emmanuel Makenga’

Summary

Since the late 1990s, the Ituri District of the north-eastern DRC has been the scene of some of the bloodiest fighting and gravest atrocities of Congo's numerous conflicts. The particularly vicious nature of war in Ituri—including large-scale massacres, widespread sexual violence, and the use of child soldiers—led to interventions by the European Union and United Nations, and prompted the International Criminal Court (ICC) to indict four of Ituri's armed group leaders. The most intense period of conflict was 1999–2007, but violence resurged in 2012, and insecurity continues into 2013.

Conflict in Ituri has been intimately linked to conflict in the provinces of North and South Kivu, and other parts of the eastern DRC, but it is also rooted in local histories of socio-economic relations and natural resource exploitation. Beginning more than 150 years ago, the impact of foreign military and commercial interventions in Ituri has been consistently negative, exacerbating existing local rivalries and increasing the likelihood of direct communal conflict. The decisions by local leaders either to collaborate with or resist incursions into Ituri—initially for ivory and slaves, and later for gold and land—had a profound impact on communal relations in the district. Divisions were exacerbated by the Belgian policy of divide and rule, in which the colonial authorities deliberately played ethnic groups off against each other as a way of maintaining power and ensuring access to Ituri's natural resources.

Even after Congolese independence, colonial-era inequities were largely preserved—and again resources lay at the heart of the problem. The erosion of the state and the decline of industrial gold mining during the 1980s and early 1990s created new opportunities for local populations to mine for gold and for local businessmen to trade the precious metal. Armed groups found it much easier to exploit the new labour-intensive, artisanal mining as opposed to the expat-run, capital-intensive industrial operations from the past. Furthermore, gold trading networks could

more easily be integrated into militia structures, prolonging war and insecurity in Ituri.

This report highlights three key aspects of Ituri's history that help to explain the situation in the district in the mid-1990s, when outsiders brought war to Ituri, and to provide context for the formation and conduct of the non-state armed groups such as the UPC and FNI/FRPI. First, the colonial enterprise built an infrastructure and political economy in Ituri to support the exploitation of gold, but this required forms of control that strained local relations. Second, the colonial focus on gold created numerous land conflicts, resulting specifically from colonial agents appointing chiefs, re-drawing boundaries, physically separating populations, and issuing concession or plantation rights to white settlers. In the post-colonial era, disputes over land rights, ownership, and access became incorporated into local struggles for political and economic power, particularly among elites from the Hema and Lendu groups. Third, colonial agents viewed local populations through a racial lens, resulting in narratives of ethnic superiority (Hema) and inferiority (Lendu). Over time, these narratives became entrenched attitudes, and by the mid-1990s, Lendu and Hema elites employed them to mobilize populations to commit violence.

Ituri's history and on-going problems related to gold mining, land conflicts, and ethnic relations have implications for policy makers. There is an urgent need for a comprehensive peace process in Ituri to bridge the socio-economic and ideological gap between ethnic communities, particularly between the Hema and Lendu. Elements could include governmental efforts to identify land boundaries and ownership clearly, as well as a locally-driven truth and reconciliation commission to facilitate open and honest discussion about Ituri's history. Such a process could also identify ways to integrate development and peace-building initiatives better.

In addition, there is a need to reform the resource exploitation sector, so that Ituri's valuable natural resources are better harnessed to address entrenched poverty. For decades, the exploitation of gold, timber, and

other resources has benefited a relatively small elite with ties to government officials in both Kinshasa and Kampala. Formalizing Ituri's resource exploitation sector has proven to be a difficult task, but with sufficient political will in Kinshasa and Kampala, and an end to impunity for those who ignore government regulations, it is possible that profits could be utilized to address the health, education, and economic needs of Ituri's population.

1. Introduction

In November 2007, the brutal war in Ituri District—a fertile and resource-rich sub-division of Orientale Province, bordering North Kivu—appeared to be over. That month, the last three major rebel leaders in Ituri joined the Congolese national army, ending nearly a decade of armed conflict characterized by ethnically targeted killings, widespread sexual violence, extensive land grabbing, and the illegal exploitation of natural resources including gold. The United Nations Mission in Congo (*Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies au Congo*, MONUC) quickly turned its attention to other problems, primarily in the provinces of North and South Kivu, and Ituri entered a fragile, post-conflict period.

Shortcomings in the peace-building effort were revealed during 2012, as violence once again surged in Ituri. As noted in the Usalama Project's report on North Kivu, 'interpretations of the on-going violence in the eastern Congo variously stress grievances over land and identity, greedy local and international elites, or a weak and venal Congolese state'.¹ Each of these elements has played a role in recent conflict in Ituri, too, yet these factors are also closely linked to historical processes and events.

Since the mid-1800s, foreign interventions in Ituri have combined with local struggles for political and economic power to create conflict. Local leaders variously responded to early incursions—initially for ivory and slaves, and later for gold and land—with collaboration or resistance, responses that had an impact on Ituri's inter-communal relations. The Belgian colonial administration, as part of a deliberate strategy to exploit Ituri's natural resources, then transformed social relations by favouring some groups, such as the traditionally pastoralist Hema, and marginalizing others, such as the Lendu, who were traditionally farmers. And during the post-independence era, the regime of President Mobutu

1 Jason Stearns, *North Kivu: The Background to Conflict in North Kivu Province of Eastern Congo* (London: Rift Valley Institute, 2012), p. 9.

largely preserved colonial-era power structures and inequities, further straining local relations.

