



Violence and Instability in Ituri

**DJUGU'S MYSTIC CRISIS
AND THE CAMOUFLAGE
OF ETHNIC CONFLICT**

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Executive summary

This report analyses the string of attacks in and around Djugu territory in Ituri since late 2017. Based on both historical and recent conflict analysis, it finds recent and concrete triggers of the ongoing crisis, nonetheless rooted in protracted tension over land, livelihood and territory, often framed in ethnic binaries. Situated in a geopolitically strategic – but contested – area and shaped by eastern Congo’s broader security challenges, the Djugu crisis quickly escalated, with hundreds killed and half a million displaced. While the bulk of the violence seem to be driven by CODECO, an opaque mystico-armed movement, the government-led response rather complicated than attenuated violence. This report demonstrates that peace-building in Djugu depends on deeper understanding of conflict dynamics and requires addressing political manipulation. Stabilisation efforts thus need to be embedded in broad strategies to address long-standing tension over land and identity.

Table of Contents

1 INTRODUCTION	6
2 BACKGROUND TO THE CURRENT CONFLICT	8
2.1 Ituri in the Colonial Era	8
2.2 Ituri from 1960 to 1998	11
2.3 The Ituri War and its Aftermath	13
3 TRACING THE DJUGU CRISIS	17
3.1 Trigger Moments of the Violence in 2017	19
3.2 The First Wave of Attacks in 2018	20
3.3 The Continuation of Conflict in 2019	23
4 ROOTS, ACTORS AND DRIVERS OF THE CONFLICT	27
4.1 Historical Path-dependencies	28
4.2 Current Drivers of Violence	30
<i>Rumours, Conspiracies and Tracts</i>	31
<i>Provocations and Half-hearted Calls to Peace</i>	33
<i>Governance and Rule of Law</i>	34
<i>The Lack of Sustainable DDR</i>	34
<i>Land, Enclaves and the Struggle over ‘Ethnic Territory’</i>	36
<i>Natural Resources: Unwitting Dynamics of Gold and Oil</i>	37
4.3 Key Stakeholders of the Crisis	38
<i>CODECO and ex-FNI networks</i>	38
<i>Ex-UPC/PUSIC Networks</i>	41
<i>The Congolese Army</i>	41
<i>Political and Economic Elites</i>	43
<i>Regional Actors</i>	44
5 A STABILIZATION STALEMATE?	46
6 CONCLUSIONS	49
7 BIBLIOGRAPHY	52
ANNEX: ADMINISTRATIVE MAPS OF DJUGU AND MAHAGI	54

Located in northeast Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Ituri province has experienced a new and significant wave of armed violence throughout 2018 and 2019. While much of the violence centres on Djugu territory (situated along the Western shores of Lake Albert), other parts of Ituri have been affected by the subsequent influx of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and sporadic attacks. This resurgence in violence is inscribed a longer history of tensions over land and identity and a major armed conflict, known as the ‘Ituri war’, between 1999 and 2004.*

This study offers a substantive analysis of the violence that has engulfed parts of Ituri – in particular Djugu – throughout 2018 and 2019. It provides insight into a conflict that has killed over 700 and displaced at least half a million (OHCHR 2020) and its broader contours. It investigates the various waves of violence since and offers a preliminary understanding of how renewed instability is rooted in previous and current dynamics. In so doing, it addresses the following points:

- the main factors that triggered the violence in Djugu throughout 2018 and 2019
- the main enabling dynamics, potential perpetrators and instigators of violence
- the main dynamics of escalation throughout the different phases of the current conflict
- the potential vantage points that can inform future ISSSS programming on stabilization

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In responding to these questions, the study uses a mixed-methods approach, drawing on significant fieldwork carried out September 2019 by three Congolese researchers during three weeks of parallel, qualitative research based on semi-structured interviews.

These interviews focused on witnesses, victims, potential perpetrators and key stakeholders at the local and provincial level. Moreover, it draws from existing research into Ituri, Djugu in particular, as well as documentary evidence gathered throughout the research process. Finally, the report uses third-party evidence and available mappings of the violence around Djugu.

Through the process of analysis, these different sources have been triangulated against each other in order to check against potential bias and compared with other publicly available data (e.g. media and UN reports) to underpin the qualitative material gathered. This study proceeds as follows: The following chapter provides background on the historicity of conflict and a broader discussion of Ituri's socio-economic predicament – including colonial roots of contestation, major underlying factors like access to land and political participation and the role of the Ituri war from 1999 to 2004.

After that, a descriptive chapter narrates the onset and evolution of the current crisis between late 2017 and late 2019. This part contains verified but unfiltered chronological information and precedes an analytical chapter. Divided into three sections, the analysis starts by introducing the stakeholders of the current crisis.

It proceeds with a discussion of both the entrenched historical dynamics that contribute to the current conflict and the short-term enabling conditions and key triggers of violence. In a subsequent chapter, the report juxtaposes the current crisis with opportunities and limitations for stabilization and peacebuilding before turning to a general conclusion.

Background to the Current Conflict

This chapter discusses key historical and socio-economic trajectories that frame the current crisis. Based on existing studies and echoed in fieldwork testimonies, the chapter reviews Ituri's colonial and post-colonial trajectory. It also introduces the social, political, economic and ethnic fault lines that have marked Ituri's predicament since. While this section is fundamental to understand the *longue durée*, it can be skipped by readers interested in current events only.

2.1 Ituri in the Colonial Era

Ituri has a long history of violence, most of which is based on political manipulation during and after colonial times. While it is widely known the Banyali and Bambuti communities used to live in contemporary Ituri, successive migration from the 17th century onwards brought Lendu and Hema from what is now South Sudan and Uganda. Currently, Lendu, Hema, Alur and Lugbara form Ituri's four main ethnic groups in terms of numbers. If conflict is complex and multi-layered across all of Ituri, it has often surfaced in the shape of ethnic cleavage between Lendu and Hema – both claiming autochthony in contemporary Ituri.

While Lendu are considered farmers, Hema are seen as pastoralists – but a closer look suggests this binary to be not as clear cut. Like elsewhere, the colonial administration reverted to shortcuts in its efforts to both understand and govern the populations in Ituri. This triggered a divide-and-rule

approach guided by racist theories pushing Hema superiority. Nonetheless, it is important to note that many Hema and not all Lendu speak Kilendu as their mother tongue:

Lendu refers to Kilendu-speaking Lendu [also known as 'Bale'] (mostly from Djugu Territory), while southern Lendu are known as Lendu-Bindi or Ngiti, and speak Kingiti. There are also Kilendu-speaking Northern Hema, called Gegere, and South Hema [also known as 'Nyoro'], who speak Kihema. The generic term Hema refers mostly to both South Hema and Gegere. (Pottier 2004: 153).

While the reasons for this linguistic evolution are difficult to trace, in the absence of significant written material that antedates the colonization of Congo, it is further noteworthy that today's administrative and customary delimitations between Hema *chefferies* and Lendu *secteurs* are heavily intertwined. This created so-called 'enclaves' (see below), which suggests that both, or all four (following the Lendu–Bale, Ngiti, Gegere and Hema–Nyoro classification), communities share important links in both social and economic matters. This observation refutes simplistic binary ethnic readings of the current crisis, as well as of bygone conflicts.

Moreover, noting shared patterns of socio-economic organisation, the case of the Ngiti that both farm and herd is "blurring the pastoral/agricultural divide between the Hema and Ngiti" (Fahey 2013: 15). Yet, these similarities notwithstanding, a number of observations highlight the extent to which Lendu and Hema are separated by political and cultural boundaries. Colonial rule – establishing firm administrative cleavages between the communities – has entrenched this separation:

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 [in] appointing chiefs, re-drawing boundaries, physically separating populations, and issuing concession or plantation rights to white settlers. [...]. Third, colonial agents viewed local populations through a racial lens, resulting in narratives of ethnic superiority (Hema) and inferiority (Lendu). (Fahey 2013: 9)

The colonial governance cocktail consisting of infrastructural imperatives, economic ambition and structural racism powerfully alienated communities from their own, lived history and became a major source of inter-community tension and conflict later on. Colonial land grabbing, expropriation and ill-conceived redistribution of access and property rights helped disenfranchising large parts of the population. The main victims at the time were the Lendu, based on racial stereotyping – pushed by Henry Morton Stanley’s accounts on the two communities – that categorized them as ‘inferior’ part of the local population. Ethnic identity became not only set in stone, it also led to a manifestation of belonging to a specific socio-economic class (Pottier 2004: 153).

Throughout the Congo Free State (1885–1908), this has been underpinned by externally imposed re-ordering of customary authority both in terms of territory – dispossession with the aim of creating a plantation economy – and rule, such as through the arbitrary reattribution of chiefly positions. This approach originated in the colonial ideology of a ‘civilising mission’ and the operational need to increase economic efficiency of the colonial extraction through rendering both space and society more legible regardless of longer-term consequences (Bakonzi 1982: 175; Schouten 2016: 6). Initially lacking a firm ethnic thrust, these policies grew to favour Hema over Lendu, such as illustrated by concomitant violence including the 1911 killing of Belgian-appointed Hema chief Bomera.

Over time, and reinforced by the creation of landless classes, subsequent droughts and the accentuation of existing tensions, colonial policy thus contributed to a situation whereby Lendu and Hema have significant grievances, many of which have continued to fester from one cycle of conflicts to another. (PAX 2019: 10)

While the grand ideological lines did not change dramatically under public Belgian colonial administration from 1908–1960, the overtly pro-Hema approach became somewhat more nuanced in this period. Certain local colonial administrators even openly favoured the Lendu. This however, did not contribute to balancing the previously sown tensions. Rather, it pushed a wave of Lendu nationalism and created the Hema image as invaders (though both Hema and Lendu are not autochthonous). Claiming to be ‘Bantu’, Lendu

conceive of Hema as 'Nilotics'. Yet, Kingiti, spoken by Lendu-Ngiti, and Kilendu, spoken by Lendu-Bale, Hema-Gegere, are no Bantu languages as opposed to Kihema, spoken by Hema-Nyoro (Nassenstein & Dimmendaal 2020).

Given its geographic position (at the shores of Lake Albert) and its demographic weight at the time, Djugu was at the heart of colonial dispossession and divisive policies (Pottier 2004) and prominently featured in cases of customary manipulation (PAX & Haki na Amani 2009: 21).

