

# Local Violence, National Peace? Postwar “Settlement” in the Eastern D.R. Congo (2003–2006)

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*Editors’ note:* The following essay won the prize for the best paper presented by a graduate student at the annual meeting of the African Studies Association in Washington, D.C., Fall 2005.

**Abstract:** This article develops a conceptual analysis of the dynamics of violence during the transition from war to peace and democracy in the Democratic Republic of Congo between 2003 and 2006. I locate the sources, at the local, national, and regional levels, of continued local violence during this transition. Through an analysis of the situation in the Kivus, I illustrate how local dynamics interacted with the national and regional dimensions of the conflict. I demonstrate that, after a national and regional settlement was reached, some local conflicts over land and political power increasingly became self-sustaining and autonomous from the national and regional tracks.

**Résumé:** Dans cet article, je propose une analyse conceptuelle des mécanismes de la violence durant les trois années officiellement consacrées à la transition de la guerre à la paix et à la démocratie en République Démocratique du Congo (de 2003 à 2006). J’identifie, au niveau local, national et régional, les raisons pour lesquelles la violence a perduré localement au cours de cette période. J’analyse la situation dans les Kivus pour illustrer l’interaction entre les mécanismes de la violence situés à ces différents niveaux. Je démontre que, après la signature d’accords

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de paix nationaux et régionaux, certains conflits locaux portant sur les terres et le pouvoir politique se sont progressivement dissociés des processus nationaux et régionaux et sont devenus autonomes.

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## Introduction

A year after the war in the Democratic Republic of Congo officially ended on June 30, 2003, more than one thousand civilians continued to die every day. Most of the deaths were caused by disease and malnutrition and could have been prevented if outbursts of violence had not impeded access to humanitarian aid, especially in the east (International Rescue Committee 2004). In April 2004, for example, the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs wrote the following situation report:

The security situation was the most worrying this month in North-Kivu, South-Kivu and Katanga Provinces in the Eastern region of the Democratic Republic of Congo. . . . As a consequence of the fighting and increased tension in these three regions, approximately 30–35,000 people were estimated displaced over the course of this month. In addition to the displacement, [the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs] continued to receive reports of massacres, cannibalism, rapes, looting, extortion and other serious violations of human rights being committed by various armed groups, leaving questions as to whether or not the protection situation for civilians living in [the Congo] has improved since the war officially ended last year.

Even though the situation improved somewhat in 2005 and 2006, similar reports of tensions and local hostilities could be found in all weekly and monthly U.N. humanitarian situation reports covering the Congolese transition from war to peace and democracy (June 2003–December 2006). What were the reasons for the continued violence during the transition?

In June 2003, a settlement seemed to have been reached at the international and national levels. The foreign troops that withdrew from the Congo in 2002 and 2003 officially remained out of Congolese territory. Normal diplomatic ties, including the exchange of ambassadors, resumed between former enemies. Important developments also took place at the national level, such as the official reunification of the country, the formation of a unified government, the preparation for democratic elections, and a progressive integration of the different armed groups into a single national army.

However, local conflict—at the level of the village, the district, or the

community—persisted in the eastern Congo. Political, economic, and social antagonisms generated frequent massacres, massive human rights violations, and population displacement. Throughout the transition from war to peace, the ongoing violence maintained the overall atmosphere of terror of the war period.

Local agendas have been a source of conflict and violence throughout modern Congolese history. Local antagonisms over land and traditional power led to violence long before the warfare of the 1990s. Most of these conflicts involved only a few villages, communities, or provincial leaders. In the case of the conflict between the Rwandophone minority and the “indigenous” communities, however, local actors engaged national and regional politicians in their fight from the 1960s onward.<sup>1</sup> These local tensions, combined with the retreat of the Congolese state, the ruling strategy of Mobutu which enhanced local antagonisms, and the arrival of thousands of Rwandan Hutus after the 1994 genocide, precipitated two wars in the late 1990s.

During this period of warfare, local political, economic, and social agendas contributed to the widespread and horrific violence. These local dynamics interacted with national and regional causes of violence and provided the pretext for the national and regional fighting that took place throughout the eastern Congo. At the same time, national and regional cleavages reinforced local tensions. Then, at the end of this time, both pre-existing and war-induced local cleavages fueled ongoing local violence in the east.<sup>2</sup> Although some progress was made compared to the situation during the war, many areas of the eastern Congo remained very unsafe, and many Congolese continued to suffer from violence waged by one of the many armed groups still active.

Many of the international actors I interviewed, especially high-ranking diplomats and U.N. staff members, do not believe that local causes played a decisive role in sustaining national and regional violence during the war and in the postwar period. During the transition, diplomats, U.N. staff, and many nongovernmental organizations worked mostly on the national and regional cleavages, mediating among, and when necessary putting pressure on, the main Congolese, Rwandan, and Ugandan political and military leaders. Their role at the local level was often nonexistent (Autesserre 2006).

I claim that local dynamics remained key after the war formally ended. In making my case, I proceed as follows. First, I present my analytical framework. Second, I locate the sources at the local, national, and regional levels of continued local violence during the transition. I emphasize the importance and distinctiveness of local agendas in the Congo as well as the local dimension of problems usually considered as purely national and regional (i.e., the status of the Rwandophone minority and the presence of the rebel Rwandan Hutu militias). Third, I provide a brief overview of the situation in North and South Kivu. I document how the interlocking nature

of these tensions caused violence to spread from one level to the other. I illuminate how the dynamics of this interconnection created economic and political opportunities for individual and group actors, who then had an interest in ensuring that violence continued—even if they dissimulated and provided rhetorical assurances to the contrary. I also demonstrate that, after a national and regional settlement was reached, some local conflicts over land, political power, and ethnic antagonism increasingly became self-sustaining and autonomous from the national and regional tracks.

I focus on three of the four most violent areas of the Congo during the transition: the provinces of North Kivu, South Kivu, and North Katanga. I do not include in my analysis the Ituri district because the patterns of violence there were very different from the dynamics of violence in the other areas. I draw on field observations in Kinshasa and the provinces of Katanga and the Kivus conducted between 2001 and 2006; document analysis; and more than 280 interviews conducted with Congolese political, military, diplomatic, and civil society actors, victims of violence, diplomats, staff of international organizations, and foreign observers—in the Congo, France, Belgium, New York, and Washington, D.C. Given the substantial degree of political tension and uncertainty surrounding the themes of this article, and given the culture of secrecy pervasive in U.N. and diplomatic circles, most of the people I interviewed preferred to remain anonymous. For this reason, I reference only the data obtained through on-record interviews or in public sources. Unless otherwise indicated, the rest of the information presented in this article comes from the author's anonymous interviews, and each observation has been confirmed by at least five different sources.

## **Analytical Framework**

The paucity of research on the impact of local violence on the viability of peace processes constitutes a significant gap in the scholarly literature on conflict resolution. How can we analyze the dynamics of violence—particularly at the local level—during the Congolese transition? Is localized violence merely a manifestation of national and regional tensions or is it distinctive in character? If the latter, how does local violence interface with violence at the national and regional levels? Are local agendas independent of and autonomous from, or connected to and dependent on, national and regional motivations?

Academics and practitioners often share the same flawed interpretation of conflict (Kalyvas 2003). Most analysts perceive local dynamics “as a mere (and rather irrelevant) local manifestation of the central cleavage” and local actors as mere “replicas of central actors” (Kalyvas 2003:481). In his comparative analysis of civil wars, Kalyvas (2003:482) emphasizes instead “the presence of considerable local input and initiative in the pro-

duction of violence. Rather than being imposed upon communities by outsiders . . . , violence often (but not always) grows from within communities even when it is executed by outsiders” (see also Kalyvas 2006).

To illuminate the multiple layers and connections among conflicts at different levels, I build on Kalyvas’s analysis that local and national dimensions of violence interact through two distinct mechanisms: cleavage and alliance. “Cleavage” refers to the “overarching issue dimension”—that is, ideology, ethnicity, religion, or class—which links actors at the center to actors on the ground (Kalyvas 2003:476). “Alliance” is a concept that links the central actors’ quest for national power to the local actors’ quest for local advantages. It “entails a transaction between supralocal and local actors, whereby the former supply the latter with external muscle, thus allowing them to win decisive local advantage; in exchange the former rely on local conflicts to recruit and motivate supporters and obtain local control, resources, and information” (Kalyvas 2003:486).

