The War within a War: Analysis of the Ituri Conflict, Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, from a Systemic Perspective

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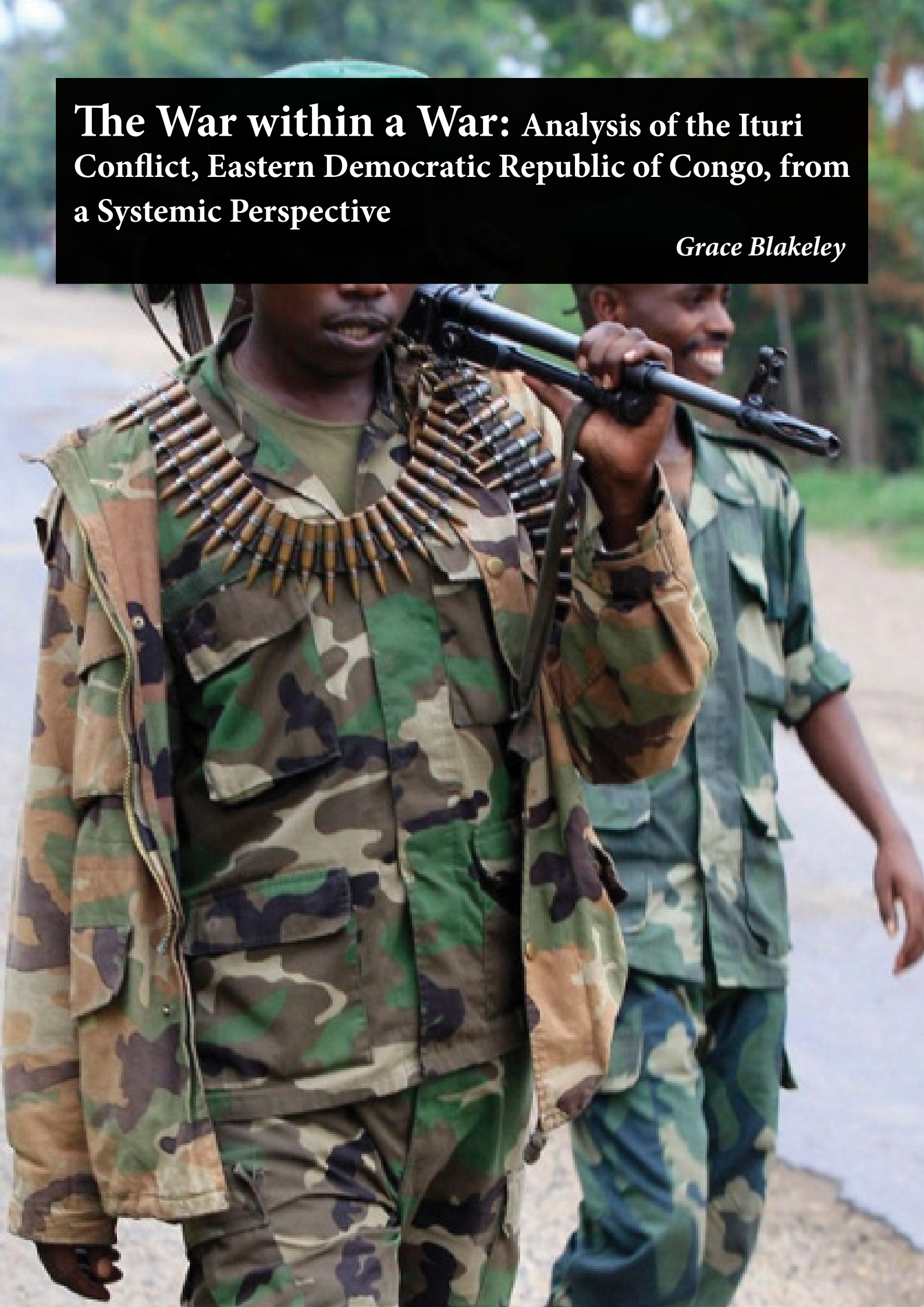