In 1996 and again in 1998, outsiders brought war to Ituri. In the first case, the war passed through Ituri relatively quickly, but in the latter instance, the Ugandan army occupied the district and managed it in ways that produced ethnic strife and militarized the illegal exploitation of natural resources. In June 1999, a conflict erupted in the Walendu Pitsi *collectivité*, in Ituri's Djugu territory. This escalated into what became known as the Ituri War, a conflict that was both distinct from and intertwined with the larger war taking place across the eastern DRC, involving multiple factions as well as multiple neighbouring states.

Three principal rebel groups were formed during the Ituri War: the predominantly Hema *Union des patriotes congolais* (UPC), and the predominantly Lendu *Front nationaliste intégrationniste* (FNI) and *Forces de résistance patriotique d'Ituri* (FRPI, Ituri Patriotic Resistance Forces).² This report highlights aspects of Ituri's history that help explain the situation in the district on the eve of these wars and provides context for the formation and conduct of these three armed groups.

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2 See Henning Tamm, *UPC in Ituri District: The External Militarization of Local Politics in North-eastern Congo* (London: Rift Valley Institute, 2013).

2. Precursors to conflict

Ituri District takes its name from the Ituri River, which runs south and then west through the heart of the district, emptying into the great Congo River. Ituri is richly endowed with natural resources, including fertile land, pristine forests, and large gold deposits. Thousands of fishermen work on Lake Albert, where there are reportedly also oil reserves. Ituri, whose capital is the town of Bunia, is administratively a sub-division of Orientale Province and is itself further sub-divided into five territories—Aru, Djugu, Irumu, Mahagi, and Mambasa—each of which has several *collectivités*.³

When asked about the origins of the bloody conflicts that consumed Ituri between 1999 and 2007, locals usually choose to begin with pre-colonial or colonial events. While authoritative sources on this period are scant—and the representation of history has been shaped and deeply politicized by present-day conflicts—events witnessed by generations past are often cited by local leaders today.

As was the case in other parts of the DRC, the migration of people to Ituri started in the sixteenth century and led to the development of rich cultures, linked to the regional geography and environment. With relatively small populations, socially and economically interdependent, scattered across the vast Ituri landscape, conflict between communities was initially minimal. The first recorded instances of large-scale violence stemmed from the arrival in the late nineteenth century of European explorers and Afro-Arab raiders—and conflict was further exacerbated under colonial rule. While historical events and processes did not pre-determine contemporary conflict, they are undoubtedly part of the narrative, often used by warring factions to explain or justify current events.

3 There are two categories of *collectivités*: chiefdoms (part of the customary administration) and *secteurs* ('sectors', parallel administrative branches). All Hema *collectivités* are chiefdoms, all Lendu and Ndo *collectivités* are sectors, led by bureaucrats.

The first inhabitants of Ituri are believed to have been Mbuti pygmies, who still live in the Ituri rainforest. During the sixteenth century, Banyali, Bira, and other populations arrived in Ituri from present-day Uganda and settled in the areas to the south and west of Lake Albert: what are today Irumu and Djugu territories. Around the same time, other groups started to arrive from what has recently become South Sudan, including the Lendu. Some Lendu (also known as Bbale) settled in the area that became northern Ituri (Mahagi and Djugu territories), while others (now more commonly known as Ngiti) travelled further south and settled near the village of Gety. The Lendu were traditionally arable farmers, although they later acquired livestock from pastoralists who moved into Lendu territory.⁴

During the eighteenth century, two more groups migrated into Ituri; both would subsequently come to wield power over the Lendu. The Hema travelled to Ituri from the Bunyoro kingdom in present-day Uganda. Some Hema settled to the west of Lake Albert, becoming known as the Gegere, or northern Hema. The Gegere established political and economic dominance over the Lendu who were already present in this area, although, as a sign of their close relationship, the Gegere adopted the Lendu language.⁵ The Gegere also married Lendu women, ‘had their dwellings built according to the Lendu model; practised agriculture learned from Lendu; and had adopted certain matriarchal principles from Lendu’.⁶

Around the same time as the Hema settlement in northern Ituri, other Hema settled in the west and south-west of Lake Albert, in what is now Irumu territory. Here too, the Hema established dominance over the Lendu populations (Ngiti), although the Hema retained their native

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 4 J.M.T. Meesen, *Monographie de l’Ituri: histoire, géographie, économie* (Brussels: Direction de l’Agriculture, des forêts, de l’élevage et de la colonisation, 1951), p. 185.

5 Edmond Thiry, *Une introduction à l’ethnohistoire des Hema du Nord* (Tervuren: Musée royal de l’Afrique centrale, 2004), pp. 109–113.

6 Johan Pottier, ‘Representations of Ethnicity in the Search for Peace: Ituri, Democratic Republic of Congo,’ *African Affairs* 109/434 (2009), p. 37.

language (Kihema or Nyoro). In general, the southern Hema were cattle herders who traded with farmers, but over time the Ngiti acquired cattle and became major herders—blurring the pastoral/agricultural divide between the Hema and Ngiti. In addition, the Hema of southern Ituri were nomadic, with decentralized power spread among at least seven groups or clans. By the time the Belgian colonial authorities established control in southern Ituri at the end of the nineteenth century, Hema dominance had ebbed substantially; Ngiti were politically and economically independent of the Hema and other southern Ituri tribes.⁷

The second group to migrate to Ituri in the eighteenth century was the Alur, who arrived amid migrations of Luo from what is now southern Sudan. Alur settled in the savannahs to the north-west and north of Lake Albert, in an area that straddled both sides of the current DRC/Uganda border. Like the Hema, the Alur established political and economic dominance over the Lendu in northern Ituri, in present-day Mahagi and northern Djugu territories.⁸ Today, according to research by two NGOs working in Ituri, the district's most populous groups are the Alur (27%), Lendu (24%), Hema (18%), and Lugbara (12%).⁹

Foreign intrusions

Ituri's position in the geographical centre of Africa resulted in the relatively late arrival of foreigners seeking ivory, slaves, and power. But, beginning in the 1880s, the incursions of armed traders and, eventually, colonizers from East Africa and Europe transformed social relations and the political economy of Ituri. The events and processes that accompanied these early invasions have become incorporated into local narratives

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7 Pottier, 'Representations of Ethnicity', pp. 41–2.