2.2 Ituri from 1960 to 1998

After colonialism, dispossession and ethnic manipulation continued. If colonial concessions mostly remained foreign-owned until 1973, Mobutu's Zairianisation efforts then nationalised foreign assets and later redistributed them – influential Hema being the main profiteers:

[The Bakajika Law] provided a powerful instrument for further modifying Ituri's social structure; by rejecting the notion of diffuse property rights, the law provoked the formation of a landless rural class [and the] shift from colonial family-held plantations to a new class of Hema. (Vlassenroot and Raeymaekers 2004: 390)

This further ossified land tenure in contradiction to flexible access regimes in pre-colonial times. Moreover, racialized theories and ethnic diatribe continued to spread and classified Hema and Lendu very much in line with earlier colonial stereotypes (Fahey 2013: 23). Ituri's contemporary administrative organisation somewhat reflects these imbalances and the blurred lines that come along: all entities considered 'Hema' are full-fledged customary entities (the *collectivités-chefferies*), while those considered Lendu entities are *collectivités-secteurs*. While the former work with hereditary succession, the latter have appointed chiefs. The table lists Djugu's and Mahagi's chieftaincies and sectors, and their respective leaders, Hema and Lendu ones are marked in italics (see also administrative maps in annex III, retrieved in: De Saint Moulin & Kalombo 2011).

DJUGU		MAHAGI	
Chefferies	Chefs	Chefferies	Chefs
<i>Bahema Badjere</i>	Jean-Richard Dhedda	Alur-Djuganda	Defalaise Songa III Ukia
<i>Bahema Baguru</i>	Lotute Jingunga	Anghal	Jalawure Serge
<i>Bahema Banywagi</i>	Yves Kahwa Mandro	Djukoth	Alipacu Lossani Asinda
<i>Bahema Nord</i>	David Pilo Ndrundo	Pandoro	Ukethweng'U Lokwa
Ndo-Okebo	Jean Dz'ba Bandju	Wangongo	Unecan
Mambisa	Henri Juga Tchele	Mokambo	Ang'iya Ucopi Ketha
Mabendi	Likpa Adrugesi	War-Palara	Rwoth Ng'a Ugwaru Nyipiri III
Secteurs	Chefs	Secteurs	Chefs
<i>Walendu Tatsi</i>	Joel Mande Lonema	<i>Walendu Watsi</i>	Lotoma Fety
<i>Walendu Pitsi</i>	Jerome Ndalo (interim)		
<i>Walendu Djatsi</i>	Claude Mateso Mbutcho		

Against the backdrop of nationwide economic crisis from the mid-1980s onwards, the tenuous situation of landless Lendu worsened, supporting a more pronounced ethnic framing of socio-economic tensions. Both intra- and inter-community conflicts occurred regularly in the areas of Bahema Nord, Walendu Bindji, Walendu Tatsi, Walendu Pitsi and Walendu Djatsi (PAX & Haki na Amani 2009: 90–93; Ansoms & Hilhorst 2014). While competition over local political power existed and continues to thrive in both chieftaincies and sectors, the imbalance between Hema chefferies and Lendu sectors and the enclave-shaped territorial gazettement has evolved by 2020.

Most of the tensions since the mid-1980s turn around land access and tenure and occurred in a period when both Hema and Lendu had organized in respective *mutualités* (ethnic solidarity associations in DRC) – the *Libération des opprimés et rejetés d'Ituri* (LORI) for the Lendu and the *Ente* (Kihema for 'cow') on the Hema side (Pottier 2004: 153, Fahey 2013: 30). Both have a reputation for being enablers for violence and catalysts for peace at the same time. Against a worsening economic and political crisis in Zaire's early 1990s, tensions became

a bargaining chip among political elites vying for support (Vlassenroot and Raeymaekers 2004: 390). Previous manipulation, especially in terms of land demarcation, reinforced this development.

2.3 The Ituri War and its Aftermath

Tensions over land, identity and local politics have been a constant feature in many parts of Ituri for decades but gained increased attention in the context of the larger regional wars from the late 1990s onwards. With Uganda and Rwanda backing local leaders and armed groups, the main waves of armed mobilization crystallized along ethnic lines. While many Lendu joined the *Front des nationalistes intégrationnistes* (FNI) and the *Front de résistance patriotique d'Ituri* (FRPI), Hema regrouped in the *Union des patriotes congolais* (UPC) and the *Parti pour l'unité et la sauvegarde de l'intégrité du Congo* (PUSIC).

As Alur and Lugbara got drawn into the war, they created the ephemeral *Forces armées du peuple congolais* (FAPC). The convoluted interplay of regional politics and local conflict also triggered a number of short-lived coalitions when the Nande-led *Rassemblement congolais pour la démocratie–Kisangani/Mouvement de libération* (RCD–K/ML) split from the RCD and began operating in Ituri.

Alongside the new Rally for Congolese Democracy (RCD) rebellion, which quickly split into pro-Kampala [RCD–K/ML] and pro-Kigali [RCD–Goma] factions, the UPDF [Ugandan army] mounted a campaign of exploitation in which co-opting key military entrepreneurs and businessmen played a major role. Local disputes that preceded the Ituri War merged with the regional war pitting Kinshasa and loyalist militia against Kampala, Kigali and their respective proxy forces. (PAX 2019: 11).

If violence in Ituri had been less significant during the first Congo war (1996–1997), in which Kabila replaced Mobutu, the Second Congo war (1998–2004) fully absorbed Ituri's tenuous equilibrium. The broader fault lines of the 'African World war' became intricately connected to the Ituri war, not least through the massive involvement of Uganda and Rwanda (Prunier 2009, Stearns 2011).

The arrival of the Ugandan army and the way in which they co-opted local belligerents and politicians amplified existing conflicts in Ituri. Especially Uganda's attempt to install a Hema governor provided to be a tipping point for increased Lendu mobilisation that experienced a major push after the RCD-K/ML's split into a pro-Hema (led by John Tibasiima) and a pro-Lendu (led by Mbusa Nyamwisi) wing (Pottier 2004, Pottier 2009). The RCD-K/ML had been a major protagonist in the Second Congo war, being Kinshasa's strongest opponent in the *Grand Nord* of North Kivu as well as Ituri. Under Nande leader Mbusa Nyamwisi and John Tibasiima, a Hema politician, it sided with Uganda after the fallout of Kampala and Kigali. Quickly afterwards, internal quarrels caused yet another split as Mbusa rallied the Lendu, while the RCD-K/ML's Hema wing left the movement. This led to a series of clashes and attacks in 1999, heralding further violence in Ituri, concentrated in Djugu and Irumu territories.

The outbreak of violence in Ituri is the result of the exploitation, by local and regional actors, of a deeply rooted local conflict over access to land, economic opportunity and political power. Today, these actors use war as a means to reorganize the local economic space and control the mobility within and between spaces. The result is a struggle between informal networks that link local warlords and rebel leaders with their external sponsors, [...] for economic, political and social control. (Vlassenroot and Raeymaekers 2004: 387).

Under young local politician Thomas Lubanga, the Hema then formed the UPC in response to Mbusa's flirt with emerging Lendu militia. Mbusa's bold move had alienated Uganda, which readily took sides with the UPC (Tamm 2013a). Lubanga, however, sought an alliance with the Rwanda-backed RCD-Goma provoking Kampala's realignment with yet another Hema-based armed group, the PUSIC of Kahwa Mandro. As major rifts and shifts in a series of opportunistic and externally-driven alliances, these developments further obfuscated the rationale of war for many ordinary Iturians and strongly contributed to the entrenchment of mistrust.

Between 2000 and 2002, the bulk of violence concentrated around Bunia and in Djugu. The UN Security Council then decided to deploy a French-led force known as 'Artemis' to stabilize Ituri since the new *Mission de l'organisation des Nations unies au Congo* (MONUC) faced major delays in fully deploying.

Around that time, conflict moved to the southwest into Irumu, where

Bernard Kakado, a man in his late seventies, started to organize one such self-defence [among] the Ngiti ethnic group. Kakado, who would later be seen as the spiritual father of the FRPI, was managing director of the agricultural enterprise *Coopérative de développement économique du Congo*. He was also widely considered to have the gift of prophecy. According to an FRPI commander, Kakado began to warn his Ngiti community of the imminent danger of extermination, referring to the idea of a Hema-Tutsi empire—a rumour spread during the Congo wars, suggesting that the Rwandan and Ugandan leadership wanted to annex eastern Congo through local allies such as the Hema. (Tamm 2013b: 21)

Since 2004, and following a series of peace deals at different levels (national, regional) as well as increased UN presence, violence ebbed in Ituri and a major demobilisation programme dubbed DCR (demobilisation and community reinsertion programme) was launched. While the DCR successfully dismantled most armed groups (including UPC, FNI, FAPC and PUSIC), the FRPI only partially demobilised and the prevalence of light weapons shipped in at the peak of the war further complicated a fragile peace. Similar to other DDR programmes carried out in eastern Congo, the Ituri-centred initiatives largely failed to trigger sustainable reintegration.

Although the FRPI is the only remaining belligerent of the Ituri war that never fully demobilised (a significant effort, co-sponsored by the provincial government and MONUSCO is currently underway) it has no strong links to the current violence. While CODECO, the most-cited suspect for the recent instability, has historical links with FRPI, available evidence suggests that it mostly involves ex-FNI elements and disenfranchised Lendu youth from Djugu and Mahagi.

Numerous peace and stabilization efforts have marked recent years in Ituri, which has been transformed from district to province in Congo's 2016 decentralization move. Meanwhile, a range of deeper, structural problems remain unaddressed, in particular dysfunctionalities in land governance and justice (many of which are situated at the national level too) as well as the duality of competing customary and state governance. Moreover, the uneven distribution of local political power rooted in the bifurcated chieftaincy/sector

system and the convoluted demarcation of entities and respective enclave spots prevails. These factors add to impunity and denial of access, further aggravated by elite interests and insufficiently addressed conflicts over land and identity (PAX & Haki na Amani 2009):

[...] post-war Ituri has seen an economic upsurge thanks to mineral extraction and agricultural production, which has increased the pressure on the land due to new waves of land-grabbing by elites from both within and outside Ituri. While at the local level numerous leasing agreements exist through which Hema subcontract land to Lendu and vice versa, these contracts are increasingly being called into question by overlapping claims to 'autochthonous' land ownership, often invoking myths of migration and historical settlement. Furthermore, corruption has facilitated dispossession—especially in and around former colonial concessions—as wealthy elites used their clout, in particular immediately after independence, to acquire favourable access to state institutions issuing land titles (PAX 2019: 12).

In sum, if Djugu crisis is not a neat succession of earlier conflict, Ituri's underlying paradigms of violence and the related rhetoric have been pivotal for the recent evolution. Specifically, this concerns the ways in which the 'ethnic character' of violence underpins narratives of the conflict, while more complicated political logics tend to be minimized both by respondents as well as peacebuilding initiatives, and policy analyses more broadly. However, this new crisis questions straightforward explanations, owing first of all to the mysterious nature in which violence has been rolled out and the opacity surrounding the suspected conflict parties, as well as their structure, leaders and drivers. This is somewhat reminiscent of other recent crises in the Congo, such as around Beni and in the Kasais. And, while Ituri had been lauded as a showcase for post-conflict reconstruction, the roots of past violence have never been addressed entirely as the Djugu crisis illustrates. Chapter three traces the evolution of violence in Djugu, covering mid-2017 to late 2019, with a focus on major events and turning points.