1. Introduction

It is the contention of this paper that analysis of the war in the DRC (Democratic Republic of Congo) so far has suffered from one major problem; that is the tendency to oversimplify the complexity of the conflict by understanding it through certain preconceived narratives and frames. Such a tendency leads to certain dynamics being obscured, whilst others are overemphasised (Autesserre, 2012). I will be arguing that the application of systems theory to the study of conflict offers a unique opportunity to overcome some of the disadvantages associated with framing. Rather than attempting the impossibility of gaining a 'perspective from nowhere', systems theory brings us closer to gaining a 'perspective from everywhere'; i.e. as opposed to attempting to reduce the influence of frames on analysis, it allows us to include insights from a multitude of perspectives such that the influence of each individual narrative is reduced (Coleman, 2006). Systems theory also provides us with unique insights into the nature of intractable conflict; only through holistic analysis, incorporating dynamics such as causal interaction and feedback, can one come to understand the nature of complex, intractable conflict. What's more, conceptualising conflict in such a way provides distinctive opportunities for intervention which are often missed by more linear approaches; innovations in conflict interventions based on a systemic perspective such as systemic action research outlined by Burns (2007; 2011) give the peace builder different ways of understanding a conflict, often enabling her to identify new avenues for intervention.

Coleman (2006: 326) argues that systems theory should be used as a 'superordinate frame that employs a process of multi-perspective reframing, and a methodology for analysing, intervening, and using feedback to address conflicts.' Rather than attempting to negate the influence of individual narratives, systems theory allows the researcher to combine different approaches based on different epistemological frameworks into a comprehensive conceptualisation of the conflict as a whole, including the perspectives of a number of stakeholders. By recognising the explanatory power of individual paradigms used by different authors in their analysis of the war in Ituri and combining them into a single conceptualisation of the conflict, it becomes possible to gain a broader and more nuanced understanding of the conflict under examination (Coleman, 2006).

The war in Ituri and the wider Congo war of which is was a part is continually described as a complex phenomenon. Jason Stearns (2011: 2) writes 'I do not have a Unified Theory of the Congo War, because it does not exist. The conflict is complex and knotted, with dozens of different protagonists.' Reyntjens (2009: 1) writes that 'in order to understand the multifaceted and complex nature of the conflicts, an eclectic approach to factors is required; some factors occurred simultaneously, whilst others were successive.' Autesserre (2010: 2) writes '[s]cholars and policy makers consider the Congo wars of the 1990s and their aftermath as some of the most complex conflicts of our time.' Daley (2006: 304) argues that traditional accounts of the Congo wars (as well as those in Rwanda and Burundi) '[fail] to address the complexity of politics in Africa'.

The Ituri conflict, which was at once separate to and also fundamentally linked with the broader national conflict, has been described using a similar lexicon. Vlassenroot and Raeymaekers (2004: 394, 388) write about how the Ituri conflict was 'complex and highly unpredictable' and that it should be understood as a 'complex of dynamics'. Pottier (2008: 427, 445) characterises the conflict in Ituri as a 'complex emergency', also warning about the 'temptation to go easy on Ituri's history and dilute its complexities'. These quotations demonstrate the powerful appeal of applying the concept of complexity to the national war in the DRC and the Ituri conflict which formed a part of it.