Although I agree with Kalyvas’s insight, I find it necessary to modify his analytical framework in order to account adequately for the dynamics of violence during the Congolese transition. First, Kalyvas’s analysis includes only the local and national dimensions. He misses the international dimension that is so often present in civil wars, such as the involvement of Liberia in Sierra Leone, Pakistan and Iran in Afghanistan, the United States in Columbia, and Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi, Angola, and Zimbabwe in the Congo. Instead of using Kalyvas’s binary framework (local-national), I use a three-tiered framework (local-national-regional), in which the local can be further subdivided into several different levels: the individual, the family, the clan, the municipality, the community, the district, the ethnic group, and the province.

Second, Kalyvas tends to conceptualize the local dimension as the complete opposite of the national dimension. To him, the master cleavages stem from political, ideological, ethnic, or economic issues. Although he mentions the political and social aspects of local factionalism (2006:365–74), in most of his analyses the local dimension operates at a level that does not extend beyond the strictly local. In his study of denunciation, for example, the local conflicts often evolve from the realm of the private: personal grudges, professional jealousy, family feuds, romantic rivalries, individual fights (2006:346–52). I argue, however, that although local conflict operates on a scale that is different from that of national and international conflict, it is not necessarily of a different nature: local conflict is also rooted in political, ideological, ethnic, economic, or social antagonisms among groups; it is not essentially private.

Third, Kalyvas hypothesizes that top-down mechanisms (cleavages) are likely to do “most of the ‘heavy lifting’ before the war, during its initial stages, or after the war has ended,” while the bottom-up mechanism (alliance) may prevail when the war is under way (Kalyvas 2003:487). I demonstrate that alliances can also prevail during the postconflict period.

## Identifying the Different Loci of Violence during the Transition: Regional, National, and Local Patterns

### *Regional Causes of Local Violence*

In March 2005, the U.N. Security Council denounced Rwanda's and Uganda's continuing involvement in supporting the armed groups responsible, among other things, for the perpetuation of violence in the Congo. In particular, Rwanda remained physically present in the Kivus, and in 2004 it often carried out hit-and-run operations in the border regions (Romkema 2004). Rwandan troops often crossed the border to patrol areas of North and South Kivu; the Rwandan Army maintained "semi-fixed positions" in North Kivu (U.N. Security Council 2004); and the U.N. Mission in the Congo (Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies au Congo, or MONUC) denounced the presence of Rwandese soldiers there in March 2004 (interview with MONUC official, 2005; informal communication with foreign observer, 2004; Institute for Security Studies 2004). Many witnesses have claimed that in November 2004 Rwandan army trucks had crossed into the Congo; although MONUC never confirmed the presence of Rwandan troops there, evidence of an invasion was sufficient for the United Kingdom and Sweden to suspend substantial quantities of aid to Rwanda (Global Witness 2005; International Crisis Group 2005:21–22; author's interviews, spring 2005; review of press articles).

Three important incentives were at the root of the Rwandan involvement in the Congo during the transition: first, the threat posed by the continued presence of Rwandan Hutu militias; second, the problem of ethnic hatred against Congolese Rwandophones; and third, the appeal of the Kivus' mineral resources.

During the transition, armed groups affiliated with the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (Forces Démocratique pour la Libération du Rwanda, or FDLR) remained heavily present in both Kivus.<sup>3</sup> They included combatants as well as family members of the combatants, refugees, and political opponents forced to flee by Kagame's crackdown on opposition parties. Congolese and international observers often labeled these people—combatants as well as noncombatants—as "Interahamwés," while the Rwandan government insisted that they were mostly "former *génocidaires*." However, many well-informed interviewees confirmed that only a small number of those responsible for the 1994 genocide were in the Congo. Most of the FDLR were people who had arrived in the Congo when they were young, had grown up there as refugees, and used violence because they had no other means of subsistence.

The Rwandan government often complained about this continued FDLR presence in the Congo and emphasized the threat it posed to its country. Kigali, therefore, threatened several times—notably in November 2004 and in April 2005—to invade the Congo again should Congolese and

international actors fail to solve the FDLR problem. However, the relatively small group of FDLR combatants remaining in the Congolese forests did not seem to pose a real danger to Rwanda (author's interviews with foreign political and military observers and with peace builders working with the FDLR, 2004–6). Contrary to Kagame's propaganda, there had been no attacks, only a few infiltrations since the last major FDLR assault on Rwanda in spring 2001. The danger posed by FDLR troops further decreased after the 2005 Sant'Egidio negotiations forced the FDLR leadership to officially renounce the armed struggle.

Many Congolese and international observers wondered, therefore, whether Kagame's assertions that he was worried by the FDLR presence in the Congo were perhaps "all an act, or a pretext."<sup>4</sup> They emphasized that, contrary to these claims, Kagame apparently did not want Hutu militias to be repatriated. First, "not even a single combatant came back when the Rwandans were in the Congo." Second, Kagame and his ally, the Congolese Rally for Democracy-Goma (Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie-Goma, or RCD-G), presented many obstacles to the U.N. program that was organizing the pacific repatriation of the FDLR.<sup>5</sup> Thus many interviewees claimed that Kagame knew that the FDLR was not a real threat to Rwanda, but that he had several reasons to prefer either its extermination or continued roaming in the Congo. Keeping the FDLR out of Rwanda ensured that the movement could not become an official, recognized opposition to the Rwandan ruling party. Keeping the FDLR in the Congo also allowed Kagame to maintain a permanent quasi-state of war in Rwanda and therefore to restrict civil rights and clamp down on opposition parties. Finally, according to many interviewees, the FDLR presence in the Congo provided Kigali with a pretext for coming back into the Kivus and pursuing what Rwanda was truly interested in: protecting the Rwandophones and exploiting the Congo's resources.

During the transition, the members of the Rwandophone community of the Congo were subject to considerable discrimination and abuse, and many Congolese groups contested their very right to live on Congolese territory. This hatred fed Rwanda's alleged concerns for a potential "genocide" of Rwandophone communities. Several times during the transition—notably after the May–June 2004 fighting in Bukavu and the August 2004 massacre in Gatumba—Rwanda threatened to go back into the Congo if Kabila did not take appropriate measures to protect the Rwandophone minority and stop the anti-Rwandophone propaganda. The Congolese felt deep resentment toward Rwanda because of its lengthy occupation of the eastern Congo; thus these threats reinforced the anti-Rwandophone feelings among the vast majority of the Congolese people and led to further discrimination and violence against Rwandophones.

Economic motivations also seemed largely to account for Rwanda's interest in the eastern Congo. U.N. and nongovernmental organizations noted the discrepancies between the very limited mining resources of

Uganda and Rwanda, and their massive exports of cassiterite, Coltan, tin, and gold (Global Witness 2005:4, 24–26; Pourtier 2004:4; U.N. Security Council 2005b: par 85–86). Global Witness’s (2005) case study on cassiterite documented how the Rwandan state was involved in this illegal trafficking: first as the prime beneficiary (the state-owned company Redemi being the major exporter of tin and cassiterite); and second as an armed actor able to secure mining sites when necessary. In addition, Rwandan officials and civilians also benefited from the trafficking because of the “important business links” they had developed with members of the RCD-G (Global Witness 2005:26). In the words of a MONUC spokesperson, “the economic dimension of the pillage of natural resources, with Rwanda and Uganda profiting especially, continues to be the key to their [involvement].”<sup>6</sup> This involvement was sporadic and aimed at influencing or supervising Congolese allies. The six-year conflict had enabled foreign countries to set up systems of exploitation that could continue functioning through Congolese proxies even after the Rwandan or Ugandan armies had withdrawn.