Tracing the Djugu Crisis

While large-scale attacks only began in early 2018, the antecedents of the current Djugu crisis can be dated as early as mid-2017 when a Catholic Lendu priest died mysteriously. Rumours attributed his passing to alcoholism, but due suspicions grew quickly. They were amplified by a lack of accountability – neither the Church nor the provincial government have carried out a transparent, public investigation ever since. The resulting tensions found a sequel when, in late 2017, Lendu youth got into a wrangle with government soldiers and stole an ammunition rack. Nearby female Hema farmers reportedly helped identify them so they could be detained.

In the months afterwards, Djugu experienced a string of tit-for-tat attacks. While many of these attacks had an ethnic framing – targeting Hema and provoking retaliation against Lendu – populations and elites of all sides have refuted a purely ethnic reading, pointing both the elusive character of the violence and the army's silent complicity and lack of reaction. At the height of the violence in 2018, near-daily attacks occurred in the areas Walendu Pitsi, Walendu Djatsi and Bahema Nord. After two months, this episode of violence stopped abruptly – leading local populations and other observers to believe in some form of coordination.

A new wave of attacks in August 2018 specifically aimed at Congolese security forces. Under the late Mukwake Mambo (from whom Justin Ndujgolo took over in 2019), these attacks operated under the label *Cooperative pour le développement au Congo* (CODECO). CODECO is an agro-religious cooperative formerly linked to the Irumu-based FRPI rebellion but nowadays operating in Djugu.

As numerous interviews indicated, CODECO has been serving as a vehicle to coordinate recruitment and training of Lendu youth and ex-combatants since late 2017. Since Mukwake's death, CODECO is led by Justin Ngudjolo (unrelated to Mathieu Ndjolo indicted by the International Criminal Court). Operating without a visible chain of command, CODECO seems to rely as much on circles of ex-FNI combatants as on Lendu youth from Djugu.

The late 2018 violence was followed by a lull covering almost the entire electoral period from September 2018 to January 2019. Ever since, violence has been flaring up again, intensifying from April onwards, with a peak in June. In contrast to mostly machete-driven attacks before, the 2019 violence saw an increased use of firearms, targeting IDP camps and army positions. Since mid-2019, the *Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo* (FARDC, the national army of DRC) has launched counterinsurgency operations dubbed *Zaruba* to tackle insecurity and disband suspected militia strongholds in the forests of northern Djugu territory.

In parallel, several initiatives to foster dialogue between stakeholders and communities have taken place. These efforts are yet to bear fruit though, and future stabilisation initiatives will require both a deeper understanding of the current Djugu conflict as well as a conflict-sensitive approach as to Ituri's longer-term, multi-layered history of contentious politics. Late 2019 the situation in the area remains volatile, and over 500,000 IDPs have been registered according to the UNHCR. While authorities attribute all the violence to CODECO, the opacity surrounding the underlying drivers of conflict risks undercutting conflict resolution efforts.

As the detailed reconstruction of events will show across the three following sections, Djugu's current crisis a story of peaks and lulls. While highly symbolic trigger events happened in 2017, the first major escalation occurred from February 2018 to April 2018. Violence then ebbed until August 2018, as a spate of attacks aimed at the FARDC. While most Djugu remained calm between October 2018 and January 2019, attacks and massacres geared up again since and remained intense from April to September 2019, with a strong peak in June 2019. Moreover, in 2019, violence remained centred on Djugu but also extended into neighbouring Mahagi.

3.1 Trigger Moments of the Violence in 2017

On 10 June 2017, a Lendu Catholic priest named Florent Dunji died in a village called Drodro. Authorities stated that excessive consumption of alcohol was the cause of his passing, but this version is contested among Lendu, who suspect he was killed. In the absence of transparent investigations and after unsuccessful requests to that end, Lendu took to the streets and organized demonstrations. Lendu interlocutors reported to have witnessed Hema mocking the death of Dunji while sitting together in bars, further enraging the Lendu community.

The death of Dunji and the ensuing controversy preceded a first minor episode of violence, as young Lendu from Walendu Tatsi began attacking villages of the Hema who in turn engaged in a tit-for-tat. Moreover, youth from both sides began building up roadblocks, effectively contributing to heightening tensions and impacting on the movement of both communities, most notably around Drodro. While community leaders – for instance on the sides of LORI – aimed at appeasing the tensions, interlocutors have complained over what they felt was an intransparent handling of the matter by government authorities as well as the crackdown on the related protests. Until late 2019, no conclusive investigation of the case exists, and numerous interviewees consider the event as a central push factor in the broader Djugu crisis.

A second trigger event happened mid-December 2017 in Uzi, near Ladedjo, when a Lendu man refused roadblock taxes and stole an ammunition rack from local FARDC soldiers. According to testimonies, the army relied on Hema witnesses to identify and track down the thief. Again, a violent reaction of young Lendu ensued, attacking the Hema women suspected to collaborate with the army. In response, Hema went to burn Lendu villages nearby, most notably in Tete. Like the death of Dunji, this event appears to have unfolded neatly along ethnic lines. Nonetheless, interlocutors across age, gender, ethnicity and education levels have in a broad majority refuted to classify the Djugu crisis as ethnic war – citing significant differences in how violence has been employed, claimed and justified. Nonetheless, the analysis of subsequent incidents shows that most of the attacks have targeted either one or the other community.

3.2 The First Wave of Attacks in 2018

While these two incidents triggered localised skirmishes, the onset of a more serial string of violence only happened in early 2018. From February 2018 onwards, attacks and killings have been reported almost on a daily basis across wide parts of Djugu. Besides hundreds of killings, the main *modus operandi* was the large-scale burning of villages on both the Lendu and the Hema side. Most of the violence focused on Djugu, with Bahema Nord and Bahema Banywagi chieftaincies as well as the Walendu sectors Pitsi, Djatsi and Tatsi being most affected. Until mid-April 2018, when a lull interrupted the violence, over 100,000 had been displaced and either left for Uganda or one of the several IDP camps around Bunia and Mahagi. This section provides an overview of key instances of violence between February and September 2018.

A first string of attacks occurred on 4 February 2018 when several villages in Bahema Nord (Djusa, Lera, Lovi, Ngaroli, Ngbagu, Blukwa Collectivité, Blukwa Centre, Katoto and Labo) suffered raids. Over 30 were killed, more than 400 houses were burnt down and pillaged. This was followed by attacks in Langa, Dz'mbu (Bahema Nord) and Bese (Banyali Kilo chieftaincy) on 7 February, with a death toll of at least nine. On 8 February, at least 37 were killed in Kparangaza, Kawa, Tche and Logo. Testimonies converge that the attacks were carried by groups arriving from Walendu Tatsi and Walendu Djatsi. On 10 February, another 14 died in attacks targeting Tchura, Ulo, Ndjaza, Reta (Bahema Nord), Lidja and Kli (Bahema Badjere).

Between 11 and 15 February, a series of attacks concentrated on Bahema Nord. Around 75 were killed in Angolu, Talire, Rule, Dzri, Blukwa, Panduru (the first village affected in Mahagi). The Rule attack was the biggest, with over 60 being killed and the entire village burnt. Most of the attacks aimed at Hema villages, even though certain Lendu villages figure among the targets. On 20 February, a first attack against FARDC left two soldiers dead in Tche. Moreover, two civilians died in an attack on Blukwa on 24 February and four in Tchele on 27 February.

The pace of violence continued all through March, with around 40 people being killed in Maze and Beliba on 1 March. A simultaneous attack occurred on 3 March in Chele, Bbani, Gobba, Ddeti, Nyanda and Chatsikipa – killing more than a dozen. A day later, six people were killed in Sal and several villages looted. On 7 and 8 March, 16 people – including four FARDC elements – died in attacks in Drodro, Masini, Tsoba and Ndoki. Another significant wave happened on 13 March when nearly 30 were killed in Jjo, Gbi, Ngazba and Risasi. On 17 March, another large-scale burning of houses happened in Bbu, Jibba and Petro. By the end of March things calmed down, except attacks in Penyi on 21 March, killing at least seven, and on 24 March against FARDC. While it is difficult to ascertain if and which specific communities have been targeted by precise incidents and list them one by one due to uncertain data, the overall assessment is that both communities were engaged in the violence, and suffering from it.

Djugu remained mostly calm between April and September 2018. However, in lack of any success in identifying or dismantling those carrying out the attacks, the situation remained tense. While a few isolated incidents occurred, this period was mostly marked by fear to either return home or otherwise move across Djugu. Certain areas were considered particularly dangerous, such as Kafé, Dhedja and Blukwa. While many of the displaced would not dare returning, let alone to farm alone, young Lendu increasingly began experiencing harassment by security services in what was a generalized suspicion. Judging from the bulk of previous attacks – concentrating on Hema villages – and testimonies of the attackers having hailed from Walendu Djatsi and Walendu Pitsi, public opinion quickly focused on idea that Lendu were mobilizing on ethnic grounds.

However, given that certain attacks aimed at Lendu villages, it was difficult to establish an overarching trend. Violence resumed in August 2018 through a series of ambushes directed against members of the army and the police. A major attack in this period happened on 16 September: combatants led by Mukwake Mambo, a former FNI member allegedly working for CODECO, killed nine FARDC soldiers across different army positions in Tara, Songamoya and Muvaramu. After an attack on 24 September in Bule, Mukwake was reported wounded and passed away shortly later. The period was marked by

further assaults on FARDC positions, leading to the killing of several soldiers. Clashes also ensued between newly deployed FARDC and alleged CODECO throughout late September 2018. Most of these confrontations happened in Walendu Tatsi and Walendu Pitsi.

Overall, the violence in 2018 had specific characteristics: most attacks were carried out at night, using blades and clubs rather than guns – except the raids on FARDC positions ascribed to Mukwake in late 2018. And while the government was slow and timid to respond to the attacks in February and March 2018, it often became a target itself when stepping in to protect populations. Three main types of violence came were employed in the 2018 attacks: looting, arson and homicide. Taken together, they form a combination of violence conducive to a broader aim of scaring and traumatising civilians through the loss of both life and livelihood.

In a third of the 75 interviews underpinning this report, respondents also stressed the loss of harvests and livestock following massive displacement. Although more Hema than Lendu were killed, it is less clear if the majority of attacks were carried out by Lendu or if the attacks targeting Hema were more frequent or deadlier. While the violence was mysterious in earnest, the role of Mukwake in the September attacks provided a first indication as to a potential role of CODECO in mobilisation, recruitment and training, but also the group's biographical links to ex-FNI rather than FRPI circles. In sum, the 2018 violence suggest a modicum of coordination, both in the ways in which violence began in February as well as its abrupt pause two months later. The August/September violence in turn shows a clear anti-FARDC pattern.