There is a tendency among academics and laypersons alike to make sense out of this apparent complexity by filtering information through particular narratives or frames; in the context of the war in the DRC these often take the form of either 'good guys' versus 'bad guys' logics, or the kind of New Barbarism thesis advocated by authors such as Kaplan, which see no rhyme or reason in the African conflicts of the twenty first century, only chaos (Autesserre, 2012; Prunier, 2009: 357; Dunn, 2003). George Lakoff (2011: 25) describes mental frames as 'the mental structures that allow human beings to understand reality— and sometimes to create what we take to be reality'; such frames determine which ideas we have, the way we reason and even what we perceive and the way we act. He describes how these frames are combined in our minds to create narratives which are stories that help 'transform a set of values, principles, beliefs, and

statistics into stories with a beginning, a middle, and an end' (Lakoff, 2011: 129). The most fundamental narrative roles are 'hero, villain, victim and helper' who interact in the basic narrative processes of self-defence, rescue, overcoming obstacles and achieving potential (Lakoff, 2011: 129). These narratives are so strong and deeply felt that they determine the way we reason and what information we take in; this unconscious confirmation bias can distort our conception of reality (Lakoff, 2006; Westen, 2008). This effect is intensified when the media pick up on and reinforce our unconscious frames; the marked tendency of the American press to do this is noted by Jamieson and Waldman (2003).

Prunier (2009: 357) writes of how the complexity of the situation in the DRC is so pervasive that many 'fall victim to the syndrome of desperately wanting to find 'good guys' and 'bad guys' who could restore meaning and clarity to such moral gloom'. In this context Prunier is referring to the American tendency during the First Congo war to unquestioningly accept the official RPA line, especially regarding the fate of the Hutu refugees in the Congo, because they were still seen as 'victims' after the genocide. The reality of the Rwandan genocide threatened to undermine the story of the Americans as 'heroes' to the African 'victims' (the Tutsi) threatened by other African 'villains' (the Hutu); the Americans had done nothing to stop the genocide and as such felt an acute sense of guilt for letting the 'good guys' suffer alone. However, the rise to power of the RPF and the subsequent Congo war allowed them to recover their self-image without altering their narrative. Reyntjens (2009: 27) describes this phenomenon succinctly; '[f]rom the first days after the RPF's victory, abuse was veiled in a conspiracy of silence, induced in part by an international feeling of guilt over the genocide and a comfortable 'good guys-bad guys' dichotomy'. By seeing the war in the DRC through the 'frame' of 'good guys' vs 'bad guys', one can ignore the complexity of the situation and adopt a narrative which affirms one's beliefs, whilst dismissing or rationalising information which contradicts that view.

When these simplifications are found wanting, when, for example, the RPA (Rwandese Patriotic Army) was implicated in the murders of hundreds of thousands of Hutu refugees in the DRC (see page 24), it is tempting to stop attempting to find meaning in the chaos at all. Richard Kaplan (1994) writes in his well-known article The Coming Anarchy about how Africa is slowly imploding due to 'scarcity, crime, overpopulation, tribalism and disease'. He tells of how African countries make 'no geographic or demographic sense' and that, as a consequence, 'Africa is reverting to the Victorian atlas'. Dunn (2003: 166) writes about how this kind of fatalistic and 'subtly racist' logic has coalesced in the form of the 'New Barbarism thesis', the main tenet of which is that Africa cannot sustain the basic elements of human civilisation. Dunn (2003: 166) claims that: 'Western… responses to the crisis in Zaire and the Great Lakes were largely informed by this trope', in large part due to a media which portrayed the crisis as one of 'chaos, tribalism and irrational African violence'. The temptation to make sense of the obvious complexity of the wars in the Great Lakes by reverting to either of the two aforementioned frames is strong, and understandable. But it is not always necessary; if we approached the analysis of conflict from a different perspective, the apparent chaos of contemporary African conflicts is rendered more comprehensible.

However, whilst the influence of narratives can be reduced, it is never possible to approach analysis completely objectively. According to the observer principle this is because the mere process of observation involves the researcher intimately with the system they are trying to observe; observation cannot be objective, and must account for the presence of the observer within the system (Bernshausen & Bonacker, 2011; Körppen & Roppers). Similarly, any analysis of the war in the DRC takes place within the context of a particular perspective – the one which is chosen by the researcher (Coleman, 2006). One has to accept the impossibility of providing a strictly objective analysis of conflict; the conclusions that are reached will always be dependent upon the subject deriving them (Bernshausen & Bonacker, 2011; Cilliers, 1998). Coleman (2004: 198) talks of 'frame-driven' analysis in which the cognitive structures the analyst brings to bear in conceptualising a conflict deeply affect what he finds; he writes 'our reading of any conflict will depend largely on… the cognitive structures we bring to the analysis… This is particularly true when the situations we face are difficult to comprehend: vast, complex, volatile, and replete with contradictory information.'