The combination of these security, political, and economic interests led Rwanda to actively support several armed groups responsible for local violence in the eastern Congo. At the end of 2003, Rwanda resumed military support to several Kivu militias (International Crisis Group 2004). Furthermore, Rwandan officials supported Kunda and Mutebusi during the 2004 conflict in Bukavu. They provided the renegade leaders with heavy arms and ammunition, uniforms, money, and a rear base in Rwanda to regroup and retreat when necessary, and helped them recruit soldiers (U.N. Security Council 2004). Rwanda also helped the North Kivu governor, Eugene Seruphuli (a Rwandophone affiliated with the RCD-G), arm Rwandophone civilians in Masisi and constitute additional local defense militias (Amnesty International 2005).

### *National Causes of Local Violence*

If regional agendas continued to cause violence during the transition, national dimensions remained similarly influential. Two series of causes for local violence can be identified at the national level: first, political and military issues (including a high distrust among participants in the Transitional Government, which was deepened by the slow pace of the transition, the personal ambitions of the national spoilers, and the hatred of Rwandophones); and second, economic issues.

Throughout the transition, the Transitional Government was mostly characterized by a distrust among the representatives of the different “components” of the transition institutions. These were the eight most powerful political or military groups at the outset of the civil war, and they had received an equal share of representation in the government, the parliament, and the national administration. The government did not work as a



team to manage the transition and lead the country, but rather as enemy factions bent on overtaking one another and on enhancing the political, military, symbolic, and financial position of their own parties. The internal antagonisms were such that the government stopped functioning as an entity during the third year of the transition.

The political and military unification at the top level (government and General Staff) was a smokescreen. It masked the fact that each component retained parallel military and administrative structures in order to maintain its territorial control to the furthest extent possible (Romkema 2004). In the administration, the strategic departments—police, security services, taxes, and so on—largely continued to operate along party lines all throughout the transition, although some technical departments—such as health, social affairs, and education—started functioning under the national authority in late 2003. Militarily, each component strived to maintain control over its former military assets under the umbrella of the newly unified army, the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of Congo (Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo, or FARDC).

This continuation of high-level hostilities created dire local consequences. In the eastern provinces, the antagonisms between the RCD-G and Kabila fueled the resistance of all former warring parties to the army integration process. The persistent distrust and lack of integration generated a highly volatile situation in those territories that continued to be controlled by troops affiliated with different factions, and led to both small-scale battles and several bouts of large-scale fighting.<sup>7</sup>

The local population was the first to suffer from this fighting. Each armed group used violence to deter villagers from supporting some other armed group. Prime examples were the actions of the RCD-G aimed at preventing villagers from collaborating with the Mai Mai in Rutchuru or with FDLR around Kayna; actions of the Mai Mai to prevent villagers from collaborating with the FARDC in Malemba-Nkulu; and actions of FDLR in Walungu to punish villagers for helping the FARDC in summer 2005 (author's interviews and review of press articles, 2003–6).<sup>8</sup> The Bukavu crisis also illustrated the Congolese armed groups' tendency to flee from their assailants; then, when the assailants had left or the groups had retaken a given city, they would take revenge on the population (see especially Human Rights Watch 2004).

The slow pace of the transition deepened the distrust among the participants in the Transitional Government and among different armed groups, and reinforced the negative consequences of this suspicion on the ground. Two main factors accounted for the transition's lack of progress: first, the above-mentioned struggle within the Transitional Government, which blocked the decision-making process; and second, the interests that most representatives had in stalling the transition process.

The Sun City and Pretoria peace agreements privileged a repartition of power between former warring parties, notwithstanding their lack of legit-

imacy in the eyes of the population. After the general elections scheduled for the end of the transition, only the allies of the winning party—which everybody expected to be President Kabila’s—would be able to retain their positions of authority. For prominent leaders investigated by the International Criminal Court, such as Vice-President Jean-Pierre Bemba, a longer transition meant continued immunity from prosecution. For the many government workers (at the top and at the bottom of the hierarchy) who were utterly incompetent and owed their nominations to their affiliation with one of the components, a long transition meant more time to enrich their coffers.<sup>9</sup>

One of the consequences of the slow pace of the transition was the continued absence of state authority in the east, especially in the rural areas. The eastern provinces had experienced a progressive retreat of state authority under Mobutu and a complete collapse of the state during the war. During the transition, the lack of state presence in the eastern Congo continued to be such that, in February 2005, the Belgian foreign minister found it appropriate to call the Congo a “failed state.” In the absence of state authority, the justice and police forces acted with impunity. Bias, corruption, and inefficiency were so widespread that these sectors lost all credibility with the Congolese people. At the same time, the lack of legitimate state authority in the east encouraged the continuation of violence, which seemed the easiest road to power and wealth. Thus civil as well as violent crime (including rape and kidnapping) persisted in many areas, unhindered by the nonfunctioning forces of law and order.

The conditions of impunity and the lack of legitimate state authority in the east also facilitated the illegal exploitation of resources. During the transition, the FDLR, Mai Mai, RCD-G, pro-Ugandan, pro-Rwandan, and criminal groups remained involved in illegal mining (Global Witness 2005; International Crisis Group 2005; Romkema 2004; U.N. Security Council 2005a, 2005b). Large quantities of cassiterite, Coltan, gold, diamonds, and palm nut crossed the borders every day and evaded the tax authorities. This situation, in turn, fueled the absence of state authority in the east: first, by reinforcing the reluctance of many local strongmen to work in good faith with the central authorities; and second, by depriving the Transitional Government of important resources that could have helped it extend its authority (informal communication, Congolese observer, June 2004; see also U.N. Security Council 2005e: par. 44; 73).

In addition to those representatives stalling the transition for political or individual reasons—and thus indirectly contributing to continued conflict—there were a few influential groups that used violence to end the peace process. The three main former warring parties—RCD-G, Congo Liberation Movement, and the Kabila government—were split between two sides: the legitimists, who wanted to play the game of the transition, and the warmongers, who either had everything to lose with the peace or had too much to gain from war to accept a settlement of the conflict. Two of

these groups could be held responsible for major outbreaks of violence in the east. RCD-G extremists triggered the Kunda-Mutebusi offensive on Bukavu (May 2004), the tensions in Masisi following North Kivu Governor Seruphuli's distribution of arms to local Hutus (Fall 2004), the Kanyabayonga crisis (December 2004), and the Rutchuru crisis (February 2006). The "Katangans" (that is, Kabila's former closest advisors, mostly ethnic Lubas from Katanga) sparked the February 2004 fighting between Mutebusi and Nabyola troops in Bukavu (Romkema 2004), reportedly encouraged Major Lengwe to attempt a coup d'état on the night of June 10–11, 2004 (International Crisis Group 2004), and engineered the ousting of former RCD soldiers, an act that precipitated the Kanyabayonga crisis.

If the personal ambitions of the national spoilers led to several clashes among different armed groups stationed in the east, hatred against Rwandophones was a much more pervasive source of violence. In Kinshasa, newspapers every day disparaged the Rwandophone community and their political party, the RCD-G: both were presented as the source of the war and of all the problems in the transition, and they were depicted as the "Trojan horse" of the abhorred Rwandese. Leaders from all side of the political spectrum defended a similar point of view, apparently for the sake of electoral advantage. Fueling ethnic hatred spared politicians the need to develop real political platforms. Rwandophone-bashing was an easy way to show one's patriotism and to appeal to the majority of the Congolese population. This led to a vicious circle: existing ethnic tensions encouraged national politicians to use anti-Rwandophone rhetoric, which further stirred ethnic hatred, which was an important cause of local violence in the eastern Congo.

Not only political issues, but also national economic agendas fueled tensions and violence in the east during the transition. The fight between Kinshasa- and Goma-based companies over trade in the eastern provinces both exploited and reinforced anti-Rwandophone feelings. In addition, national actors were often involved in the illegal exploitation of natural resources in the east. The RCD-G troops and administrative officials secured, taxed, and supervised the exploitation and transportation to Rwanda of the mining resources in their area of control (Global Witness 2005: 4, 16). Upon their arrival in the Kivu, numbers of FARDC brigades also became involved in mining: soldiers either dug minerals or taxed the local production, while the officers facilitated and benefited from the illegal exportation of minerals—notably cassiterite—to Uganda, Tanzania, or Rwanda (Global Witness 2005:17–20).