8 Aidan Southall, *Alur Society: A Study in Processes and Types of Domination* (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons Limited, 1953), pp. 152–3, 199, and 231.

9 IKV Pax Christi/Réseau Haki na Amani (RHA), *A Golden Future in Ituri? Which perspective for gold exploitation in Ituri, DRC?* (Utrecht/Bunia: IKV/RHA, 2012).

and grievances, and are frequently invoked in contemporary debates to explain the causes and intensity of the recent war in Ituri.

The initial wave of foreign forces arrived in the late 1880s. These Afro-Arab invaders were traders from Zanzibar and the East African coast. The merchants were accompanied by armed escorts: troops that included so-called *arabisés*—men from Maniema province who had been captured by Zanzibaris and became soldiers in the service of the traders. They arrived from the west, travelling up the Ituri River, and reportedly killed and maimed large numbers of people in pursuit of ivory and slaves for the export markets.¹⁰

Explorers and colonists working for European governments were the second and ultimately most disruptive group to arrive in Ituri. Their initial intrusions during the 1860s and 1870s were fleeting, with a few explorers arriving and then leaving—but the information they conveyed back to European capitals, about natural resources and the relative weakness of local populations, helped to inform plans for the colonization of Ituri.

The colonial era

The 1885 Berlin Conference, which formalized at a diplomatic level the carve-up of Africa among the great powers of Europe, did not have an immediate effect in Ituri. For the previous six years, the part of Ituri to the immediate west of Lake Albert and along the present-day border with Uganda had nominally fallen under the authority of Eduard ‘Emin Pasha’ Schnitzer, a German adventurer who served as Governor of Equatoria in the Egyptian colonial occupation of Sudan. In reality, however, vast tracts of the north-eastern DRC, northern Uganda and southern Sudan were beyond the effective administrative control of any colonial power.

For King Leopold II of the Belgians, control over this region would mean access to the Nile River and therefore a back door to his newly

¹⁰ David Northrup, *Beyond the Bend in the River: African Labor in Eastern Zaire, 1865–1940* (Athens: Ohio University, 1988), p. 26.

acquired Congo Free State.¹¹ Ironically, the victory achieved by the Sudanese Mahdi's jihad against the Egyptians—culminating in the capture of Khartoum in January 1885—opened the door for Leopold to gain entry to north-eastern Congo, by means of an expedition to 'rescue' Emin Pasha (much to the German's displeasure). Leopold's agent, Henry Morton Stanley, at the head of this privately funded expedition, reached Ituri by travelling up the Congo River to the Aruwimi River, and then up the Ituri River and overland to the south-western corner of Lake Albert, near present-day Kasenyi. Stanley fought his way through Ituri, killing and plundering on his way to his eventual meeting with Emin Pasha, north of Lake Albert.¹²

Stanley's expedition brought him into contact with the Hema and Ngitu in southern Ituri—although he referred to them as 'Wahuma' and 'Balegga' respectively. In general, Stanley received cooperation and assistance from the Hema—but met resistance from the Ngitu. These responses, coupled with contemporary ethnic prejudices, may account for Stanley's differing attitudes to the two communities. He praised the Hema as 'tall, finely-formed men, with almost European features', and 'true descendants of the Semitic tribes' who were one of the 'dominating classes' in their region. The Hema were, he added, 'amiable, quiet and friendly neighbors ... with whom we have never exchanged angry words'.¹³

Stanley described the Ngitu, by contrast, as 'abrasive and violent'. He reported that in one incident in December 1887, a group of Ngitu were 'vociferating fiercely' and pouring 'storms of abuse' upon Stanley's men and proxy forces when the latter cleared villages and stole the Ngitu's cattle.¹⁴ A little over a year later, when a group of Ngitu assembled to

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 11 George Martelli, *Leopold to Lumumba: A History of the Belgian Congo, 1877-1960* (London: Chapman & Hall Ltd, 1962), pp. 144-5.

12 Meesen, *Monographie de l'Ituri*, pp. 31-38; Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1998), pp. 98-100.

13 Henry Morton Stanley, *In Darkest Africa: Or, the Quest, Rescue and Retreat of Emin Governor of Equatoria* (Torrington, Wyoming: The Narrative Press, 2001), vol. 2, pp. 340-3.

14 Stanley, *In Darkest Africa*, vol. 1, p. 288.

attack Stanley's expedition, Hema warriors helped to defend Stanley and defeat the Ngiti.¹⁵

Such racialized views about the Hema and Ngiti have left an enduring legacy in Ituri. Disseminated internationally through his best-selling books, Stanley's depictions of the two communities influenced the opinions and policies of the Belgian colonists who arrived in Ituri during the following decades. Indeed, today's Lendu leaders identify Stanley as the creator of an ideology of Hema superiority that was embraced and institutionalized under Belgian rule, and which continues to affect Hema-Lendu relations today.¹⁶

The Congo Free State, the private dominion owned by King Leopold II, finally established a presence in Ituri around 1894. Leopold's initial interests in Ituri were to procure ivory and to extend his authority toward the Nile River. Soldiers of the king's private militia, the *Force Publique* ('Public Army'), were the first state agents to arrive in Ituri, their mission being to 'combat and disperse' anyone engaged in the slave trade and to establish new outposts of the state.¹⁷ The Free State established small military outposts at Mahagi and in the village of the Banyali chief, Kr'lo, which the Belgians dubbed 'Kilo'.