However, according to Coleman (2006: 325), analysing a conflict from a systemic perspective can lead to 'frame-breaking' insights and the identification of

opportunities for sustainable change. Adopting such an approach allows the researcher to identify key variables from all the aforementioned perspectives, along with many more, and identify the ways in which they are linked (Coleman, 2006). Linking, for example, structural factors such as the collapse of the state with more historically rooted analyses of local cultures, as well as individual sense making narratives – what Lederach would call switching lenses – provides for a conceptualisation of conflict which is not only more exhaustive, but also more robust (Coleman, 2006; Lederach, 1997).

Conducting analysis in this way enables the researcher to 'generate a comprehensive understanding of complicated situations and events' (Coleman, 2006: 326). Coleman uses the example of a researcher who is attempting to understand a certain ethnic conflict; if she were seeking to understand power and authority within the group context, she might use a political lens as one aspect of a framework, complementing it with cultural and psychological lenses to shed light on inter-group power struggles. Purposively changing perspectives in such a manner 'forces us to reflect on our assumptions and consider viable alternatives' and therefore helps to 'highlight the limitations of our initial frames and can lead to new understanding' (Coleman, 2006: 326). What's more, using a certain frame allows the researcher to see connections between dynamics which might not be as salient from another perspective; often, dynamics which seem incompatible, arising as they do from radically different epistemological perspectives, are found to be linked to one another. These linkages are not, however, simple, linear and transitive; they are complex non-linear and cotemporaneous. Systems theory is one of the only perspectives capable of linking all the pertinent dynamics in a complex conflict system, and elucidating the complex, non-linear interaction between them involving phenomena such as positive feedback and emergence (Gallo, 2012; Hendrick, 2009; Ropers, 2005).

Many authors engaged in analysis of the war in the DRC have failed to adopt such a perspective; Prunier (2009: 357) writes '[m]any writers routinely warn about 'complexity' and 'contradictions' and then immediately proceed to re-create a coherence that contradicts the wise warnings they have just uttered'. Writers who are deeply aware of the limitations of traditional modes of analysis for analysing such a complex conflict have often presented a conservative portrait of the conflict, which, whether structural or cultural, critical or constructivist, never challenges underlying assumptions of causal linearity. As demonstrated above (pages 5-6), there is often talk of complexity and causal interaction, but this is never elaborated into a broader framework of which causal interdependence is a cornerstone, not an anomaly.

As such, the purpose of this thesis is to apply a complex systems paradigm to the ethnic conflict which ravaged Ituri from 1999 to 2003, in the hope that the insights gained from this study might be useful in analysing the conflict in the DRC more broadly and indeed modern African conflict in general. First I will outline the theoretical framework I will be using for the purposes of my analysis, as well as presenting my methodology including an outline of the interview process used when I travelled to Ituri. Next I will give a brief background to the Ituri war as well as the Second Congo war of which it was a part, followed by a review of the current literature on these topics. In the following chapter I will apply my theoretical framework to the conflict in Ituri, constructing a model to elucidate this, and will explain how such an approach not only improves our understanding of the conflict in Ituri but is also a helpful framework for the analysis of modern African conflict more generally. This will be followed by a brief conclusion and recommendations for further research.