The national involvement in illegal mining generated local violence in three different ways. First, national actors competed among themselves as well as with local and foreign armed groups (notably Mai Mai and FDLR) for the control of mining sites. This led to frequent fighting over the key mining areas of the Kivu (Global Witness 2005:4, 8, 16). Second, illicit exploitation of resources enabled all armed groups to finance their war

efforts, which further fueled armed conflict (Staibano 2005:3; U.N. Security Council 2005c). Third, control of mining sites by national or local armed groups caused massive violence against the local population. Global Witness (2005:10) documents that in the mining areas of North and South Kivu, “violations against international human rights and humanitarian law were colossal. . . . Abuses on the part of government soldiers and other armed combatants targeted non-combatants and included killing, rape, torture, arbitrary arrests, intimidation, mutilation, the destruction or pillage of private property. . . [and] mass displacement.” The report goes on to show that all armed groups were involved in such violence against civilians and that these abuses were “integrally linked to natural resources, particularly in the eastern provinces, as they were employed as methods by which to gain control either over resource-rich areas or over the ability to [exploit them].”

Finally, diversion of funds for the army reinforced the soldiers’ tendency to prey on the population. Not only was the soldiers’ pay far too low to cover their basic needs, but it was also widely acknowledged that between 20 and 40 percent of it was embezzled. Furthermore, officials in Kinshasa and in the provinces diverted the funds for the integration of the army. The consequence was that the soldiers’ commanders, who did not have the resources to remunerate their troops adequately or provide them with basic supplies, encouraged them to make a living from the local population. A commander at the highest level acknowledged that military authorities had advised soldiers to “sort it out” (“se débrouiller”), which in the Congolese context meant helping oneself to the local population’s assets (humanitarian worker, 2004).

Thus all soldiers (belonging to all components) continued to harass the local population throughout the transition. This meant extorting the local residents, stealing all kinds of valuables in urban areas (money, mobile phones) and harvests or cattle in rural areas, and beating, raping, torturing, killing, or imprisoning those who refused to comply (author’s interviews with Congolese inhabitants of urban and rural areas, 2004–6). Abuses by soldiers trying to make a living were so widely reported that they seemed to be the most common form of low-level violence in the east. Of course, because local commanders either participated in these abuses or encouraged their troops to do so, appealing for justice within the military hierarchy never solved anything.

### *Local Causes of Violence*

If regional and national antagonism continued to generate high levels of violence at the local level, local conflict was also motivated by distinctly local causes. The main difference between the war period and the transition was that during the transition these local agendas became increasingly autonomous from the national and regional tracks.

During the transition, in the words of a conflict-resolution worker based in South Kivu (Romkema 2004b), “the environment at the grassroots level was very favorable to a rebellion” because the Congolese “were very divided.” In the east, the problem was not only “the most obvious division, ‘everybody against the Banyamulenges,’” but also the “hundreds of potential divisions, of local problems,” which were exploited by commanders and often erupted in violence. In North Kivu, South Kivu, and North Katanga, a mosaic of alliances and counteralliances separated the numerous ethnic groups in each province. The clan and ethnic tensions were usually articulated in terms of social, economic, and political issues. Clanic, ethnic, political, and social identities remained extremely fluid during the transition and individuals often switched allegiance from one group to another as opportunities arose. The causes of the divisions were intertwined both with one another and with national and regional agendas.

Lack of social opportunities during the war had led many young Congolese to turn to militias as the only source of social mobility (Van Acker & Vlassenroot 2000:25). These social motivations persisted after the war. A Western donor, for example (interviewed in 2005), claimed that the Mai Mai remained “very hungry for some respect and some identity.” Just as during the war, involvement in a militia gave its members the feeling of “[being] part of a thing, attached to a group,” and of being “recognized as something separate from the masses.” Individuals and groups—such as the youth and the pygmies—who, because of the war, had attained a status that was previously denied to them, had therefore strong incentives to perpetuate the violent situation that had enabled them to reach a higher social position.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, many Mai Mai chiefs knew that, should peace return to the Congo, they would lose their status as all-powerful, kinglike leaders and become once again mere soldiers—often ill-trained and illiterate (author’s interviews and informal communications, 2004–6). This was one of their main motivations for refusing to be integrated into the army (interview, Jean-Charles Dupin, humanitarian advisor, U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Bukavu, April 2005).

The second social cause of local violence was the threat of retaliation against those perceived as having wronged their neighbors or their communities during the war. This threat remained mostly latent throughout the transition period, but according to a humanitarian worker (Dupin 2005), it was one of the main problems that the return of refugees from Tanzania was likely to raise. It was also the main reason why, two years after the beginning of the transition, many refugees and displaced persons had failed to return to their home villages in the Kivus and North Katanga. They were “afraid of being accused of having supported someone, or taken this or that point of view, or afraid that the mere fact that they had fled was a sign that they had a bad conscience” (interview, Anders Vatn, head of mission, Norwegian Refugee Council, Goma, March 2005).

In addition to social issues, political antagonisms at the local level

fueled significant violence. Conflicts of succession continued to generate tensions similar to those that had existed before and during the war. During the transition, these were further complicated by the competition between new and traditional authorities. During the war, many traditional authorities (village, collectivity, or territory chiefs) had fled, either to escape ongoing violence or because an armed group (Mai Mai militias or RCD-G affiliates) had usurped their power. After the war, the return of the traditional authorities to their territories generated a high level of hostility. In the Osso and Bashali collectivities (North Kivu), the Hunde population reportedly sided with the newly returned traditional chief, himself a Hunde, against the Hutu chiefs who had seized power during the war; in retaliation the Hutu chiefs committed “a lot of abuses” against the supporters of their opponents (interview, Azile Tanzi, head of mission, Campagne Pour la Paix, Goma, April 2005). Because Hutus dominated the army stationed in the area, the Hundes could not express their dissatisfaction for fear of retaliation from the military apparatus. However, it was clear that, should the composition of the army change and become less pro-Hutu, the Hundes would very soon take revenge on their Hutu neighbors.

Such conflicts between new and traditional authorities were not limited to North Kivu. One of the main problems linked to the repatriation of refugees from Tanzania to South Kivu was the tension likely to arise with the return of traditional authorities to their area of origin (Dupin 2005). Similarly, while conducting interviews in a camp for displaced people in Nyunzu (North Katanga), I realized that, contrary to my expectations, people in the camps were not the lowest-ranking members of their communities but rather families of local traditional authorities (notably village and collectivity chiefs). Ordinary citizens had been allowed to go back to their villages, but when the chiefs tried to do so, the Mai Mai soldiers who had taken their place threatened them and forced them to leave again. Articles in the press suggested that this situation was common throughout Katanga. For example, Reuters reported that in the Mitwaba territory, “local administrators described [the Mai Mai] as a collection of bandits, poachers and gunmen trying to usurp the power of the local chiefs.”<sup>11</sup>

In addition to local conflict over traditional power, there was ethnic conflict over appointments in state institutions by transitional authorities. For example, in the Shabunda territory (South Kivu) in 2004, the Mai Mai General Padiri (himself a Tembo), who was recognized as a leading figure in the Mai Mai movement by the transitional authorities, reportedly appointed only Mai-Mai Tembo to important military and administrative positions. This led to several small-scale fights between the Mai-Mai Tembo and the Mai-Mai Rega, until the Mai-Mai Rega retaliated by chasing the Mai Mai-Tembo from Shabunda territory (interview, humanitarian worker, 2005). In most cases, such political tensions interfaced with economically motivated hostilities. Political power often guarantees access to land and economic resources, while access to wealth means, in turn, the availability

of resources to buy arms and reward troops and to secure political power. In particular, the land problems that had led to massive local violence before and during the war remained salient in the eastern Congo and often constituted the grassroots dimension of local conflicts (MONUC 2004).<sup>12</sup>

In South Kivu, land issues were usually the most important source of conflict in rural areas (humanitarian workers, 2006) and further problems were expected with the return of refugees (interview with Prof. Mugangu, Bukavu, July 26, 2006). In North Kivu, land problems were “the main source of local conflicts” in Masisi (Vatn 2005) and an important source of tension between RCD-G and Mai Mai groups stationed in Walikale in early 2004 (informal communication, humanitarian aid worker, June 2004). In North Katanga, the Bembes reportedly attempted to take over land in Holoholo and Kalanga areas. Local tensions over land sometimes erupted into open fighting, such as in Walikale (North Kivu) in June 2004, Bwerema (South Kivu) in December 2004, and Katogota (South Kivu) in November 2005 (International Crisis Group 2005:14; author’s interviews and review of press articles, 2004–6). They also greatly impeded the peaceful return of refugees and displaced persons because those in control of the land after the war threatened to use force to avoid giving it up.