3.3 The Continuation of Conflict in 2019

After a period of relative calm in late 2018 – coinciding with the run-up to the combined presidential, parliamentary and provincial elections – violence geared up again since early 2019. Sporadic attacks significantly multiplied again since April, increasingly spilling over to the neighbouring, ethnically more diverse Mahagi territory – in particular in the chieftaincies of Djukoth, Pandoro, Mukambo and Mokabo in May and June 2019. Other than in 2018, the 2019 attacks increasingly featured unspecific attributions to CODECO and several interviews, including FARDC, intelligence operatives and local civil society pointed at Walendu Pitsi (Wago forest), Walendu Djatsi (Kpandroma, Mbau forest) and Walendu Watsi as strongholds of the militia.

In 2019, the logics of violence changed and IDP camps became targets for attacks, owing to the assailants' need for supplies but also the aim to steal nearby cattle brought along by IDPs. Moreover, it is noteworthy that Lendu increasingly also fled alleged CODECO attacks. In mid-2019, the FARDC launched its *Zaruba* ("wave") operations into the suspected CODECO strongholds, leading to additional displacement, but also to a weakening of CODECO. This section offers a non-exhaustive narration of events throughout the first nine months of 2019.

On 22 January attackers targeted a FARDC position in Largu. Four soldiers and three attackers were killed in the clashes, and several wounded. On 15 February, the FARDC position in Blukwa-Mbi suffered an assault, triggering large-scale displacement in surrounding villages. Yet, it was only in April that the sequencing of attacks gained pace again with almost daily killings. On 5 April, the FARDC position in Nyapala was raided, killing three (two soldiers and a police officer) and its arms caches were looted. On 7 April, five were killed in an attack on the market of Kalo. On 11 April, some suspected Kalo attackers were detained. On 11 April, over 200 livestock were stolen in Reta. On 15 April, four were killed in Loko (Dhedja) and on 16 April several attacks occurred in Bahema Badjere and Bahema Nord, but no casualties were reported. On 28 April, several civilians were killed in Losandrema (Bahema Badjere).

On 6 May three were killed in Bapu (Bahema Nord) after a clash between assailants and the army in nearby Laudjo (Walendu Pitsi). FARDC soldiers tracked the attackers and fought them in Wago Forest where seven soldiers were captured by alleged CODECO. On 8 May, four FARDC officers were killed (including two colonels) near Moganga at Lake Albert. On 13 May, one civilian was killed by FARDC in Angolu. That same day, attackers killed two soldiers in Datule (Walendu Djatsi) and looted their guns. On 15 May, four were killed in Tara area near Lake Albert.

On 21 May, five were killed in Lona Lotsikpa. On 27 May, several houses were burned in the same area, and one infant being burnt to death. On 4 June, intra-FARDC fighting caused the death of a soldier in Joo, Losandrema area, following a disagreement over military rations and their distribution. On 5 June, several attacks occurred, including the kidnapping of a priest in Jibba. On 9 June, two FARDC soldiers died after clashing with unidentified combatants in Tsubba (Mambisa) and several pillages occurred in Bahema Nord.

A significant event happened on 10 June, when a trader named Tikpa – a Lendu and the president of the local FEC in Kobu – was killed in Zibiti (Mambisa territory) alongside three other civilians. According to several interviews, the killing was organized by CODECO elements and led by a person known by the name of Go. They attackers benefitted from support by local chiefs in Pimbo area and had set out to avenge the trader's refusal to financially contribute to CODECO. Several vehicles on the road were ambushed and set on fire. Since the start of the crisis, many businesspeople had lost access to local markets and faced the constraint of protection rackets to guarantee their mobility and not be referred to as 'Hema collaborators'.

The following days featured a sequence of pillages in Kobu area, including the killing of six in Iga Barriere, in sequence to popular demonstrations against the violence. Several clashes and killings occurred the same day, involving security forces, angry civilian groups and unidentified combatants but it remains difficult to gather complete, verifiable numbers. Cases include the killing of three in Kparangaza, two in Sayo Mongbwalu, three in D'da, one in Kokoliko, six in Ddi. On 11 June, five were killed in Waiso and Noko (Walendu Djatsi) and the village Sombo (Bahema Nord) was burnt down. That same

day, an attack in Tche caused 38 deaths and a FARDC convoy was ambushed in Logotakpa, both in Losandrema area.

Further attacks and clashes on this day happened in Rule, Blukwa, Ndjala, Sumbuso, Dhendro, Duvire, Ngolo, Reta and Lirri – destroying at least five local health centres (Bahema Nord) as well as Senge, Goikpa, Nyamasa, Kabakaba, Lissei, Lenge, Raa and Dema (various chieftaincies). Unconfirmed counts estimate that over 130 were killed across different incidents and clashes that day alone. On 12 and 13 June, hundreds of cattle were pillaged in Goikpa (Walendu Pitsi). A day later, the villages Rule, Somba, Duvire, Saokpa and Bunya suffered attacks leading to the killing of almost 40 people. On 14 June, a motorcycle driver was killed in Dhendro. On 15 June two were killed in Iga Barriere, as attackers ambushed a group of civilians bringing back the bodies of those killed on 10 and 11 June, and one person was killed in Ndoki by suspected CODECO.

Another motorcycle driver was killed on 16 June in Maze, again by suspected CODECO. On 18 June, CODECO attacked FARDC in Ndri and killed eight civilians in Dema (Bahema Nord). Five civilians were killed in Nyamamba (Bahema Banywagi). On 18 June, a string of attacks provoked the killing of seven in Reta, three in Limbi, five in Tsuki, two in Ndoki and two in Ndjachulu. On 21 June, CODECO elements killed 16 in Kafé and Mbogi (Bahema Nord). On 22 June, four were killed near Sumbusu. Many of the June attacks originated from Wago and Mbau forests, suspected hideouts of CODECO. On 25 June, fighting between FARDC and CODECO left nine soldiers dead in Kpandroma, triggering massive displacement. These clashes continued on 28 and 29 June near Wago forest, resulting in the arrest of several suspected CODECO members.

Over 400 bodies alone were recovered by the Congolese Red Cross in Djugu in the weeks after the 10 June attack. In the midst of this serious deterioration, newly elected President Felix Tshisekedi visited Ituri on 30 June, DRC's Independence Day. However, his presence would not have a lasting stabilizing impact. Just a day later, several skirmishes and attacks occurred in Makofi, Kpawi and near Mongbwalu – leaving at least two dead and several villages pillaged. On 2 July, six were killed in Losandrema and two in Dhedja. 80 cows were stolen in Loko and taken to Walendu Pitsi. On 6 July, two were

killed in Dhendro. On 10 July, over 40 houses were burnt in Kilo and on 11 July a FARDC camp was burnt in Ndri. On 12 July, two were killed in Nyali.

On 14 July, 13 were killed near Dhedja in clashes opposing FARDC and CODECO. The next day, ten militiamen were killed near Bule as governor Jean Bamanisa called for a ceasefire and LORI organised a peace conference among Bale leaders. The same day, a soldier was killed near Jibba and three civilians in Katoto. Still on 14 July, further bodies missed since 10 June were found in a river near Djailo. On 17 July, another FARDC–CODECO clash near Jibba caused several deaths. On 21 July, an attack killed seven in Nguzu and Dala (Mambisa), leading to massive displacement. A day later, clashes continued between CODECO and FARDC in Jibba. Seven were killed by CODECO in Fichama (Bahema Banywagi) near Lake Albert on 23 July.

After three extremely violent months, August remarkably calmed down. On 19 August, six civilians got killed by FARDC in Mbau, Walendu Djatsi, as soldiers aimed to dig up a CODECO network and started shooting. On 9 September, over 20 houses were burnt in an attack in Rho, provoking large-scale displacement, and in Nioka (Mahagi) a group of traders were ambushed. Pillages occurred on 13 September in Amé and on 15 September in Djupawala.

During that period, several testimonies reported shipments of arms by boats across Lake Albert into Mbau forest. Between 17 and 19 September, attacks in Bule, Kachele, Ndoki and Pkatse killed almost 50 people and a vehicle of an international NGO got ambushed in the same area. At least 700 have been killed, thousands of cattle and other livestock looted, and thousands of villages destroyed or burnt – including churches, government buildings and health centres.*

*During fieldwork, different civil society sources provided lists, estimating that at least 60 health centres are not operating anymore (Fataki 5, Rethy 5, Drodoro 12, Lita 8, Linga 5, Jibba 8, Tchomia 8, plus others in Nizi, Bambu, Kilo, Damas, Mangala and Mongbwalu). According to the Red Cross, the following health centres were fully destroyed: Dhendro, Sumbusu, Duvire. The same report also mentions the destruction of churches: two in Dhendro, Kpawi, Dada, Dhema, Hukba, Reta, Duvire, Sumbusu, Mayalibo and Likida. Around 140 schools have been directly or indirectly affected by attacks, amongst them figure Sumbu, Atsida, Duvire, Kpawi, Tchendji, Tsu, Lenge and all schools in Sumbusu groupement. Over 40 local government offices were destroyed in Bahema Nord, Badjere and Banywagi, as well as Walendu Pitsi and Tatsi and Mambisa (Mahagi). Groupement offices were destroyed in Dhendro, Sumbusu, Mayalibo, Losandrema and Dhedja.

Roots, Actors and Drivers of the Conflict

Although the onset of the Djugu crisis dates back to late 2017, violence remains elusive and it is difficult to discern clear patterns amidst rampant rumour mongering and the absence of clear patterns. Yet, the crisis unfolds against the backdrop of an incomplete peace and reconciliation process after the 1999–2004 war and highlights continuous grievances rooted in tensions over land and identity. Based on the preceding description of the violence in 2018 and 2019, several weeks of fieldwork in August and September 2019 (resulting in 75 interviews), this chapter flags a couple of historic path-dependencies before diving into an analysis of current drivers of violence and a discussion of key protagonists in the Djugu crisis.

The ebbs and flows of violence since the beginning of the crisis puzzle populations and analysts alike. On the ground, the cyclical nature of the violence has given rise to speculations – most of which insist that attacks were coordinated and not an outcome of spontaneous outrage. Readings of the Djugu crisis as being a result of coordinated violence are also fed by recent conflicts elsewhere in the DRC. Both in Beni and in the Kasai area, violence is characterized by a fairly opaque scene of belligerents like in Djugu. In both cases, evidence shows that both government and opposition actors are involved in the killings. However, as opposed to Beni, there are almost no abductions in Djugu. Moreover, there has been little separation of killings and pillages in Djugu – while most attacks in Beni are either one or the other. Comparing their predicament with other conflict areas, Iturians voiced concern the Djugu crisis could serve as a vehicle to justify delays and a partial annulment of the 2018 elections, such as in Beni area.