2. Theoretical Framework and Methodology

Systems Theory

Systems theory first emerged in the 1940s as a result of theoretical advances in the natural sciences but quickly evolved and was applied to a number of different disciplines such as biology, computer science and economics. As such, 'defining what we mean by systems theory… is virtually impossible outside the context of a particular discipline' (Langlois, 1983: 581). Therefore I will present an outline of systems theory here as it is usually understood by social scientists. Because systems theory is such a broad theoretical framework, there is a great deal of disagreement as to how to approach complexity even within the social scientific community. However, the majority of social scientists applying systems theory to their discipline share a number of key assumptions (Loode, 2011; Hendrick, 2009).

A system, firstly, is an arbitrarily defined network

of interaction; on the international level, for example, relationships between states, international organisations and international institutions, among others, make up the international system. On the national level, on the other hand, relationships between groups in society make up national systems. Where the line is drawn between a system and its environment – the system's boundaries – is determined by the particular dynamics the researcher wishes to analyse. Midgley (2000: 205) claims that: 'the boundary concept is at the heart of systems thinking: because of the fact that everything in the universe is directly or indirectly connected to everything else, where the boundaries are placed in any analysis becomes crucial'. Complex systems are open systems; unlike closed systems, they can only be understood in terms of their relationship with the environment (Woermann, 2010). As such, the boundaries we use to isolate a particular system should be seen as both a real, physical category and mental category or ideal model (Morin, 2006).

One thing that differentiates systems theory from other conceptual frameworks is a rejection of reductionism in favour of the study of systems holistically (Byrne, 1998). According to the traditional scientific paradigm, which is predicated on a reductionist approach, all systems can be understood in terms of their component parts; this hypothesis is rejected by systems theory which calls into question the 'metatheoretical foundations of much of traditional science' (Matthews, White & Long, 1999: 440). Cilliers (1998: 106) writes '[a]s a result of the complex patterns of interaction, the behaviour of a system cannot be explained solely in terms of its atomistic components, despite the fact that the system does not consist of anything else but the basic components and their interconnections.' The early systems theorists realised that whilst simple systems could be understood in a reductionist framework, complex ones could not (Waldrop, 1996). According to Langlois (1983: 582), the 'systems theorists discovered – or rather rediscovered – complexity'; equally, Flood (1993) claims that systems theory is all about dealing with complexity. As opposed to studying the component parts themselves, systems theorists are interested in studying the complex interrelationships between the parts, as it is these relationships which give rise to the self-organised, non-linear, and emergent behaviour which characterises a complex system (Byrne, 1998; Cilliers, 1998).

Emergence is the idea that the behaviour of a system on certain levels cannot be predicted based on analysis of the properties of that system at lower levels; dynamic causal interaction gives rise to phenomena that are 'dependent on the base but simultaneously supersede that base' (Woermann, 2010: 4). Linked to the dynamic organisation which leads to emergence is the property of complex systems called self-organisation; this is the idea that 'internal structure can evolve without the intervention of an external designer or the presence of some centralised form of internal control' (Cilliers, 1998: 89). What all of this also means is that, depending on your view, complex systems are either impossible or very difficult to predict; according to Cilliers (1998: 110) 'predictions can be attempted, but never with certainty'. One reason for this is that complex systems are highly sensitive to initial conditions; a very small intervention in a complex system produces 'very different and therefore uncertain results' (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse & Miall, 2011: 58). This also means that complex systems are path dependent; they can develop in a number of different ways and an intervention at some point in the past can create behaviour in that system which then becomes entrenched (Waldrop, 1992; Hendrick, 2009). Relatedly, complex systems also exhibit feedback loops; negative feedback is common in simple systems, but positive feedback in which certain trends are continually reinforced leads a system to behave nonlinearly (Coleman et al., 2011). Feedback loops are circles of interaction in which the effect of an activity feeds back onto itself; sometimes this involves direct feedback in which the process is self-reinforcing, and sometimes it occurs through a number of intervening stages (Cilliers, 1998). Feedback loops can be either positive or negative; positive feedback loops reinforce interaction whilst negative ones inhibit it; interaction between positive and negative feedback loops further augments this causal complexity (Coleman et al., 2011).