Competition for the control of natural resources also remained a major cause of local conflict in the Kivus and North Katanga. In 2005, the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs claimed that the control of mineral resources was becoming the driving force of the Mai Mai phenomenon. In North Katanga, most of the Mai Mai chiefs had regrouped around the gold mines and were striving to control them. In Nyunzu, for example, violence took place mostly around the gold mines of the northern part of the territory. All of the armed groups based in the Kivus also used violence to access the mining resources of the provinces. For example, in Shabunda (South Kivu), the vice president of the Shabunda section of the Civil Society reported that “the armed forces” pitted against each other the persons who had legal claims on mineral-rich areas (interview, Buka Pole Pole, Shabunda, April 2005). When the tensions reached an alarming level and erupted in localized violence, armed forces usually intervened to disarm people and confiscate their exploitation rights. Then the armed forces would either exploit the concessions themselves or hand them over to a third party. Provincial and national commanders were reportedly bribed into looking the other way.

Finally, the need to find means of survival, which had pushed many civilians to enroll in militias during the war (Van Acker & Vlassenroot 2000), remained salient during the transition. Before the war, most of the Congolese population had faced massive poverty and unemployment. In the east, this situation deteriorated further during the war. Children and teenagers who had grown up during the war had not received proper schooling and thus were not well-prepared for pursuing peaceful and pro-

ductive activities. Land remained scarce, so young people could not easily acquire fields for farming, and the economic and development infrastructure was nonexistent. Outside intervention in the east continued to focus on humanitarian issues, and very few development projects were funded in the eastern provinces. In this context, being part of a militia remained the most profitable option. The continuing insecurity enabled Mai Mai militiamen to set up checkpoints and demand “tolls” from anyone who came through, and to make money “through looting, rackets, and blackmail.”<sup>13</sup>

### *Local Dimensions of the FDLR Problem*

These economic and political issues often motivated local alliances with the FDLR. Given the number of atrocities for which the FDLR is responsible, its leaders’ claims that their troops were often well integrated in the Kivus may have sounded like mere propaganda. However, the FDLR did benefit from the support of many local strongmen. The Mai Mai, their allies of the war period, often continued to collaborate with them in both Kivus during the transition. For example, in Fizzi, Mai Mai leaders reportedly hid FDLR combatants (interview, Congolese civilian, South Kivu, May 2004). In Walungu, some groups like the Rasta included both FDLR and Mai Mai soldiers. In Lamera (a Mai Mai–controlled zone near Uvira) on market day, one had to go through both Mai Mai and FDLR checkpoints before reaching the market itself, which reportedly swarmed with armed FDLR combatants (informal communications, humanitarian workers, 2005–6). In North Kivu, the FDLR reportedly collaborated with some Mai Mai groups, which enlisted them in their factional fighting against other Mai Mai groups.

During the transition, the FDLR even enrolled new allies: FARDC soldiers originally from Bemba’s or Kabila’s forces. A U.N. official working with the FDLR (interviewed in 2005) reported that these Congolese soldiers were “afraid of the FDLR” and therefore refused to attack them. Because they also were not paid and were poorly disciplined, they were easily bribed by the FDLR into assisting them in taxing and looting the Congolese population. In Shabunda territory, for example, the FDLR (based in the northern part of the territory, near Kalolo) were reportedly on very good terms with the FARDC brigades that were supposed to prevent them from raiding the local population. FDLR families peacefully cultivated their fields and regularly sold their products to the local market. Similar situations existed in the South Kivu territories of Kilembwe and Lamera (informal communications, humanitarian workers, 2004–6).

In addition to armed forces, local administrative authorities in places such as South Kivu and the Lubero and Walikale territories (North Kivu) also collaborated with the FDLR.<sup>14</sup> In these latter two areas, the authorities of the RCD-Kisangani/Liberation Movement (RCD-K/ML) largely tolerated the presence of FDLR members, provided they refrained from raping



and killing while they looted villages (humanitarian worker, 2005). In other areas, notably in Walikale, Rutchuru, Lemera, and Kilembwe, Congolese inhabitants reportedly accepted the FDLR living on their territory as long as they refrained from harassment (author's interviews, 2004–6; Willame, personal communication based on a discussion with a MONUC official, 2005).

The presence of FDLR in the Congo, which usually has been presented as a national or regional problem, was thus very much grounded in local dynamics, which reinforced national and regional interaction. Local alliances were key to perpetuating the FDLR presence on Congolese territory and the violence associated with it. To a high ranking R-FDLR official (2005), Rwandan Hutu refugees “would not have been able to survive” without the good relationships they had developed with the local population. FDLR groups were too small and too divided internally; they could not have remained on Congolese territory if they had been required to survive on their own while fighting back all Congolese military forces. On the contrary, support by local armed groups enabled the Rwandan combatants to recruit allies, to fight their opponents, and to hide from the FARDC (usually RCD-G) and MONUC troops determined to attack them. That local authorities tolerated the FDLR on mining territories also enabled the Rwandan militias to find the economic resources they needed to buy arms and continue fighting.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, this local collaboration enhanced the quality of life for the FDLR on Congolese territory and therefore diminished their incentives to peaceably return to Rwanda.<sup>16</sup> Support by local authorities, local forces, and sometimes local populations allowed FDLR forces to live near Congolese villages. In selected places such as Rutchuru, Shabunda, and Kilembwe, this enabled FDLR families to trade goods and services with the surrounding population. In other places, it provided the FDLR with the opportunity to live off the surrounding Congolese population through looting. Kidnappings, rapes, tortures, and massacres accompanied their raids on Congolese villages.

### *Local Dimensions of the Rwandophone Issue*

Contrary to a commonly held belief, the problem of the Rwandophone minority status, which had the potential of jeopardizing the regional and national peace settlements, also carried distinctively local stakes. Before the war, the Rwandophone problem was rooted in local conflicts around land and traditional power (Mamdani 2001; Willame 1997). During the transition, Rwandophones' claims on traditional political power—and their associated claims on land—continued to fuel anti-Rwandophone sentiments and to generate violence. Tensions were especially high in provinces where the Rwandophones constituted the largest ethnic group, as in Masisi, where they successfully managed to “prevent other groups from accessing... power” (Batahabi Bushoki, conference, City University of New York,

May 19, 2005). In South Kivu, where Rwandophones were a minority in all territories, their claim of entitlement to traditional representation also met with large resistance. There, the reason was that during the war the RCD-G had carved up a few territories such as Minembwe where Banyamulenges were the majority and could therefore rule the area. During the transition the Banyamulenges refused to abide by the requests of the “indigenous” communities to return to the prewar territorial arrangements.

All throughout South Kivu, these political and economic motivations were multiplied exponentially by the departure of Banyamulenges from Uvira and Bukavu in June 2004, after fighting took place there between Rwandophone and FARDC troops. Those who fled vacated the high positions and nice houses they had acquired during the war. “Indigenous” Congolese took over these jobs and houses, refused to restore them to the Banyamulenges who returned in late 2004, and tried to discourage the refugees from coming back and threatening their new wealth and authority (Dupin 2005; interview, NGO official, South Kivu, spring 2005). Given these local political and economic stakes, the return of the Banyamulenges who had fled generated many incidents of violence in 2004 and 2005. The most publicized one took place in September 2004 when, after 160 Banyamulenge refugees (mostly women and children) were massacred in a refugee camp in Gatumba (Burundi), hundreds of Banyamulenge refugees tried to return to the Congo from Burundi. They were blocked at the border for several days and obliged to stay in the “neutral zone” between the two countries. The first group that succeeded in reentering the Congo was stoned by an angry mob that reportedly had been organized by local authorities (interview, NGO official, South Kivu, spring 2005). After that incident, a few Banyamulenges trickled back into South Kivu, but many stayed in Burundi for over a year, afraid to go back.