At a first look, this contrasts with the observation that compared to the visible participation of armed groups and neighbouring in the Ituri War, the current crisis is marked by an opaque landscape of belligerents. Moreover, protagonists of the 1999–2004 war ceased operating, except a Mai-Mai Simba faction around Mambasa and the Irumu-based FRPI currently in a process of demobilisation. None of the two are cited in the Djugu crisis. Still, bearing in mind the limited success of DDR and the absence of reliable statistics on where ex-combatants of the Ituri War ended up, former elements of the FNI, PUSIC or UPC have been accused to play a role in the current crisis.

While many have integrated FARDC or found jobs in the artisanal gold sector, precarity in the lower ranks of the army and a recent bust of international gold prices can be factors conducive to recruitment. While these hypotheses deserve analysis and reflection, it should be noted though that Ituri has had a pattern of cyclical conflict dynamics in the past too, principally owing to manifold vantage points for ethno-political manipulation.

4.1 Historical Path-dependencies

Based on the chapter outlining Ituri's historical background of conflicts, this section elaborates on how long-standing contestations influence the current crisis and became reinvigorated in popular opinion and political arguments. While other communities played peripheral roles in Ituri's conflicts, the relation between Lendu and Hema stands at the centre of this contention.

This relates to the longer history of entrenched jealousies, mutual contempt and deep-seated mistrust since colonial times. It is perpetuated in the myths of origin upheld by influential opinion leaders. According to these myths, the Lendu are autochthonous (which is factually wrong) or have at least arrived first (which is backed up by sources), around a century before the Hema. However, while there is a common belief among Lendu to be Bantu, it is striking that – like Ngiti or Alur – Lendu (spoken by Lendu-Bale and Hema-Gegere) is a central Sudanic, hence Nilo-Saharan language. Jealousy and contempt are also triggered racial tropes rooted in colonial ideology and radical Iturian voices, exemplified by the dissertation by Professor Lobho Iwa Djugu

invoked as ‘scientific’ proof of Lendu inferiority. This and other racial tropes attribute less intelligence to the Lendu compared to the ‘superior’ Hema and are strongly influenced by colonial-racial stereotyping. Hema-Lendu tensions are also reflected and amplified in selective justice or impunity and unequal representation in state institutions. In analogy to complaints about an overrepresentation of Kinyarwanda-speaking army officers in the Kivu provinces, many Iturians lament the number of Hema FARDC officers.

Another long-standing problem is the distribution of land and resources. As mentioned above, colonial policy – based on the premises to extract and rule – manipulated local governance and remade boundaries of belonging and rule. In the case of Djugu (and other parts of Ituri), this has resulted not only in an artificial hierarchy of Hema entities as *chefferies* and Lendu entities as *secteurs*, but also in the creation of ‘enclaves’, smaller administrative entities surrounded by larger ones. These enclaves include Bahema Baguru (squeezed in between Walendu Djatsi, Ndo-Okebo and Mambisa), Bahema Banywagi (surrounded by Walendu Tatsi) and Bahema Badjere (squeezed in between Walendu Pitsi and Walendu Tatsi).

Enclavement has led to the displacement of Hema, such as in Kpandroma in Walendu Djatsi, but also Ndrele and Amé. Many Iturians see the enclave issue, together with other land issues such as dispossession and opaquely attributed concessions as a revolving trigger of tensions. If enclaves tend to favour large Lendu entities, land tenure and concession ownership remains Hema-dominated since decolonization. However, these are only two elements in a larger typology of land-related conflicts. Contestation further exists over territoire boundaries (between Djugu and Mahagi, as well as Djugu and Irumu), as well as more locally at the level of chieftaincies/sectors but also groupements and villages. Beyond these more structural tensions, land conflicts are legion between farmers and pastoralists, between local populations and concession-holders, around collectively organized farm and grazing lands, and – linked to dysfunctionalities in the justice system – with regards to specific conflicts over plots due to illegal occupation or dispossession.

In conclusion, while the current crisis is not a neat continuation of entrenched animosities and historically grown tensions, ethnic conflict

plays out foremost around questions of land and territory, as well as associated local political power. Long-standing land issues thus keep feeding any newly arising tension, compounded by a lack in rule of law, a high prevalence of ex-combatants from previous wars, and the availability of small arms and light weapons.

4.2 Current Drivers of Violence

The historical roots of violence offered a fertile ground to exacerbating a range of more contemporary triggers of violence in Djugu's ongoing crisis. They are as much visible in the diatribe surrounding the violence as in local explanations of specific incidents and the practices of Othering that have resurfaced since late 2017. This section analyses the different drivers of violence and explains how Ituri's past intersects with the present, perpetuating political and governance failures. It organizes the analysis into rumour mongering, mutual provocations, justice and impunity, land conflict, natural resources and questions related to DDR. The trigger moments introduced above abundantly illustrate how these factors contribute to the violence.

The first is the death of Florent Dunji June 2017 in Drodro. In absence of transparent police and justice work – impunity is further pushed by a weak judicial infrastructure and the absence of sufficient courts and judges – many Lendu keep seeing the passing of Father Dunji as a symbol for their own powerlessness with regards to institutions and rights. Some of their suspicions are borne in the observation that all other five priests of Drodro parish are Hema. Justin Ngudjolo – alleged leader of CODECO, the loosely organized Lendu militia responsible for numerous attacks – is a cousin of Dunji. Sources suggest Ngudjolo receives significant support by influential Lendu operating behind the scene, many of which had unsuccessfully, requested deeper investigations into Dunji's death.

Secondly, the Maze incident of December 2017 when a young Lendu stole cartridges from the FARDC post in Uzi, following a dispute over illegal taxation at a roadblock that ended in bullets being shot. Since local Hema supported the FARDC's efforts to find and arrest the culprit, underlying tensions have been

reactivated in the weeks following this incident as the first major instances of violence occurred around Maze and across Djugu territory.

While these two incidents may not be direct causes of all the ensuing attacks, massacres and clashes, they function as important, symbolic watershed moments channelling future violence and fostering cohesion among militant Lendu. Moreover, they are invoked by interlocutors of all communities, classes and origins, and thus serve as legitimisation for ensuing violence. While they have given rise to rumour, ethnically tinged conspiracies and the spread of tracts and fake news, they have also been amplified by impunity, looming land and resource conflicts and DDR failures in the past.

RUMOURS, CONSPIRACIES AND TRACTS

Rumours, often combining facts with fiction, are an important element of producing 'social facts' and mobilising action – including violence – in areas where access to reliable information is both difficult in general and uneven across social strata. The Djugu crisis saw an increase in the circulation of tracts warning against a grand conspiracy mixing up issues as different as CODECO, a Hema-led invasion, Kabila's generals and grand oil rackets by Total and Bolloré. These rumours are pushed by a wide range of actors – including politicians, pressure groups, anonymous free-riders as well as known conspiracy theorists.

To give one example, on 21 September 2019, an unsigned tract was found at Amé market (one of the 'enclave' areas of Djugu). The tract announced an attack on the following day – which never occurred. Yet the tract was efficient in sowing fear among populations and the market remained empty on 22 September. Beyond the actual violence, this shows how the threat of violence has become a powerful political strategy.

Other tracts and rumours relate to suspicions of external meddling but often also bind Iturians into alleged collusions or destabilisation plans. Oftentimes, they relate to former belligerents, in particular the RCD-Goma (including its successors CNDP and M23) and RCD-K/ML rebellions (including its armed wing APC), but also the Ugandan and Rwandan army – both active in Ituri

previously. Even highly educated ranking army and police officials contribute to these – if not wrong, then for the least widely exaggerated and not backed up by evidence – suspicions: one claimed that “we already have names of many ex-M23 but it is too early to share with the public”.

Other conspiracies suggested that FRPI may try to undermine its own demobilisation by creating new armed formations like CODECO. While it used to be close to FRPI, evidence suggests that since 2011 the CODECO label migrated towards ex-FNI circles. None of the 75 interviews suggested that Ngiti combatants were part of today's CODECO. However, observers noted that FRPI's demobilisation process led to a dissolution of the protection rackets for Hema cattle, triggering a shortfall in revenues for both army units and Lendu combatants. Furthermore, the oil conspiracy remains particularly powerful in its various versions: certain sources claim Kahwa is the ground operator for a joint venture linking Total and the Ugandan government; others suspect a grand oil grab under the label “Congo Oil” by former president Joseph Kabila and South African allies.

These and other anti-Kabila suspicions keep resurfacing, including by elected and nominated state officials. Others again, suspect Nande entrepreneurs from North Kivu behind the destabilisation, or Rwanda through the sending of Banyabwisha in order to sabotage Ugandan interests in Ituri. Other recurrent rumours relate to the broader discourse of ‘balkanizing’ the (eastern) Congo but also specific situations like Dunji's death.

Like most conspiracies, rumours of who and what destabilised Djugu often start off from a somewhat reasonable (in the respective rationality of the interlocutor) observation enriched by largely unverifiable or even tautological explanations and claims. Many such rumours might be spread by politicians and authorities, potentially aiming at camouflaging their own governance failures and negative influence on stability. This entertains local security dilemmas and helps transposing historical tensions in the present.

PROVOCATIONS AND HALF-HEARTED CALLS TO PEACE

Both historically existing tensions and rumours circulating find a fertile soil in provocations by key actors as well as half-hearted calls for peace and restraint. While the crisis triggered a series of peace calls by customary and other leaders to refrain from violence, populations do not necessarily see all of those as genuine. One example are the two main ethnic associations, LORI for the Lendu and Ente for the Hema. While they remain influential in their respective communities and vocal in Ituri's broader political landscape, the interviews underpinning this report highlight their ambivalent role: while both have issued communiqués condemning the violence in Djugu and team up with other leaders for joint declarations, they also galvanize 'ethnic opinion' and peace calls often feature condemnation of the 'other community' and solicit solidarity for their own.

Transcripts of past and recent conferences to mediate and resolve conflict show a similar picture. Yet, given their audience in respective publics, both LORI and Ente are likely to remain key stakeholders for future peace and stabilisation efforts. None of the two, however, have been cited for playing substantive role in triggering or amplifying the Djugu violence since 2017.

In a similar vein, certain customary leaders position themselves as peace-makers but are widely perceived as so-called *pompier-pyromanes* that seek to extinguish the fires they may have set themselves. Others are said to play a major role in rallying youth to join respective armed formations. Mistrust against elites also contributed to more decentralised mobilisation, in particular on the Lendu side. A similar dynamic exists with regards to FARDC commanders and the way they run operations – sometimes using civilians in support, making those a target for armed groups in return.

Several cases, such as in Bule, are reported in which FARDC units have looted Lendu areas with Hema civilians. This nourishes an existing Lendu sentiment against government actors, part of which is said to have inspired attacks against FARDC in the second half of 2018. Mukwake Mambo who set out to attack FARDC positions on the grounds of perceived partiality of the army in favour of the Hema. Mukwake's successful operations, killing several soldiers, has granted him popularity of hard-line Lendu in turn.