In 1897, Batetela soldiers from Kasai, to the far south-west of Ituri, mutinied against their Belgian officers in the *Force Publique*, disrupting the expansion of the colonial presence in Ituri.¹⁸ The Belgian military commander in the area, Baron Francis Dhanis, evacuated the outpost at Kilo before fighting and losing a decisive battle against the mutineers on the Ituri River at the village of Ekwanga (present-day Salambongo). Less

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15 Stanley, *In Darkest Africa*, vol. 2, p. 114.

16 Interviews with Lendu politicians and leaders, Ituri, June 2009 and February 2012.

17 Edmond Thiry, *Elements de l'ethnohistoire des Nyali* (Tervuren: Musée royal de L'Afrique centrale, 2002), p. 88.

18 Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost*, pp. 128-9, says the Batetela soldiers rebelled because they were treated poorly and subjected to harsh conditions, while Meesen, who worked for the Belgian government, said the Batetela were notorious for their indiscipline; Meesen, *Monographie de l'Ituri*, p. 56.

than two years later, the *Force Publique* succeeded in re-establishing its base at Kilo—but by 1901 the colonial presence was still limited to three locations in Ituri: Irumu, Kilo, and Mahagi.

Over the next decade, however, the colonial authorities increased their presence in Ituri and carved the region into administrative zones, projecting in their maps an authority they did not possess on the ground.

Gold and the new Ituri

The colonial exploitation of gold marked the beginning of a new era in Ituri. Royal decrees in 1888 and 1893 reserved all mineral resources for the Congo Free State, thus establishing Leopold's property rights over mining areas.¹⁹ In 1903, geologists working for King Leopold confirmed the existence of gold deposits in Ituri on the Agola River, near the colonial outpost at Kilo; production began in 1905.

In 1911—three years after Leopold was forced to hand Congo's administration over to the Belgian state—the colonial government also started gold mining farther north in present-day Haut-Uele district, in the valley of the Moto River. The entire gold mining area in north-east Congo consequently became known as 'Kilo-Moto'; companies created to exploit gold reserves in this area have also borne the same name.

From 1905 until the 1930s, the colonial enterprise in Ituri was focused on extracting gold. The primary obstacle to obtaining the gold was a shortage of the labour needed to build transportation routes to the mines, to carry and pull supplies along those routes, to work the mines, and to produce food for both colonial agents and local mine workers. These agents bribed or bullied local chiefs to provide this labour, but such coercive measures led to social discontent and active resistance, requiring an ever greater exercise of government control over the people of Ituri.

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 19 Agayo Bakonzi, 'The Gold Mines of Kilo-Moto in Northeastern Zaire: 1905–1960' (PhD thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1982), p. 111.

The Kilo goldfields were located in a relatively remote and sparsely populated area in what is now western Djugu territory. In the early 1900s, the easiest way to transport equipment and people to Ituri and the Kilo mines was from the east, through the port of Mombasa in Kenya, overland through Kenya and Uganda to Lake Albert, by boat to the port at Kasindi in Ituri, and then overland to Kilo.

The Kasindi-Kilo section of the route cut through areas inhabited by Ngiti and Hema. In 1911, to control the populations along this route, the colonial *chef de zone* ('district commissioner') appointed a Hema chief named Bomera as *grand chef* ('paramount chief') over all the populations in present-day Irumu territory south of Bunia. Bomera's nomination was immediately controversial. After his arrival in around 1900 from western Uganda, he had stolen cattle, seized land, and killed people—particularly Ngiti—thereby creating enemies and increasing tensions in the area. Indeed, less than a year before his appointment as *grand chef*, the Belgian authorities had even arrested Bomera because of his abuses—so his sudden elevation was a strange reversal of fortune prompted in part by the personal recommendation of a Canadian missionary.²⁰

Bomera was not popular among Hema clans in southern Ituri, who had their own chiefs, but his selection was even more problematic for Ngiti.²¹ After his appointment, Bomera exacted revenge upon Ngiti villagers with whom he had previously had disputes. Ngiti clans revolted and, on 4 December 1911, killed Bomera along with 200 Hema villagers. The colonial authorities reacted swiftly and brutally, and with the help of a chief from the Bira clan, confiscated cattle from the Ngiti and handed them to Hema populations. In 1914, the Belgian authorities abandoned the effort to establish paramount one chief, creating instead nine chieftaincies based on pre-existing communities: six under Ngiti chiefs and three under Hema chiefs.²²

20 Thiry, *Introduction à l'ethnohistoire des Hema*, pp. 223–9.

21 Pottier, 'Representations of Ethnicity', p. 43.

22 Thiry, *Introduction à l'ethnohistoire des Hema*, pp. 230–7.

The appointment and death of Bomera illustrate the way that early colonial policy, based on the extraction of Ituri's gold, produced local conflict, particularly between Hema and Ngiti. Some recent analyses of the conflict in Ituri, indeed, have cited the death of Bomera as the first instance of Lendu resistance to Hema dominance.²³ Such narratives, however, fall into the trap of blaming groups for the actions of individuals, and show how today's ethnic conflict is projected onto the past.²⁴ For it was not the actions of Ituri's Hema populations but those of colonial agents and Bomera himself that were responsible for fomenting Lendu resistance.