### **Interaction between Local, National, and Regional Motivations: Understanding the Joint Production of Violence**

During the transition, then, just as during the war, local violence was motivated not only by top-down causes (regional or national) but also by bottom-up agendas.<sup>17</sup> This section illuminates the interaction among regional, national, and local dimensions of violence in two provinces: North Kivu, where national and regional master cleavages apparently caused most of the conflict, and South Kivu, where local agendas were more influential than national and regional issues in generating conflict.<sup>18</sup>

#### ***North Kivu: Master Cleavages and Local Alliances***

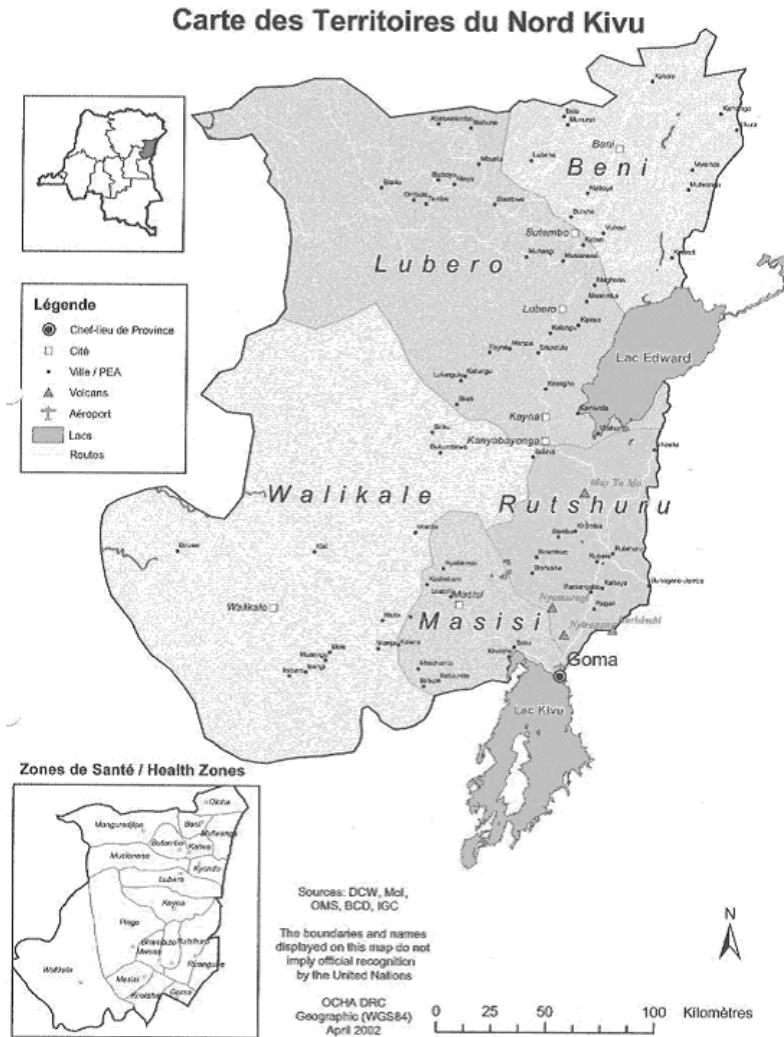
During the transition, North Kivu (see Figure 1) was marred by the combination of tensions among its eight ethnic communities—mostly caused

by land and citizenship issues—and by conflicts between the five armed groups present in the province (RCD-G, RCD-K/ML and government forces, FDLR, Mai Mai, and local defense forces). Most sources have characterized the violence in terms of the master ethnic cleavage (Rwandophones versus other ethnic communities) neatly superimposed, and running along the same dividing line, as the political cleavage (Kabila versus RCD-G).

After large-scale fighting took place around Bukavu in June 2004 and the RCD-G lost control of the South Kivu province, and while the political struggle between Kabila and the RCD-G continued unabated throughout the whole Congo (in particular in Kinshasa), the military conflict between these two enemies continued in one last place: North Kivu. The “Petit Nord” (the southern part of North Kivu, behind the former RCD-K/ML front line) remained the last stronghold of the RCD-G. The former rebel movement maintained absolute control there. In violation of one of the rules of the transition, both the governor (Eugene Seruphuli) and the regional military commanders (first General Obedie, then General Amisi) were RCD-G officials. Up until 2006, FARDC rank and file were not enlisted from each component but instead were exclusively former RCD-G soldiers. They were supported by the three-thousand-strong Local Defense Forces, a predominantly Hutu militia that North Kivu Governor Seruphuli created during the war and that Rwandan forces trained. North Kivu still had its own “financial coordinator” (a sort of finance minister). Its tax services still reported to Goma and not to their theoretical superiors in Kinshasa. Its revenues remained in the province instead of going to the capital. In addition, pro-RCD-G communities continued to hold the economic and social power of the province. As a result, from the Bukavu crisis onward, national politicians—except for those belonging to the RCD-G—thought of North Kivu as the exception: the province least integrated into the transition process and the last holdout, the place Kabila needed to take control of in order to unify the rest of the country. The regional dimension was also present—although less so than during the wars. Rwanda reportedly supported the RCD-G with its financial, military, and political might, and engaged in fighting against the Nandes, Mai Mai, and FDLR alongside RCD-G troops (author’s interviews, 2004–5; author’s review of press articles 2003–6; Global Witness 2005:26).

The Kabila government’s strength in its struggle against the RCD-G in North Kivu came in large part from the allies it had there: the RCD-K/ML, which kept the RCD-G busy on the northern front (along the same front line as during the war); and the Mai Mai, which fought against the RCD-G from within its area of control. During the transition, both of these allies were anti-RCD-G for provincial and local reasons rather than because of any convictions about the master conflict between Kabila and the RCD-G. Indeed, since colonization, North Kivu had progressively seen a strong polarization between its two most populous ethnic groups, the Banyarwan-

Figure 1. Map of North Kivu



das and the Nandes, over the control of the province (Willame 1997). During the war, the elites of these competing ethnic groups each controlled half of the province and allied themselves with different warring parties—the RCD-K/ML and Kabila for the Nandes, the RCD-G for the Banyarwandas. During the first months of the transition, the antagonism had reached such a point that the Banyarwandas and Nandes suspected each other of

harboring plans to eradicate the other (Bushoki 2005; MONUC 2004). In May 2004, the province was finally reunified administratively and put under the leadership of Eugene Seruphuli. However, this did not assuage the tensions between Banyarwandas and Nandes. On the contrary, members of non-Rwandophone ethnic groups living in Goma complained that the RCD-G's rule had a strong ethnic flavor, and it continued to be associated with Banyarwanda domination (Tanzi 2005). The "indigenous" ethnic groups deplored the fact that Rwandophones, as during the war, continued to occupy all political, military, and business positions of authority in the province. RCD-G soldiers continued to provide day-to-day protection to Banyarwanda groups in North Kivu, and RCD-G politicians continued to advocate for their cause nationally. As a result, up until the end of the transition, Nande Mai Mai groups remained extremely active in the "Grand Nord" for fear of a potential Banyarwanda invasion from the south. Despite administrative reunification, the front line between RCD-G and RCD-K/ML forces (allied with Rwanda's and Kabila's troops, respectively) remained active. Numerous skirmishes took place there in 2004, 2005, and 2006, and they erupted in a large-scale confrontation around Kanyabayonga in December 2004.

In addition, Kabila could also count on local tensions between "indigenous" and Rwandophone communities to recruit local allies, both political (as in the Civil Society party) and military (as in the Mai Mai militias) to fight against the RCD-G. For example, in Masisi and Rutchuru, Civil Society representatives and local militias had two reasons for fighting against anything perceived as part of a Rwandophone movement (MONUC 2004). First, the Hundes and the Nyangas felt that they were the only communities with a rightful claim on traditional (and political) representation. Although the Hutus were the majority population of the Masisi territory and demanded the right to adequate representation at the political and traditional levels, the Hundes and Nyangas saw them as "immigrants" who had arrived during the colonization or after independence and therefore had no legal claim on traditional power. As explored above, this led to major tensions regarding who could be named chief of a village or a collectivity, such as in the Osso and Bashili collectivities.