The Application of Systems theory to Conflict Resolution

It is possible to identify four 'generations' of literature within the field of conflict resolution (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse & Miall, 2011; Graf, Kramer & Nicolescou, 2010). Whilst the precursors to the discipline emerged in the post-war period, it was not properly institutionalised until after the Second World War. The study of conflict resolution continued to develop throughout the twentieth century, linked to developments in, for example, game theory, psychology

and sociology, and centres were established in areas of protracted conflict (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse & Miall, 2011).

The fourth generation emerged in response to the end of the Cold war and the much touted phenomena of the 'New Wars' (Kaldor, 1999), the 'new world order', and Boutros Boutros Ghali's prescription of the 'agenda for peace' (Woodward, 2007; Chandler, 2013). Fourth generation theorists realised that the conflicts they were analysing were complex systems, and consequently that the aforementioned innovations of systems theory would better equip them to understand modern conflict (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse & Miall, 2011). This revelation was in part a result of the inability of traditional explanations within political science to explain the new wars; approaches emphasising either cultural or economic factors as the 'root causes' of the civil wars which emerged in the 1990s have been subject to 'criticism and disproof' (Woodward, 2007: 153). Such approaches are based on firstly, Western liberal assumptions about state-society relations and secondly, upon the reductionist scientific method (Chandler, 2013; Diamond, 1997; Ricigliano, 2011). The weaknesses of the traditional, liberal approach have led to the emergence of a new processed based, systemic or non-linear understanding of conflict (Körppen & Ropers, 2011).

This new understanding of conflict manifested itself in a number of innovations, both theoretical and practical, in the nascent study of peacebuilding. Authors such as Körppen and Roppers (2011) associated with the Berghof Institute have developed the concept of 'Systemic Conflict Transformation' (SCT) based on principles such as multi-partiality and inclusivity premised on the understanding of conflict as a system. Much of the work of the Berghof institute is based on the seminal work of John Lederach who was one of the first of the 'fourth generation' theorists in the conflict resolution literature. Lederach (1997; 205) argued for a paradigmatic shift in peace building theory and practice, contending that those working in the field must address not only the immediate issues in a conflict but also the broader systemic and sub systemic concerns. Different 'lenses' should be used for analysing these different aspects of the conflict, but no one way of looking at things should be prioritised over any other; all of these processes should be seen as fundamentally interconnected.

One author who has proven particularly influential in the field is Peter Coleman. From 2003 to 2006 he released a series of papers in which he attempted to develop a 'metaframework' for addressing protracted, intractable conflict using insights from complex systems theory (Coleman, 2003; 2004; 2006). He claims that protracted, intractable conflict should best be understood as 'a complex, dynamic, nonlinear system with a core set of interrelated and mutually influential variables' (Coleman, 2003: 7). In part II Coleman identifies five major approaches which have been used to analyse protracted conflict; he argues that each of these perspectives are useful in helping us to 'organise our thinking about our work', but in limiting our analysis to one of these 'explicit frames' we lack an 'understanding of the full complexity of the situations that we engage' (Coleman, 2004: 198). Systems theory is the only perspective which allows us to 'see the whole'; it presents the 'political, relational, pathological, and the epistemological as simply different elements' of one system of conflict (Coleman, 2004: 228). As such, it is the only theory capable of organising all of the aforementioned paradigms into one, coherent way of looking at conflict.