The expansion of colonial authority during the second decade of the twentieth century caused further social upheaval in Ituri. An account from 1912-13 describes the Lendu as 'unruly and bellicose', fighting among themselves and against the representatives of colonial authority.²⁵ An article from the same period by the British explorer and elephant hunter Cuthbert Christy mentions an incident in which the 'warlike' Lendu, 'who frequently try to assert their independence by raids on neighbouring tribes and by defying the Government forces', were threatening further attacks on colonial outposts.²⁶ The Hema, who were generally favoured by colonial authorities over the Lendu, were also criticized, as in this account from 1920: 'It is only since the arrival of the European that the Bahema, always ambitious and deceitful, has tried to dominate the Walendu in order to better exploit him.'²⁷

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23 Koen Vlassenroot and Timothy Raeymaekers, 'The Politics of Rebellion and Intervention in Ituri: The Emergence of a New Political Context?' *African Affairs* 103/412 (2004), p. 390; cf. ASADHO (Association Africaine de défense des droits de l'homme), *Rapport de l'ASADHO sur le conflit inter-ethnique Hema-Lendu en territoire de Djugu dans la Province Orientale*, Kinshasa, December 1999.

24 Stathis Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 391.

25 Thiry, *Introduction à l'ethnohistoire des Hema*, p. 30.

26 Cuthbert Christy, 'The Ituri River, Forest and Pygmies', *The Geographical Journal* 46/3 (1915) p. 207.

27 Pottier, 'Representations of Ethnicity', p. 43.

To control the local populations better, and to expand gold mining in the Kilo belt, the Belgian colonial authorities created new tribal and administrative units in Ituri. During 1917–18, they started to organize the Lendu into several autonomous chiefdoms, thereby separating them from the Hema and Alur chiefs who previously ruled over them. As a consequence of this colonial intervention, which continued into the 1930s, there were numerous power struggles among Lendu leaders and increased tension between the Hema and Lendu, both of which the authorities suppressed by deploying the *Force Publique*.²⁸ By attempting to separate the Hema and Lendu, and by favouring Hema in the areas of education and administration—in short by suggesting that the two communities were incapable of peaceful coexistence—Belgian colonial agents established a new narrative that still has echoes in community relations within Ituri today.

The colonial authorities' response to food shortages at the mines added to these tensions: they invited white settlers to set up farms and businesses in Ituri. Between 1910 and 1930, a *mélange* of British (mainly from Kenya), Afrikaaners, Belgians, and Greeks arrived in Ituri to raise cattle, grow food crops, and plant coffee for export.²⁹ The authorities allocated additional lands to white settlers and companies for farming, ranching, forestry, fishing, and mining, leading to the creation of many substantial landholdings in Ituri during the 1930s and 1940s—a diversification of the regional economy into the agricultural sector that required still greater colonial control over both land and people.

Gold mining, however, remained at the core of the colonial enterprise. In 1928, the government changed the district boundaries to bring the Kilo and Moto goldmines together in a single district, called Kibali-Ituri. It also created new economic zones throughout the Congo that restricted population movements. In Ituri, this measure prevented migration and

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28 Thiry, *Introduction à l'ethnohistoire des Hema*, pp. 30–32.

29 Bakonzi, 'The Gold Mines of Kilo-Moto', pp. 113, 138, and 178.

helped to ensure sufficient labour for the mines and farms run by white settlers and companies.³⁰

There are two enduring legacies of the colonial era that help explain the origins and actions of the armed groups that have emerged in Ituri since 1999. First, the colony gave preferential treatment to Hema over Lendu in education, administration, and business, contributing to the formation of a Hema elite. This class was well placed to take advantage of the new opportunities afforded by the end of colonialism, establishing themselves as important hubs in President Mobutu's patronage networks in what became north-eastern Zaire. Secondly, the colonial enterprise exacerbated inequalities and latent tensions between Hema and Lendu communities, and created myths about superiority, inferiority, and incompatibility that persist in today's discourse.

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 30 Bakonzi, 'The Gold Mines of Kilo-Moto', pp. 267–9.

3. Post-independence

The post-independence period in Ituri was characterized by economic decline and transformation, as well as increasing social and political tension. Industrial gold mining—which had been the core of Ituri’s economy—went into a steady decline, even as artisanal mining steadily increased. Agriculture remained important in Ituri but changes in national land policy led to the redistribution of prime concessions to politically connected elites. As a result, many Hema businessmen acquired ranches and plantations in Lendu areas, which provoked resentment among Lendu elites.

Gold mining and trade

After 1960, industrial gold mining in Ituri went into serious decline as the European engineers who ran the Kilo mines left their jobs. Due to colonial education policy, there were few Congolese staff with the qualifications or ability to take over the operation. In 1966, Mobutu nationalized the company controlling the gold mines in north-east Congo, creating the *Office des mines d’or de Kilo-Moto* (OKIMO, Office of the Gold Mines of Kilo-Moto).

When nationalization failed to halt the plunge in gold production, Mobutu attempted to attract foreign investment, but this effort also foundered. During the 1970s, the failure to maintain infrastructure such as roads and bridges led the Kilo-Moto mines in Ituri to become isolated, further discouraging foreign investment. As a result, the mine apparatus and equipment deteriorated badly, diminishing yields. Exploitation of so-called ‘reserve areas’ also declined, due to insufficient investment in research and prospecting.³¹

31 Louis Bedidjo, ‘Situation Preoccupante a l’Office des Mines d’Or de Kilo-Moto’, Centrale Congolaise du travail, Bunia, 5 January 2007, p. 1.