Second, Rwandophones (mostly Tutsis) owned about 80 percent of the land as a result of transactions they had made under Mobutu. However, the Hundes and the Nyangas claimed that the land was traditionally theirs: Mobutu should not have been allowed to sell it because it belonged to traditional authorities. The issue of land ownership was further complicated by the fact that many Tutsis had fled Masisi in the 1990s to escape the ongoing massacres, and either had abandoned their land or sold it at an artificially low price. When they came back after the 1996 and 1998 wars, they found their lands occupied and reportedly took all of it back, by force if necessary, including the land that had been sold legitimately (Tanzi 2005).

These local antagonisms over political and economic issues were car-

ried onto the military stage, particularly the conflict between the Mai Mai (allied with FDLR) and both the Local Defense Forces and the RCD-G. The Mai Mai represented the “indigenous” communities, whereas the RCD-G and Local Defense Forces were accused of siding with the Hutus and the Tutsis (Tanzi 2005). Fighting became more frequent and more violent after the 2004 Bukavu crisis, which generated a complete breakdown of trust between the RCD-G and the Mai Mai. In October 2004, the situation in Masisi became so tense that there was once again a real front line within the province, with both groups committing abuses against people crossing to the other side.

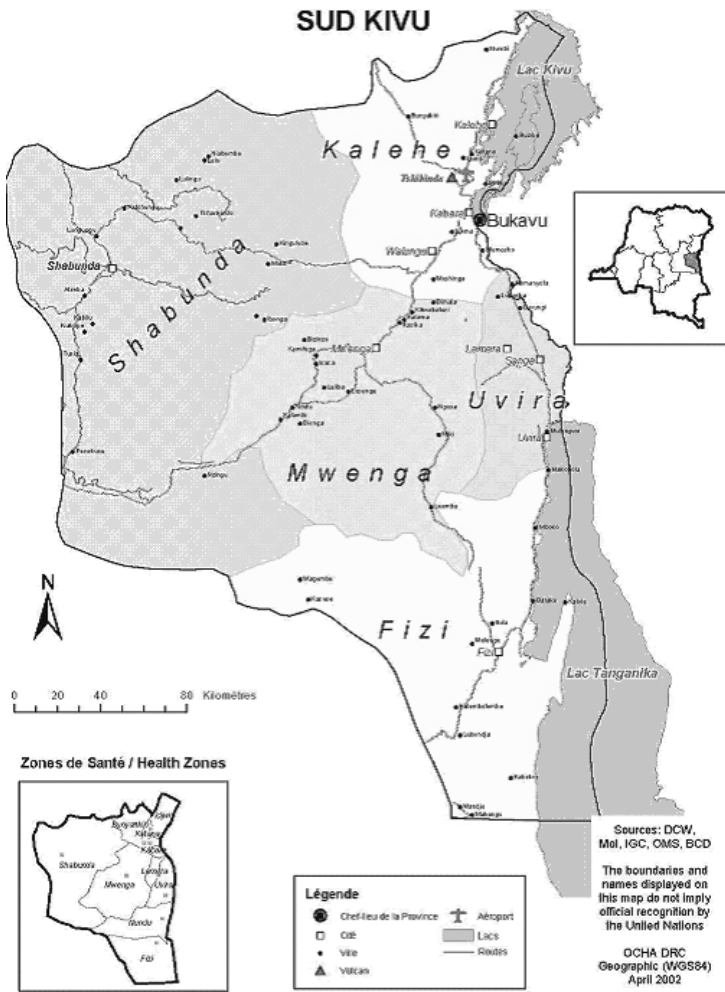
Local agendas regarding traditional power or land, which led to hostilities at the provincial (Nandes versus Rwandophones) and village (Hutus or Tutsis versus other communities) levels, were therefore as influential as national and regional cleavages in generating violence. However, local conflicts were easily reinterpreted in light of the ethnic and political cleavages, and thus North Kivu politics appeared to be dominated by these master cleavages. In contrast, in South Kivu, after the Bukavu crisis, the master cleavages carried much less weight and the local agendas could hardly be interpreted in light of them.

### *South Kivu: Local Agendas and National Involvement*

Up until the Bukavu crisis, the dynamics in South Kivu were similar to those in North Kivu, apparently articulated around the RCD-G versus Kabila political cleavage and the Banyamulenge versus other communities ethnic cleavage. The Bukavu crisis marked the disappearance of both master narratives from South Kivu politics. RCD-G troops were utterly defeated—most of them retreated to North Kivu or Rwanda and a few were integrated within the FARDC—and RCD-G authorities lost administrative control of the province. The Rwandophone population fled to North Kivu, Burundi, or to the Banyamulenge rural stronghold in the high plateaus, and only the tensions around their potential return remained. And yet the disappearance of the political and ethnic cleavages resulted in a South Kivu that was far from pacified. In 2005, for example, the 200-kilometer road from Kamanyola (beginning on the Ruzizi plain, at the border with Rwanda—see Figure 2) to Fizzi crossed over the territory of twelve different armed groups and bordered the territory of four other militias, some of which were allied with foreign rebel groups. All these soldiers continued to commit abuses against the Congolese population, while the presence of RCD-G, Mai Mai, Banyamulenge, and FDLR armed groups transformed the province into a powder keg.

The reason that South Kivu continued to be fragmented despite the quasi-disappearance of the national and regional sources of violence was that many local conflicts remained unresolved. Antagonisms revolved around the leadership of specific militias (as between General Dunia and

Figure 2. Map of South Kivu



Colonel Nguvu); disagreement over who could control the political and economic resources won by the group; opposing claims on land, mining sites, and traditional and administrative positions; ethnic tensions (Bembes versus Banyamulenges and Buyus, Tembos versus Shis, Fuleros/Baviras versus Banyamulenges, Shis versus Regas); and clan tensions (among the three main Shi subgroups, among Bembe clans, among Banyamulenge

clans). As a result, Mai Mai militias continued their armed struggle despite the fact that, by the summer of 2004, almost all of them had been officially integrated into the FARDC.

The Mai Mai continued to ally itself with national and regional actors, but to a much lesser extent than in the past. Many Mai Mai militias continued to rely on regional rebel armed groups. This partnership remained mutually beneficial: it provided the Mai Mai with additional fighters while it gave foreign armed groups the local support they needed to stay on Congolese territory. However, one of the master cleavages, the regional confrontation, had lost most of the weight it had carried during the war. Now that foreign armies had mostly withdrawn, Rwandan and Burundian rebel groups did not need to use violence to fight back the Rwandan or Burundian state armies. On the contrary, as shown above, foreign militias used violence to assert their control over land and mining sites or to secure the money and goods they needed to survive.

Most Mai Mai militias stationed in the Kivus also abandoned their previous alliance with Kabila: after the Bukavu crisis, siding with Kabila would not have enabled them to further their local interests.<sup>19</sup> Indeed Kabila needed to extend the Transitional Government's authority in the province, which involved imposing legitimate state and traditional authorities (often non-Mai Mai chiefs), providing security (notably by imposing strict control over all armed groups), and ending the conditions of impunity under which the Mai Mai's power had operated. In 2005, the rupture between the Mai Mai and Kabila became increasingly clear. Mai Mai administrative authorities often refused to obey government instructions that clashed with their own interests. Similarly, many Mai Mai officers refused to obey their superiors in the tenth military region, in particular General Mbuza Mabe. This rupture led to fighting between different factions of the FARDC (i.e., Mai Mai versus government-affiliated factions), such as in Kabare in late January 2005. This conflict abated in 2006, but it seemed more a pause in the trend of mounting tensions than a real settlement: conflicts were frozen until the upcoming local and national elections, with most groups waiting to see if their claims could be satisfied peacefully or if they had to resume fighting.