GOVERNANCE AND RULE OF LAW

A full-fledged province only since Congo's 2016 move to implement the re-ordering of sub-national governance according to its 2006 Constitution, Ituri combines the bureaucratic and institutional weakness of a newly established administrative entity with larger governance challenges. On top of that, specific conflict-induced features, such as high prevalence of roadblocks, arbitrary taxes and arrests have further minimized popular trust in institutions during the current crisis.

The justice sector and the security services figure among the least trusted institution. In Ituri, few courts exist and many of them are not operational. The closest operational court to Djugu, according to interviews, is a *Tribunal de Paix* in Mongbwalu. However, these peace tribunals have limited jurisdiction as opposed to classic courts and military courts. Customary courts are largely disbanded in most of Ituri province.

This leads to a situation whereby the rare operational tribunals are overwhelmed with a litany of trials judging contested land plots. While such cases occasionally end up in court, this remains exceptional as research has shown (PAX & Haki na Amani 2009). As repeatedly stressed interviews, this situation prevails and more often than not there is no follow-up at all or – at best – a trial up for the highest bidder. Against this backdrop, no case relating to the current crisis is on trial yet despite ongoing investigations by public magistrates and the intelligence branches of police and army. Djugu-based interlocutors considered reinvigorating existing ones and establishing new courts a key to tackling the crisis. Yet, this goes beyond infrastructure, it is crucial to also ensure an everyday and impartial functioning.

THE LACK OF SUSTAINABLE DDR

As earlier mentioned, Ituri shares a history of unsuccessful disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) programmes with other parts of Congo. Ituri's flagship DDR programme was called *Désarmement et Réinsertion Communautaire* (DCR) and ran in three phases covering September 2004 to November 2006. While the FRPI is still active (and

currently engaged in a demobilisation effort), combatants of most other armed groups of the Ituri War underwent DCR. However, like other DDR programmes, DCR was mired in failures.

Most notably, the registration of combatants included civilians and the disarmament process was centralised, leading to stigmatisation of actual combatants who had to travel long distances. In consequence, many combatants reportedly avoided the programme. Moreover, numerous combatants demobilised without arms, preferring to store them in case conflict resumed. Since the process was launched hastily, little time was given to sensitize combatants and their communities ahead. This galvanised distrust among combatants and communities alike. Ituri's track record of violence made it further difficult to motivate demobilisation. Continuous presence of other belligerents and partial, extortive behaviour of army units triggered local security dilemmas to which combatants reacted by not joining DDR.

Armed groups sometimes used threats to actively discourage their combatants to disarm. And, similar to other DDR efforts, the reintegration component in the DCR was poorly developed, leading to abandonment of ex-combatants some of whom returned to armed groups later on. There was also no meaningful approach to psycho-social aspects, including PTSD and other trauma. Some of these problems were linked to a lack of community engagement in both the planning and execution of the programme. Host communities of returnees were neither prepared nor included in the beneficiaries and ex-combatants often committed violations such as theft of extortion as their reintegration kits were geared to short-term survival instead of longer-term sustainability and opportunities for future civilian employment.

Hence, the incomplete nature of DCR and smaller demobilisation efforts along the way left a reservoir of unemployed, untrained youth easily to (re-)recruit. While statistics do not exist, various observers point at ex-FNI combatants forming part of the CODECO. Into the current crisis, the presence of unemployed ex-combatants also served as catalyst for smaller disputes to escalate into outright violence. Moreover, the hangover of failed DDR compounded more structural security challenges.

In interviews including with members of security services, interlocutors stressed the porosity of the border to Uganda. According to FARDC intelligence, there are at least 200 unmonitored roads and paths, especially in the Wago area. While these are opportunities for armed actors to organise and move, the lack of oversight also feeds into the numerous suspicions of external meddling. This further delegitimises state security forces, whose reputation is already tainted by allegations of partiality, extortion and harassment.

LAND, ENCLAVES AND THE STRUGGLE OVER 'ETHNIC TERRITORY'

Much of Ituri's conflicts revolve around differently situated tensions over land and territory, including dynamics of displacement and dispossession but also politico-administrative demarcation, access and property as well as legal uncertainty and unsolved cases. While little evidence exists as to customary conflict and specific land disputes a direct trigger for violence, it is noteworthy that some of the earlier mentioned enclaves have been epicentres of violence and displacement.

This, however, appears to be an indirect cause as existing tensions are likely to have played out more stridently in places with a history of struggle over 'ethnic territory' (Muchukiwa 2006) where such contestation is concentrated in densely populated areas framed by fine-grained demarcation. While many interviewees agreed that grievances linked to land owing to large-scale, often Hema-owned concessions as well as frustration over the official demarcation and gazetting of *chefferies*, *secteurs* and *groupements* strongly contribute to ethnic rallying, no specific examples were brought forward as to causal links with attacks.

However, certain dynamics around land and territory seem to play a more implicit role in pushing the violence. For instance, violent attacks often clustered around enclaves and appeared to be motivated by radical ethnocentrism and concomitant efforts to prevent Hema to cross Lendu areas as usual in enclave areas, like Bahema Nord, where the fastest roads and paths to another village often lead to villages of surrounding Walendu Pitsi and Tatsi sectors. Similar dynamics can be observed for Bahema Badjere. Yet, no tangible evidence or testimony exists to fully ascertain this link. Similar

observations can be made for some of the large concessions, such as in Berunda forest.

Dogged rumours over the presence of Hema-friendly FARDC units as well as ex-M23 combatants might have led Lendu-based militia to intensify attacks in these areas in a bid to counter an imagined security dilemma. However, this needs to be seen in the wider controversy around concessions in Ituri, running counter the broadly established idea that land-use should be community-based. While no direct link exists between a concession conflict and CODECO actions, popular grievance voiced at large-scale landowners might be a repertoire armed groups capitalise upon. Finally, land rental is common between and across Lendu and Hema. However, with the peaks of violence coinciding with harvest periods in the region, local observers suggest that both jealousy and opportunity might have played a role in specific attacks.

NATURAL RESOURCES: UNWITTING DYNAMICS OF GOLD AND OIL

Having discussed the eminent role of land as well as agricultural patterns such as the social and humanitarian consequences through the displacement-induced loss of harvests and access to farmland, a final topic is worth attention: natural resources. Both with regards to the power of rumours as social facts as well as observable dynamics on the ground, mineral resources are important in Ituri.

Even though mining as such does not play a role in the Djugu crisis, collective sense-making of the crisis often features references to prospective oil exploration around Lake Albert. While the oil concessions in that area have been held by Dan Gertler, an Israeli businessman with close ties to former President Kabila, they are running out in June 2021 and it is unclear whether and by whom they might be taken over. While two major oil companies initially interested – TOTAL and ENI – seem to have lost appetite, a potential bid by Tullow Oil which has been drilling on the Ugandan side since 2006 might contribute to speculations over a regional conspiracy fully in line with dominant balkanization theories.

Yet the absence of direct links between the violence in Djugu and the competition over potential future oil rents may not preclude a significant connection.

Similarly, gold is a potentially forceful but very indirect aspect. Rooted in a long history of industrialised colonial exploitation, Ituri's gold sector is a motor for revenue in the region ever since. The most important gold deposits are clustered around Mongbwalu and Kilo-Moto (Schouten 2016). As industrial operations ended in ruination like other large-scale mining endeavours (MIBA, SOMINKI etc.), they were re-appropriated by artisanal miners and thrived in the shape of so-called 'informal' economies.

Throughout the Ituri War, under heavy participation of the Ugandan army's business enterprises led by General Kazini, as well as afterwards, gold smuggling rackets destined to Uganda have been thriving. The onset of the current crisis coincided with both a drop in international gold prices as well as a centralisation of clandestine trade in gold originating from Butembo by the incoming NDC-Rénové rebellion under Guidon Shimiray. Although not observed in fieldwork, both factors can hypothetically contribute to a loss of labour opportunities among Iturian gold miners, many of which are former combatants, and thus enlarge the pool of potential recruits.

4.3 Key Stakeholders of the Crisis

This section introduces the protagonists of the crisis. While it does not attribute responsibility, it tries to outline why and how certain actors may have played a certain role, how the different stakeholders relate to each other or not, and what their known background is.

CODECO AND EX-FNI NETWORKS

CODECO was created around 1978 by Kakado Tsubira near Gety in the Walendu Bindi *secteur* of Irumu territory. Initially, its aim was to promote agricultural development among the Ngiti population of the area but later on it also turned to fetishism and other mystic engagements. With the advent of the FRPI rebellion during the Ituri war, Kakado became the producer of *dawa* (the medicine used by armed groups to render combatants invincible in combat). In 2009, Kakado was arrested for his support to FRPI and died in Bunia prison two years later.

While other CODECO members went into hiding back then, the group's name has flared up only 2018 again, as witnesses reported that individuals using the name were supporting youth in Djugu through *dawa* and ceremonies aimed at motivating them for attacks. Other sources have suggested that CODECO has become more a label than a fixed group led by specific people, and that it has been increasingly used to organize ethnic cults and worshipping among the Lendu–Bale since 2011, and not anymore among Lendu–Ngiti since that time. The concrete 2017 onwards mobilisation is reported to have begun in the Tara hills, where trainings and initiation ceremonies for recruits were organized. Currently, in CODECO strongholds, Thursday is the day of worship, hence few attacks happen. Blessing ceremonies occur before operations, including the production of *dawa* and the sharing of food including *ndeera*, a type of spinach to which mystical powers are ascribed when consumed/eaten following a specific ceremony.

While CODECO's traditional FRPI links have not been invoked, testimonies converged that today's CODECO involved a number of ex-FNI members, such as the late Mukwake Mambo but also the former chief of Walendu Pitsi *secteur*. Many former ex-FNI combatants have been reported to be in the ranks of CODECO, owing to weaknesses in the Ituri demobilisation efforts after the war. Moreover, it was under Mukwake's leadership that the group managed to increasingly formalise its structure. While Mukwake died after clashes with the army, and the Walendu Pitsi chief has placed in administrative leave for health reason, it remains highly unclear who is pushing, organizing and financing the mobilisation – with perhaps one exception: In 2019, Justin Ndugjolo surfaced as a key CODECO commander, making the thus far only known claims on behalf of the structure. Ndugjolo has no known relation with former FNI leader Mathieu Ndugjolo Chui who was acquitted by the ICC. Instead, he is referred to as being a cousin of the killed Lendu priest Florent Dunji. Besides claiming a number of attacks, security sources reported he had submitted a list of claims to government authorities.