As industrial mining declined, many miners in the Kilo belt turned to artisanal mining. This activity was initially illegal but local mining officials turned a blind eye, not least because they obtained money from taxes and fees. In 1981, Mobutu restructured the mining sector, formally legalizing—and taxing—artisanal mining in the Kilo belt and other gold-producing regions. This made artisanal mining a viable livelihood at a time when poverty was endemic and the Ituri economy, like that of Zaire generally, was in rapid decline. During the 1980s and early 1990s, tens of thousands of local people, joined by Congolese from across the nation, became involved in artisanal mining in Ituri.

When the mining sector was liberalized in 1981, local businessmen in the eastern DRC had an opportunity to enter the gold business. The Kilo-Moto company had previously controlled all the gold coming out of Ituri's Kilo belt, but the growth of artisanal mining and the erosion of government control in the mining areas made room for a pivotal new entrepreneurial activity: that of the gold trader. Businessmen from Ituri and North Kivu entered the trade, using gold as hard currency to purchase consumer goods from neighbouring Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi.

By the early 1990s, two factors combined to make Kampala the primary destination for Ituri's gold. The first was civil war and political instability in Burundi, Rwanda, and the Kivus. During the 1980s, Kambale Kisoni—based in Butembo, North Kivu—emerged as one of the main traders in Ituri's gold. Kisoni sold most of his gold to the Belgian businessman Antoine 'Tony' Goetz, who operated from the Burundian capital, Bujumbura. During 1993–94, another round of violent conflict in the Kivus, Rwanda, and Burundi made it difficult to transport gold to Bujumbura, and Kisoni started to shift his gold business towards Uganda. In addition, the Burundian government terminated Goetz's free trade status in May 1995, giving Kisoni and other traders further reason to switch to Kampala.

Kisoni's own story is a microcosm of the wider conflict in the eastern DRC, involving the pursuit of natural resources, alliances of convenience with armed groups, and the involvement of both neighbouring states and the wider international community. To secure the acquisition of gold from the Kilo area, he subsequently collaborated with two militias—the

Rassemblement congolais pour la démocratie-Mouvement de libération (RCD-ML, Congolese Rally for Democracy-Liberation Movement) and the FNI—at times when both armed groups were allied to the Ugandan government.³² Kisoni continued to trade his gold in Kampala, but in 2005 the UN Security Council placed him on its sanctions list for violating the Council’s arms embargo. In 2007, several men entered the DRC from Uganda and killed Kisoni in his office in Butembo.³³

The second factor related to changes in Ugandan government policy. During the early 1990s, as Uganda started to recover from decades of misrule and conflict, the government liberalized the economy in accordance with prescriptions from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. In 1993, the government of President Yoweri Museveni embraced an initiative to promote regional trade, and started to pursue export-driven economic growth.³⁴ A year later, as part of its restructuring programme, the government abolished the Bank of Uganda’s monopoly on the purchase of gold, revoked the gold export tax, and relaxed administrative burdens imposed on trading companies.³⁵

These changes in Ugandan policy helped to redirect Ituri’s gold trade towards Kampala. In the first quarter of 1995, Uganda exported only 1 kg of gold; by the third quarter of 1996, exports had increased to 1,099 kg.³⁶ Uganda’s own gold production was negligible during these two years—2 kg and 3 kg respectively—and its vastly increased exports were simply a re-export of Congolese gold, much of it from Ituri. By the eve of the

32 Stearns, *North Kivu*, pp. 32–3.

33 Dan Fahey, ‘*Le Fleuve d’Or: The Production and Trade of Gold from Mongbwalu, DRC*’, in S. Marysse et al., *L’Afrique des Grands Lacs, Annuaire 2007-2008* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2008), pp. 373–5.

34 Paul Collier and Ritva Reinikka, ‘Reconstruction and Liberalization: An Overview,’ in Ritva Reinikka and Paul Collier, *Uganda’s Recovery: The Role of Farms, Firms, and Government* (Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2001), pp. 31–9.

35 P.M. Mobbs, *The Mineral Industry of Uganda* (Washington, DC: US Geological Survey, 1997), p. 221.

36 Bank of Uganda, *Annual Report 1998/99* (Kampala: Bank of Uganda, 1999), p. 81.

First Congo War in 1997, Kampala had already become a major transit point for gold produced in Ituri.

By January 2013, Ituri's political economy was poised for further changes with the potential to have an impact on conflict dynamics. These changes included the possible resumption—perhaps during 2013—of industrial gold mining in Ituri by AngloGold Ashanti and the start of oil exploration by Total near the Lake Albert shoreline, should security conditions allow.

Land disputes

The concept of land in Ituri is complex and multi-dimensional. As in the eastern DRC more generally, various aspects of land ownership—economic, political, social, and even spiritual—continuously interact, informing narratives about land rights.

In the post-independence era, land emerged as an important element in power struggles among local political and economic elites. One source of conflict was the redistribution of colonial-era concessions in Ituri, which happened as a result of two changes in government policy. On 7 June 1966, President Mobutu approved the so-called Bakajika Law, which annulled all land titles granted before independence and required prior titleholders to reapply to the Zairean government.³⁷ Then, on 30 November 1973, President Mobutu unveiled his 'Zaireanization' programme, which nationalized 'farms, ranches, plantations, concessions, commerce, and real estate agencies'.³⁸

Even prior to Mobutu's laws, some businessmen and customary authorities acquired concessions from the government and from expatriate owners, but the Zaireanization plan resulted in a large-scale reallocation of concessions—indeed, whole industries—into the hands of those with political connections. In Ituri, Hema businessmen benefited

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 37 Stearns, *North Kivu*, p. 24.