There was no Mai Mai hierarchy controlling any of these militias, either nationally or even within one city. For example, in Uvira, there was no unitary command controlling the five different armed groups present after June 2004 (interview, Congolese peace builder, Uvira, spring 2005). Throughout South Kivu, each militia was further divided into subgroups and subfactions to such a point that many brigade commanders could not seem to control their battalion commanders (Dupin 2005). Mai Mai militias were thus micro-local armed groups that withheld enduring allegiance to national or regional actors.

Thus, since the Bukavu crisis, local agendas have seemed to be the determining factors generating violence in South Kivu. It is true that prob-



lems caused by the return of the Banyamulenges and the continued FDLR presence in the east could be interpreted with reference to national or regional cleavages. However, both issues have very strong local dimensions. In addition, the major source of tension in 2004 and 2005 was linked to the insubordination of Mai Mai militias (which, in turn, determined their alliance with FDLR forces), and this insubordination stemmed from purely local causes.

## Conclusion

My analysis suggests that peace builders involved in the Congolese transition should have addressed local violence for two main reasons. First, the humanitarian cost of local antagonisms that turned violent was staggering. Second, the neglect of local issues could lead only to incomplete and unsustainable peace settlements. Local manifestations of violence, although often related to national or regional struggles, were also precipitated by distinctively local problems. These included conflict over land, mineral resources, traditional power, local taxes, and the relative social status of specific groups and individuals. Even issues usually presented as regional questions (such as the FDLR problem) or national ones (such as ethnic tensions with Congolese Rwandophones) had significant local components, which fueled and reinforced the regional and national dimensions.

Local, national, and regional dimensions of violence remained closely interlinked in most of the eastern Congo. Local agendas provided national and regional actors with local allies, who were crucial in maintaining military control, continuing resource exploitation, and persecuting political or ethnic enemies. Local tensions could also jeopardize the national and regional reconciliation: for example, by motivating violence against the Rwandophone minority or allowing a strong FDLR presence in the Kivus. In addition, during the transition, some local conflicts became autonomous from the national and regional tracks, most notably in South Kivu and North Katanga. There local disputes over political power, economic resources (especially land and mining sites), and social status led to clashes that no national or regional actors could stop.

However, in combination with contextual and material constraints and with the major powers' lack of national interest in the Congo, the framing processes by which international peace builders understood the violence and the peace process resulted in a puzzling inattention to local violence (Autesserre 2006). Diplomats, U.N. staff, and some nongovernmental organizations focused their efforts on organizing national elections rather than on building peace at the local level. They portrayed local violence as a humanitarian problem and not as a political one, and each one assumed that the responsibility for working on local-level violence belonged to

someone else. The few organizations working at the local level focused on the Ituri district at the expense of other troubled areas. In the Kivus and North Katanga provinces they responded only to issues concerning the Rwandophone minority and virtually ignored the other causes of local violence.

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## Notes

1. “Rwandophone” means Kinyarwanda-speaking people. In the Congolese context, the term is used to refer to Congolese of Rwandan ancestry (both Hutus and Tutsis). Although many of them descend from families who arrived during the colonization period or shortly after independence (1960), their Congolese citizenship has been hotly contested for the past fifty years. These ethnic tensions have led to local ethnic massacres (Masisi 1993), and they were one of the reasons for the 1998 war. Within the Rwandophone population, I further differentiate between Banyarwanda (Rwandophones from the North Kivu province) and Banyamulenge (Rwandophones from the South Kivu province).  
 “Indigenous” is the term used by ethnic groups that are native to the eastern Congo to refer to themselves. It aims at differentiating them from ethnic groups considered to be foreign, in particular the Rwandophones.
2. For an analysis of local conflict before and during the war, see Autesserre (2006, chapters 1 and 2); International Crisis Group (2003); Mamdani (2001); Van Acker and Vlassenroot (2000); Van Hoyweghen and Vlassenroot (2000); Vlassenroot (2000); and Willame (1997).
3. The FDLR is a Rwandan rebel group composed mostly of ethnic Hutus based in the eastern Congo. In this article, I use “FDLR” to refer to all Hutu refugees based in the eastern Congo, including the few not associated with the FDLR movement.
4. This paragraph is based on anonymous interviews with foreign diplomats and U.N. officials conducted in Kinshasa and in the Kivus between 2001 and 2006. The quotations are excerpted from an interview with a U.N. official conducted in 2005.
5. The RCD-G was the main rebel group during the 1998 war, controlling most of the eastern Congo. It was transformed into a political party during the transition.
6. Cited in “Illicit Gold Finances Weapons,” *News24.com*, April 8, 2005.
7. The tensions between the RCD-G and Kabila erupted in widely publicized fighting during the Bukavu and Kanyabayonga crisis (2004), which in turn reinforced the distrust among the different groups. These tensions also resulted in many small-scale fights between 2003 and 2006, including, for example: RCD-G against Mai Mai in Masisi, Kitene, Baraka, Kanyabayonga; RCD-G against Mai Mai and FDLR coalitions in Masisi, Rutchuru, Walungu, Bunyakiri, Bweremana, and Shabunda; and Banyamulenges against Mai Mai in Baraka. See the maps of North and South Kivu below.
8. The Mai Mai is composed of local militias formed on the basis of ethnicity throughout the eastern Congo. It is officially considered a national actor (the Mai Mai “movement” sent ministers, deputies, and senators to the transition institutions), but Mai Mai groups have never been unified under a single command structure. During the war, the only common points between the different militias were their reliance on magic-based ritual and their pretense of being born out of a need to defend their villages. During the transition, the Mai Mai “movement” remained a loose network of very different militias following various—and often competing—leaders.
9. The Corruption Perceptions Index published by the independent watchdog Transparency International in 2004 ranked the Democratic Republic of Congo

- 133 out of 146 countries and gave it a score of 2.0 (0 being highly corrupt and 10 highly clean).
10. See Autesserre (2006, chapter 2), Van Acker and Vlassenroot (2000), and Vlassenroot (2000) for an account of the changes to the power structure of the Congolese society during the war.
  11. "Forgotten War Rumbles On in South Congo Province," Reuters, September 14, 2005.
  12. See Mamdani (2001), Vlassenroot (2000), and Willame (1997) for an analysis of the land issue before and during the war.
  13. Field observations and author's interviews, 2004–6. Quotation from Rony Brauman, director of research at the Médecins Sans Frontières Foundation, at the launch of the MSF film "Congo, Peace Held Hostage," reported in "Violence Ignored in Congo's Katanga–MSF," Reuters, July 24, 2005.
  14. For example, the journalist Ghislaine Dupont reported that in South Kivu, "upon being attacked, the FDLR retreat into the forest, and then return to their zones where they continue to exploit gold and cassiterite mines, acting in collusion with some Congolese officials, such as local territory administrators, who also profit from this business" (Radio France International, August 12, 2005). Many interviews and informal communications also confirmed the existence of collusion between FDLR and local authorities in this province.
  15. During the transition, the FDLR continued to control many mineral areas of the Kivus, often in collaboration with Mai Mai groups (Global Witness 2005:4, 20; MONUC 2004; U.N. Security Council 2005d: par. 39; and author's interviews 2004–6).
  16. The incentive to stay in the Congo was all the stronger because the dictatorial nature of the Kigali regime and its harsh treatment of political opponents gave Rwandan Hutu refugees in the Congo little hope for livable conditions in Rwanda. It was further reinforced by the harsh discipline implemented by FDLR top commanders, who would lose the basis of their power if FDLR combatants and civilians left the Congo; many leaders intimidated and sometimes killed the potential deserters they had identified in their ranks (author's interviews with Congolese and expatriates working with the FDLR, 2004–6; Synergie Vie 2004).
  17. Unless otherwise indicated, this section is a synthesis of field observations in the Kivus (2004–6), anonymous interviews with Congolese and international observers (2004–6), and author's review of press articles.
  18. An analysis of the interacting dynamics of violence in Katanga would show patterns very similar to those identified in South Kivu, the main difference being that local cleavages were even further disconnected from national ones (Autesserre 2006, conclusion to part 1).
  19. The official reason for the falling out was that the Mai Mai were angry at not receiving the same treatment as the trained forces (Global Witness 2005:20).