While CODECO's financing and support networks remain largely inscrutable, this report finds that groups operating under the CODECO label extort Lendu traders for contributions. The case of businessman Tikpa, whose killing triggered a spate of violence in June 2019, is a flagrant example of where this

strategy met resistance, and ultimately failed. Considered a traitor whose business benefitted from Hema clients, Tikpa's refusal to financially contribute to CODECO sparked anger, and ultimately led to a deadly assault on him on 10 June 2019. If CODECO elements faced little backlash from security forces in 2018, FARDC tried to track down certain of their hideouts in 2019, particularly around Wago forest and Mbau during operations in July 2019.

Putting the movement under pressure, this has led to the dispersal of CODECO groups across Walendu Pitsi and Djatsi and certain units seem to develop some willingness to demobilise. At the same time, attacks in major agglomerations and key roads have diminished since. However, in the clashes around Largu, CODECO units were able to inflict serious losses on FARDC as well, and captured army weaponry. Congolese intelligence drew a tentative list of potential CODECO members and their villages of origin:

SECTOR	GROUPEMENTS	VILLAGES
Walendu Pitsi	Dhendro	Tiba, Colo, Petro, Dhendro, Goke (village of Mukwake), Djukaba, Ndalo, Ndrele, Ladi, Ngobu, Nyamandra
	Ladedjo	Lobo, Tche
	Guba	Delo, Lutsi, Godjoka
	Linga	Ndalo
	Dz'na	Ala, Diambu
	Brubu	Bale
	Ndjukpa	Nyo, Lumbu, Ngambindro, Lovi
	Goikpa	Zanyo, Gipi (commander Tissu), Mbukpa, Dedja, Liba, Kalo
Sesele	Sesele	
Walendu Djatsi	Pitso	Dgala, Kamuso
	Dz'na	Mbau
	Tchudja	Kobu, Gditsi, Liso (commanders Papi, Innocent, Etienne), Ndikpa,
	Loga	Tshalaka (village of Ndugjolo)
	Saliboko	Masumbuko (commander Ngalu)
	Bedi Ezekere	Gbala, Kindia

EX-UPC/PUSIC NETWORKS

While key UPC commanders such as Thomas Lubanga and Bosco Ntaganda have been convicted by the ICC in recent years, many former UPC and PUSIC leaders, including chief Kahwa Mandro, have not been indicted on issues relating to the Ituri war. While Kahwa and his aides have spent most of the time since commuting between Kampala, Bunia and Djugu, his name has repeatedly been cited since the onset of the current crisis.

Many interlocutors having hailed his public efforts to appease tensions – including a call upon new President Tshisekedi to take action against potential external instigators – others have cautioned against his role and suspected Kahwa of both building up Hema resistance and potentially acting on behalf of Ugandan stakeholders with interests in oil exploration on both sides of Lake Albert. No interlocutor, however, provided tangible and verifiable claims as to Kahwa’s involvement.

THE CONGOLESE ARMY

Like elsewhere in DRC, FARDC units are often accused to play a problematic role in their task of providing security and protecting territorial integrity. In Djugu too, FARDC are object of widespread suspicions and accusations of having not reacted timely against the violence or even colluded with other entrepreneurs of violence. These accusations are based on testimony, cursory evidence as well as the observation that operational funds – only given to units operating in active zones of conflict – represent a major source of income to the army leadership. In the case of Djugu, the army has been both a bystander, a victim. The following words of a local army commander interviewed are telling in this regard:

In the army, you need two elements for victory: capability and willingness.

Initially and throughout the first major wave of violence in early 2018, FARDC units have been consistently late in their interventions or have not reacted to attacks at all. Most likely, this is linked to the army’s sparse deployment across Ituri before mid-2018 (many units were rather concentrated in Beni

area) and the logistic limitations of frontline units. Since mid-2018, however, and throughout 2019 the army has become itself a target of raids and significantly upped its presence in Djugu. Since August 2018, several high-level FARDC officers have died in a series of incidents. While some of the events were later identified as ambushes and clashes with suspected CODECO, others appear to have been inside jobs and based on potential discord. The cases of killed colonels Jaguar and Bovick in late 2018 fall into the latter category.

This coincided with an increased presence of notorious army commanders with doubtful track records on other operations and conflict zones, as well as a series of mysterious incidents as well as smaller and bigger scandals over the illegal involvement of FARDC troops in business rackets. Most recently, the new commander of the Ituri operational sector, General Kabundi, has been put under house arrest by the late army chief of intelligence Kahimbi for allegedly smuggling minerals, and the sector's deputy commander, General Chiviri Amuli (who also has a track record of mining involvement) took over.

Kabundi's predecessor, General David Rugayi, faced similar allegations before being permutated to South Kivu. Rugayi and Kabundi are former RCD-Goma officers. While they did not join CNDP or M23, this keeps feeding suspicions as to their loyalty. These suspicions extend to other commanders too.

Other FARDC officers have been replaced for lack of performance or in sequence to scandals. Colonel Rambo Kahengere was relieved of his duties for alleged ammunition sale. Chiviri in turn, plays a curious role in having returned over 100 cattle to Hema herders who had suffered a pillage of around 500 cattle in June 2019. Rambo and Chiviri are cited in the recall of army positions along the shores of Lake Albert and in Losandrema, leading to questioning by local populations as rumours emerged over arms trafficking across the lake and CODECO returning to former positions in Wago forest.

Other cases exist in which subordinate army officers sold ammunition, or where stockpiles were left to attackers, such as in Largu, Bahema Nord. One army colonel was involved in cattle theft camouflaged as an attack by Lendu militia. More generally, the army inadvertently contributed to the broader

escalation when in December 2017 in Uzi, roadblock taxes triggered the theft of an ammunition rack by a young Lendu.

The lack of trust in the Congolese army is far more apparent among Lendu populations, many of whom see the FARDC as an ally to the Hema given the perceived dominance of Tutsi officers in key positions, including in recent reshuffles as of mid-2019 as well as the deployment of the mentioned ex-RCD commanders or Gegere officers such as Colonel Ngadjole Tipi Zerozero and Banyamulenge officers such as Colonel Michel Rukunda Makanika – even though no proven instance of wrongdoing is documented for them in the ongoing crisis.

This perception is bolstered by a trend of indiscriminate arrests of Lendu youth suspected *en bloc* to be CODECO members or sympathisers. The army's reputation of leaning towards the Hema-Gegere is contrasted by an alleged Lendu sympathy among the Congolese police. Several sources reported tensions between army and police following a liberation of potential Lendu suspects from detention.

More generally, and like other security services, the army has been accused of putting revenue before performance and to allocate positions and grades not on the basis of merit but previous capacity of nuisance. Besides former RCD-Goma officers, other commanders deployed to Ituri appear to fit this category. The Ituri military region (the administrative counterpart to the operational sector) has been led by General Etienne Bindu since late 2018, previously been suspected of backing former rebel commander Sheka Ntabo Ntaberi. Before Bindu, General She Kasikila, a former Mai-Mai commander, held a key position in Ituri's military region.

POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC ELITES

Since the Ituri war from 1999–2004, the province's key political leaders have remained largely the same. Veteran politicians such as John Tibasima or Pilo Kamaragi still command prowess in the political debate and are heard by Iturians. Customary chiefs such as Kahwa Mandro and Emile Longbe have been criticised for advocating peace while preparing for war.

Others like Mbusa Nyamwisi are not Iturians but maintain leverage based on their networks and historical importance. More globally, Iturians interviewed disavow of their leaders. Both Hema and Lendu have underlined that while their history of cohabitation is mired by tension, the current levels of violence were unusual and thus point regularly at elite manipulation of ethnic politics. Certain interlocutors have illustrated this claim by highlighting that in specific areas, such as Fataki, peaceful cohabitation continued throughout the major waves of violence.

Yet, the evolution of local and provincial politics, including Ituri's ascent from district to province in the context of decentralisation, has propelled new actors to the scene such as outgoing governor Abdallah Penembaka who – unlike his successor Bamanisa – did not have a strong reputation of a peacebuilder. Ituri politics are framed both locally – often relating to long-standing tensions between Lendu and Hema in Irumu and Djugu (but less so in Mahagi, Mambasa and Aru) – and nationally where differences have mostly played out along the pro-/anti-Kabila rift since 2016. Moreover, Ituri politics remain under notable influence of external dynamics, including from neighbouring North Kivu provinces as well as Uganda.

Economically, the province is strategic to both Congolese and foreign entrepreneurs. Situated at key trading routes and hosting numerous resources (not limited to but including foremost gold and oil), it has served as Uganda's source of supply during most of the Congo wars and its main border crossings Kasenyi and Aru are among DRC's main land borders in terms of goods traded (import and export). This importance is reflected in a particularly strong provincial federation of enterprises (FEC), led by Constant Bubu Lenga, as well as other heavyweight entrepreneurs including fuel trader David Kiriku or Aroka Kopka, FEC's head in Kpandroma.

REGIONAL ACTORS

Based on both its actual involvement into subsequent armed conflicts affecting Ituri as well as numerous associated conspiracy theories about foreign meddling in eastern Congo, Uganda is often vaguely named as a key factor in the Djugu crisis. While some of the assumptions link back to key Iturian

stakeholders living in Uganda, others pertain to the porosity of borders around Lake Albert that allows for unofficial economic activities on both sides such as the smuggling, including arms and minerals. Into the Djugu crisis, the notion of oil has been a recurrent theme for Iturians to explain the destabilisation of the province.

Certain Ituri leaders were named as agents facilitating either Kampala's access to Congolese oil or the sabotage of Congolese exploration benefitting already ongoing Ugandan operations on the other side of Lake Albert. These theories, however, often originate from radical voices, justifying in parts the armed mobilisation under the label of CODECO. Part of the broader suspicions of DRC being constantly infiltrated by foreign forces is linked to the arrest of several alleged ex-M23 combatants April 2018 in Kadilo area, as they crossed with weapons into Ituri's forests.

However, it remained unclear to this point whether they were hired by Hema herders to protect cattle (in many areas across eastern Congo, cattle-herding includes armed guards) or for any other reason. Another case is that of a former fisherman known as Biogi (a Hema from Losandrema living in Uganda), whose pirogues were used to transfer arms across the lake.

Rumours are also consistent when it comes to alleged infiltrations of Ugandan and Rwandan nationals with the aim of reaching Berunda and Tara forests and help training either Lendu or Hema militia. Yet, these claims are consistently not evidenced by interlocutors. Other rumours emerged in connection to the Kinyarwanda-speaking migrant populations that have in recent years moved to Irumu (Boga), known as Banyabwisha due to their believed origin in Rutshuru.

While reports exist of attackers speaking with Kinyarwanda or Swahili with a respective accent, no hard proof underpins the version that Banyabwisha would have been involved in the Djugu violence besides unconfirmed reports on Hutu IDs recovered from killed attackers.

5 |

A Stabilization

Stalemate?