38 Crawford Young and Thomas Turner, *The Rise and Decline of the Zairian State* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), p. 326.

most from this process due to their political ties to the Mobutu regime. One prominent Hema politician, D'zbo Kalogi, served as national Vice-Minister of Agriculture from 1970–1974, Minister of Mines from 1974–77, and Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development from 1986–87. It remains unclear how many concessions were obtained by such leading personalities, but various sources suggest they acquired a majority of the concessions in Ituri's Irumu and Djugu territories.³⁹

In the mid-1970s, Lendu political leaders became more active in expressing opposition to Hema dominance in Ituri, partly in response to Hema acquisition of large tracts of land in predominantly Lendu areas. In 1974, a Lendu leader, Soma Mastaki, created the *Parti de libération des Walendu* (PLW, Walendu Liberation Party) to advance the political demands of the Lendu community—but it soon degenerated into a violent anti-Hema militia. Following several confrontations, the provincial governor organized talks that led to a 1975 pact of reconciliation between the Lendu and Hema communities.

During the political tumult that marked Mobutu's decline and the lead-up to multiparty democracy in the 1990s, latent tensions between Lendu and Hema leaders re-emerged. One source of tension derived from so-called 'cultural associations' created by Lendu and Hema leaders, similar to the *mutuelles* in the Kivus. The Lendu had the *Association culturelle pour la libération des opprimés et rejetés de l'Ituri* (ACL, Cultural Association for the Liberation of Ituri's Oppressed and Rejected—known locally by the second part of the French acronym, LORI), while the Hema created ENTE. These ostensibly cultural organizations, however, only increased mutual suspicion, with Hema leaders accusing their Lendu counterparts of promoting an active political and economic agenda, and vice versa.

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39 Dan Fahey, 'Rethinking the Resource Curse: Natural Resources and Polywar in the Ituri District, Democratic Republic of the Congo' (PhD thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 2011), p. 67.

In Djugu territory, land conflicts were particularly intense in Walendu Pitsi *collectivité*, where Lendu leaders claimed customary rights over concessions acquired by Hema businessmen after independence. In 1995, the LORI branch in Walendu Pitsi reportedly had a plan to ‘expropriate the concessions and fields of non-Lendu, particularly of the Hema’.⁴⁰ Around the same time, several Hema landowners in Walendu Pitsi acquired—allegedly through political connections—rights to expand their concessions, often by annexing land from neighbouring Lendu villages.⁴¹

Simultaneously, a long-standing boundary dispute in Irumu territory also reignited Hema-Lendu hostility. The dispute centred on whether three villages (Nombe, Lakpa, and Lagabo) were part of Walendu Bindi *collectivité* (ruled by Ngiti) or Bahema Sud *collectivité* (ruled by Hema). The disagreement dated back to the 1910s, when colonial administrators appointed the controversial Hema chief Bomera to rule this part of Irumu. During the remainder of the colonial era, administrators changed the Walendu Bindi–Bahema Sud boundary several times. By independence, the three villages were officially part of Bahema Sud, although Walendu Bindi authorities continued to claim authority.

In 1966, violence had erupted over rightful administration of the three disputed villages. Walendu Bindi authorities organized Ngiti demonstrations but they were crushed by Mobutu’s soldiers. There were additional protests over the rightful administrative control of the enclave during the 1970s and 1980s, similarly suppressed by Mobutu’s security and political apparatus. In addition, Walendu Bindi leaders sought to extend their control to the southwest shore of Lake Albert, claiming that the colonial authorities had wrongfully given Ngiti lakeshore lands to Hema chiefs.

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40 Service national d’intelligence et de protection, République du Zaïre, ‘Note d’Information au Commissaire S/Regional de L’Ituri a Bunia; Concerne: Cas de l’association culturelle “LORI” dans la Collectivite des Walendu/Pitsi’ (No. 05/00/451/SNIP/DI/462/95), 30 November 1995.

41 Dan Fahey, ‘This Land is My Land: Land Grabbing in Ituri,’ in *Land Grabbing in the Great Lakes Region of Africa* (ed. An Ansoms) (forthcoming).

In 1993, following another episode of Hema-Ngiti conflict that was put down by the Congolese army, the Governor of Haut-Zaïre—as Orientale Province was then known—went to Bunia to meet with representatives of Bahema Sud and Walendu Bindi. Both sides signed a peace agreement on 18 July 1993; under its provisions, the people of Nombe, Lakpa, and Lagabo were allowed to vote in a non-binding referendum on their administration, while Walendu Bindi was required to relinquish all claims to the shore of Lake Albert in Bahema Sud *collectivité*. On 19 September, the people of the enclave voted overwhelmingly to be administered by Walendu Bindi. The following year, local administrators forwarded the referendum results to the Ministry of Interior in Kinshasa—but the ministry took no action. In December 1996, the *Alliance des forces démocratiques pour la libération du Congo-Zaïre* (AFDL, Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire) took control of Ituri and Mobutu’s government fell in May 1997.

Disputes over land boundaries, ownership, and access have been important triggers for violence in Ituri. Many of these disputes have their origins in colonial and post-independence policies, but during the mid-to-late 1990s, local struggles for political and economic power incorporated land issues in ways that produced violent conflict and a ‘war within the war’ in Ituri. During the larger Congo Wars, local actors—including businessmen, customary authorities, and villagers—grabbed land throughout Ituri, creating hundreds of disputes over access, ownership, and boundaries that by early 2013 still remained unresolved, threatening to reignite communal conflict.⁴²

42. IKV Pax Christi and RHA, ‘Conflits fonciers en Ituri’ (Utrecht/Bunia, IKV/RHA, 2009).

4. Conclusions and policy considerations

Amid all the DRC's internal and international conflicts, the Ituri region has experienced some of the worst atrocities and the most egregious plundering of resources. But this recent violence and exploitation has strong historical roots. The colonial enterprise in Ituri significantly disrupted local social relations by privileging groups such as the Hema, rewarding them for both material collaboration and a presumed ethnic superiority—while marginalizing groups such as the Lendu, which resisted colonization. The Belgian pursuit of stability to facilitate resource extraction gave a racial dimension to differences between Hema and Lendu, thereby creating attitudes and identities that later influenced the formation and actions of Ituri's UPC, FNI, and FRPI rebel groups.

While the scars of colonialism are clear and enduring in Ituri, the legacy of the Mobutu era on society, politics, and commerce arguably had a greater influence on contemporary conflicts in the region, allowing a small Hema elite to acquire rights to many colonial-era ranches and plantations, particularly in parts of Ituri with large Lendu populations. An emergent Lendu elite chafed at the perpetuation of Hema political and economic dominance, and increasingly asserted its claims over territory in Djugu and Irumu.

As the Mobutu regime grew progressively weaker and as the national and local economies deteriorated, district-level struggles for political and economic power intensified. Local elites sharpened their rhetoric during the mid-1990s—even as most people in Ituri were living in peaceful coexistence and focusing on basic survival during difficult times. Yet by the late 1990s, elite manipulation of historical inequities and perceptions of injustice combined with Ugandan exploitation of local conflicts to produce a bitter, protracted war in Ituri.

Changes in the way gold resources were exploited during the 1980s and early 1990s added to this. The erosion of the state and the decline of industrial mining during the Mobutu era created new opportunities for local populations to mine and for local businessmen to trade gold. The

existence of a labour-intensive artisanal mining industry—as opposed to capital-intensive and European-run industrial operations—facilitated its exploitation by armed groups. In addition, the gold trading networks established during that time were easily integrated into war structures, which helped to prolong war and insecurity in Ituri.

This history has profound implications for policy-makers and those who wish to influence policy. The deep wounds inflicted both by historical processes and by recent conflict are clearly visible in Ituri, but there have been incomplete and insufficient efforts to heal them. Therefore, a comprehensive peace process is needed. Elements could include governmental efforts to identify land boundaries and ownership clearly, as well as a locally-driven truth and reconciliation commission to facilitate open and honest discussion about Ituri's history. Such a commission could also identify ways to integrate development and peace-building initiatives better.

While competition for Ituri's natural resources did not cause conflict in Ituri, it certainly prolonged it and so needs to be addressed. The informal dynamics of the resource sector have today become deeply entrenched in Ituri's political economy, due in part to the involvement of Congolese and Ugandan government officials. As a result, exploitation of Ituri's valuable resources is having little discernible impact on poverty alleviation; indeed, it continues to be characterized by structural violence that sustains poverty, fosters insecurity, and causes environmental degradation.

Smarter sanctions from the UN Security Council, greater Ugandan efforts to curb illegal activity, and altruistic leadership by Hema and Lendu elites would be a start. But the only key player that can make a definitive difference in addressing this problem is the government of the DRC. Were the state to enforce its own laws and end the culture of corruption that allows government officials and soldiers to engage in the illicit production and trade of Ituri's resources, a lasting peace could perhaps be achieved in Ituri.

Glossary of acronyms, words, and phrases

ACL	<i>Association culturelle LORI</i> / LORI (q.v.) Cultural Association, a Lendu organization
AFDL	<i>Alliance des forces démocratiques pour la libération du Congo-Zaïre</i> / Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire
<i>arabisés</i>	Congolese captured and forced to become soldiers in the service of Zanzibari traders
<i>chef de zone</i>	district commissioner
<i>collectivité</i>	chiefdom (part of the customary administration) or <i>secteur</i> (q.v.)
ENTE	Hema cultural association
FNI	<i>Front nationaliste intégrationniste</i> / Nationalist and Integrationist Front
FRPI	<i>Forces de résistance patriotique d'Ituri</i> / Ituri Patriotic Resistance Forces
<i>grand chef</i>	paramount chief
Hema	Traditionally pastoralists. Northern Hema or Gegere adopted Lendu (q.v.) lifestyles and language, while the southern Hema assimilated less
ICC	International Criminal Court
Lendu	Traditionally farmers, later acquired livestock from Hema (q.v.) pastoralists who moved into Lendu territory
LORI	<i>Libération des opprimés et rejetés de l'Ituri</i> / Liberation of Ituri's Oppressed and Rejected', see ACL (q.v.)
MONUC	<i>Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies au Congo</i> / United Nations Mission in Congo
PLW	<i>Parti de libération des Walendu</i> / Walendu Liberation Party
RCD-ML	Rassemblement Congolais pour la démocratie-Mouvement de libération /Congolese Rally for Democracy-Liberation Movement
<i>secteur</i>	sector; parallel administrative branch

UPC

Union des patriotes Congolais / Union of Congolese
Patriots

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THE USALAMA PROJECT IS ONE OF THE RARE STUDIES THAT ALLOW ONE TO GRASP THE DYNAMICS OF THE PERSISTENCE AND PROLIFERATION OF ARMED GROUPS IN THE EASTERN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO. THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PROJECT'S DIFFERENT REPORTS SHOW A WAY TO ESTABLISH A SUSTAINABLE SOLUTION TO THE ARMED CONFLICT.

—NICKSON KAMBALE KASOLA, LAWYER AND DIRECTOR OF THE CENTRE FOR GOVERNANCE, KINSHASA



Catholic University of Bukavu



OPEN SQUARE PROJECT

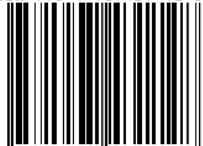


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