Due to its comparatively calm situation since the onset of stabilisation efforts, as well as MONUSCO's engagement through its stabilisation support unit (SSU), Djugu has remained out of the focus for concomitant programmes. As compared to Irumu territory and other priority zones in the Kivu provinces, little knowledge and analysis exists on the area. Nonetheless, the evolution of conflict and violence since late 2017 shows the need for more engagement. Even more so, given MONUSCO's ambiguous appreciation by local populations in Djugu, it is crucial for the mission and its stabilisation component to reorganise existing approaches and develop new strategies to meaningfully impact on peacebuilding and the reduction of violence. Nonetheless, the opportunities for engagement are mitigated for a number of reasons. First of all, international intervention in the Djugu crisis has remained poor and faces doubts:

When there is war, all NGOs leave. Why killing the people and bring them aid and peacekeepers afterwards? What is it good for? The population needs peace not aid (female interviewee, Djugu 2019).

Like elsewhere in DRC, a growing fatigue of international intervention is illustrated in the population's frustration over late and misguided action, driven by self-interest rather than humanitarian concerns (de Vries 2016). UN peacekeepers for instance, have a reputation of being idle in the face of massacres, and its civilian units as too focused on workshops rehashing problems instead of finding solutions. This fits a broader image of peace efforts in Djugu since 2018. Numerous meetings and conferences have been

held, such as most prominently in July 2018 the Fataki retreat in preparation of a more formal dialogue.

In June, new President Felix Tshisekedi visited Ituri to call out the risk of genocide and promising to solve the crisis. However, since violence continued unabated afterwards and given his blunt statements, observers are wondering if the complexity of the area had been underestimated by his government. Nonetheless, positive signs remain. The new governor of Ituri, Jean Bamanisa, is seen as committed to pacify the province. Many customary leaders support his initiatives through respective community outreach activities. Moreover, civil society and church organisations, such as FOMI, CJDP, the ILPs (local peace initiatives), NPM (the pacifist mothers' nucleus) and local media play an active role in transmitting peace messages.

Numerous joint declarations by Hema and Lendu leaders calling for peace and deeds of commitment signed by Hema and Lendu chiefs provide further signs of hope. Against this backdrop, the current crisis offers vantage points in which stabilisation efforts could play a more active role.

Yet, this depends on a number of factors. First and foremost, stabilisation efforts in an ongoing conflict zone are fragile by definition. In the face of continuing massacres, programming must heavily rely on a thick web of contingency measures and operational alternatives. The case of Kitchanga, in North Kivu, shows how easily past successful stabilisation efforts can quickly be reversed with the onset of a new cycle of conflict.

Secondly, in the absence of long-term analysis and previous programming, initial stabilisation efforts should focus on offering a more nuanced understanding of the conflict topography and a serious analysis of stakeholders. As in many other policy interventions in the region, the co-optation of conflict actors into processes of pacification and stabilisation can often be necessary but comes along with a series of risks and caveats. A standard approach without sensitivity to hurdles and spoilers is at risk to be futile. While international peacebuilding efforts increasingly emphasize deep context analysis, not all of this analysis is later transformed into concrete programming outputs.

Moreover, entrepreneurs of violence know the game of stabilisation and perfected a “politics of the mirror” (Chabal & Daloz 1999) towards donors and outside interveners, suggesting windows of opportunity that turn into later traps. Associating them, or binding them into peace efforts is necessary, yet it should not compromise the credibility of such efforts towards the populations as main beneficiaries. Legitimacy of stabilisation efforts may be born out of the international community, but it will only grow with lasting buy-in of affected communities.

As this report outlined, the Djugu crisis is a complicated mixture of deeply entrenched fault lines that have emerged over centuries and already led to a first significant breakdown during the Ituri war.

While the fault lines surface in between two of Ituri's main ethnic groups – Hema and Lendu – their underlying logics involve more complex dynamics around land, territory and local political power and invisible, often collective emotional, memorial dynamics such as feelings of inferiority and superiority impregnated upon communities in over a century of colonial rule, bad governance and violence.

Both the tangible and invisible factors can easily be activated along specific instances of contestation or provocation, as the trigger factors for the Djugu crisis has illustrated above. They are then amplified by a broader context of weak institutions, dysfunctional security and manipulative politics.

In the case of Djugu, economic competition over land for agricultural use and cattle herding, as well as over timber supply chains, is accentuated along seemingly ethnic lines between Hema and Lendu. While – even in the midst of significant violence – members of both communities continue to get along in specific areas, the path-dependency of historic antagonism fuels the organisation of the violence according to the ethnic cleavage. The emergence of CODECO is a case in point.

Rooted in clandestine mobilisation in sequence to two comparatively minor but highly symbolic events, radical leaders saw an opportunity to rally around ethnicity. Subsequently, such initiatives spiral out of control (like elsewhere in DRC) and violence escalates with or without the intention of the initial mobilisers, with armed entrepreneurs seizing opportunities to position themselves.

As the crisis expanded, state authorities have been repeatedly accused of siding with one community against the other. While government actors initially classified the crisis initially as ethnic, main community and church leaders refute this reading and put forward more hidden, political motivations – including the (meanwhile nullified) assumption that violence could be used to postpone the 2018 elections in Ituri. The following citation couples some broader debates and suspicions among Iturians:

The current situation in Ituri is due to the presence of CODECO, claiming to protect the Lendu against the invasion of the Hema. This group defends in one way or another the interests of the Lendu community. In my opinion, the cows of Hema who destroyed the Lendu fields would be the main underlying cause. There is also the eviction of the Lendu villages near Lake Chomia to facilitate oil exploitation around Lake Albert.

The evolution of the crisis features the increased use of firearms in 2019, as well as the increased targeting of FARDC positions (which began in August 2018). Certain interlocutors explained this with Lendu rancour against alleged FARDC partiality, others suggested practical reasons in terms of supply. Moreover, by mid-2019 the conflict has concentrated specifically on the confrontation between CODECO and FARDC. The 2019 violence also increasingly singles out children, old people and populations in IDP camps. Meanwhile, the level of destruction has remained even: attacks are often accompanied by large-scale looting and burning of houses and public buildings. While burning and looting have slightly diminished in 2019, attacks have become deadlier for civilians. If official and reliable statistics do not exist, first responders in the area speak about a significant increase in human bodies recuperated after attacks. While the increased use of firearms in attacks is likely connected to the pillaging of army stockpiles during previous clashes, it also came with an increased use of army uniforms by attackers.

In sum, the Djugu crisis has remained a largely mysterious war, including potential war crimes and crimes against humanity (OHCHR 2020), for neither intelligence services and international organisations nor local observers seem to be able to provide a full picture. Alongside the Beni and Kasai examples, this speaks to a broader trend of conflict in eastern Congo throughout the past five years. Instigators of violence have gained a level of awareness with regards to outside scrutiny as well as to technological means of warfare. They also learned how to amplify the impact of violence in rendering it as opaque as possible.

Moreover, the role of Ituri province in recent proceedings at the International Criminal Court (ICC) nurtured suspicions among interlocutors, often weary to speak openly. While interlocutors during fieldwork were not shy to flag names of key individuals, they believe to play a part in the violence, they would refuse or lack the information to share additional details or back up claims made. While all of that complicates thorough analysis, it has the main benefit for entrepreneurs of violence to spread fear. In a collectively traumatised society, this significantly contributes to suspicion, and complicates community efforts to stand united against violence.

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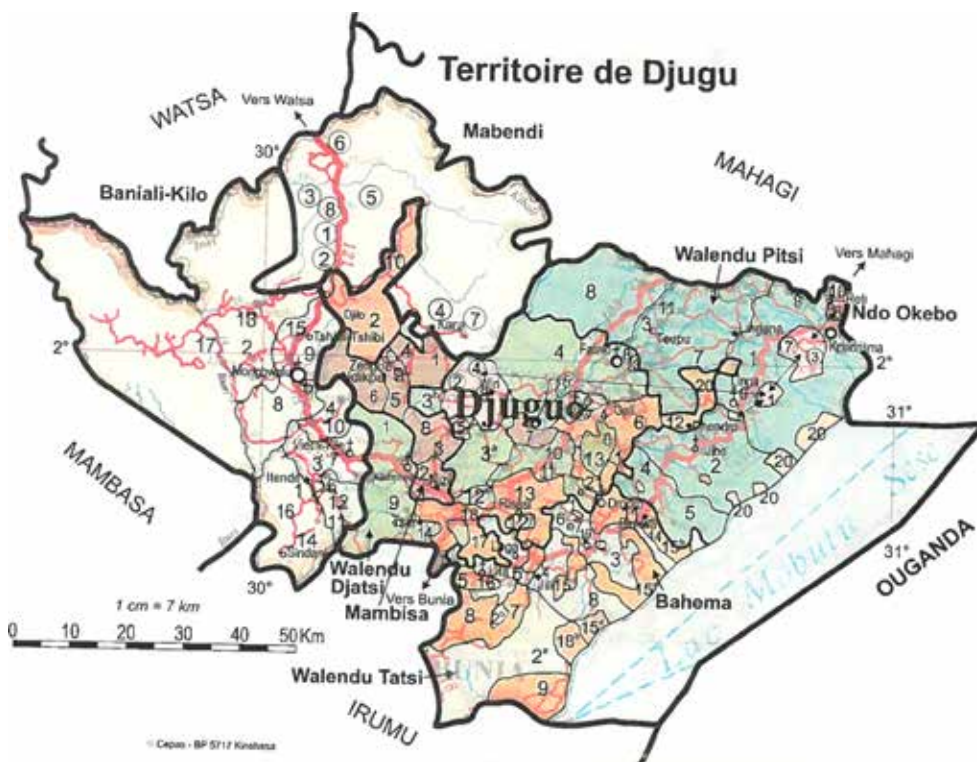
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ANNEX:

Administrative maps of Djugu and Mahagi



Chefferie ACUR-DJUGANDA

- 1 ANOLA-MONT-ZEU
- 2 ALKPA
- 3 DJUPUKANYA
- 4 KOCH-LALA
- 5 KUSU
- 6 NDAMA

Chefferie ANGHAL

- 1 ABIRA
- 2 AGBA
- 3 ALUR
- 4 ANGHAL II
- 5 AIWO
- 6 DJUPIO
- 7 JUPAGASA
- 8 NZINZI
- 9 PARAMIVOR
- 10 SARU
- 11 UKAZU
- 12 URI

Chefferie DJUKOT

- 1 BERUNDA
- 2 DJUPAJOW
- 3 DJUPANYALENGI
- 4 DJUPAWALI
- 5 PAKER
- 6 PAMITU-AMESE
- 7 UMOYO

Chefferie MOKAMBO

- 1 ASIA
- 2 APALA
- 3 ARE
- 4 AWASI
- 5 JUPANYANGU
- 6 LABO-RAMOGI
- 7 MUSONGWA
- 8 MUSWA
- 9 RUVINGA