Many authors working in the field agree that we should be applying systems theory to conflict resolution because it allows us to understand conflict far better than any other individual perspective. Gallo (2012: 1) argues that: '[a] systems approach is essential for correct understanding of the characteristics and dynamics of conflict'. Körppen and Roppers (2011: 11) also hold that systemic thinking can 'enrich the theory and practice of conflict transformation' and that it is better situated to 'cope with the challenges of nonlinearity in human interaction'. Van Brabant (2010: 2) has also suggested that a systems perspective is well placed to address several shortcomings of traditional framework as it 'helps us understand reality in a way that incorporates complexity without overwhelming'.
I will be deploying insights selectively from each of these authors as, whilst they work on different conflicts using slightly different assumptions, they agree on far more than they disagree; all see conflict as a complex system, and all attempt to analyse and construct potential avenues for intervention based on this outlook. Adopting such an approach allows the analyst to gain an understanding of conflict which is not constrained by the assumptions of the particular frames mentioned by Coleman (2006). When looking at the war in the DRC it is not necessary to choose

between, for example, a 'greed' or a 'grievance' approach to the motives of the belligerents; both of these factors can be seen as functional variables which interact with one another to produce the complex situation we see in Ituri (Anten, 2010; Githaiga, 2011). Adopting systems theory as a method of analysis provides us with the capacity not only to see past our implicit and explicit frames, it also recognises the merit in each of these frames and allows us to combine the insights gained from each one into a broad but coherent conceptualisation of the conflict we are seeking to transform (Coleman, 2006; Lederach, 1998).

Whilst there are many points of agreement between the authors working on complexity in conflict resolution, there are also disagreements as to how the insights from systems theory should be applied to the discipline (Körppen and Schmelzle, 2005). Some argue that systems theory is that the coup de grâce which will replace all other perspectives, whilst others contend that it should be adopted alongside other approaches to conflict studies, as it can offer helpful insights but is not exhaustive.[1] There is also the debate within the systems theory literature more generally as to whether systems theory falls into the realist, constructivist or postmodern epistemological paradigms.[2] These are lively and interesting debates in themselves, but I do not have the time or space to go into them in detail. I will not be assuming that systems theory is capable of replacing all other perspectives on conflict; rather I will be presenting my analysis as a new and potentially helpful way to view modern warfare. With regards to epistemology, I will primarily be adopting a constructivist perspective; however, it is important to note that this merely means I will be viewing the model I will create as a social construct, as opposed to some sort of objective representation of the conflict (Ropers, 2008). Ropers adopts the same perspective with respect to his analysis of Sri Lanka; acknowledging that there are many different ways to approach systems theory epistemologically, he writes from a constructivist perspective based on the assumptions that '(1) all statements have to be seen in the social context of the persons making them, and that (2) explanations for social phenomena are most often complex and of circular character' (Ropers, 2008: 14).

Adopting such a schema will allow me to incorporate previous generations of thinking on the subject of the Ituri wars and the DRC wars more generally, into a paradigm which emphasises the interconnectivity and mutual dependence of each of these perspectives for providing a full account of the violence which wracked Ituri from 1999 to 2003. The trend in the literature seems to be to cite certain dynamics as the 'most important' in causing or perpetuating the wars in the DRC[3]; my account will diverge from this in the sense that I will not be assigning primacy to any of the causes identified by previous authors because, according to systems theory, this is neither correct nor helpful (Hendrick, 2009). Instead, I will attempt to show that it is the interaction between the factors identified by various authors in the literature, and not individual factors themselves, which is most important in understanding the 'complex political emergency' in Ituri.

Methodology

Whilst the primary focus of my research will be theoretical, I will seek to combine a theoretical analysis of the literature on the subject with qualitative, empirical data I gathered whilst in the DRC. The conceptual approach is supplemented by on the ground interviews which will bring in alternative frames which in some way can test and challenge the conceptual

1. See e.g. Hendrick (2009) who argues for a more limited application and Graf, Kramer and Nicolescou (2010) who argue for complexity theory as an all-encompassing meta-framework.
2. See e.g. Cilliers (1998) who argues that complexity and post-modernism are compatible and Byrne (1998) who argues for complexity as a fundamentally realist doctrine.
3. E.g. Autesserre (2010) – unresolved land issues '[t]he first theme [the primacy of land] is crucial. It helps us to understand why violence started, why it became so pervasive, why it continued after the Congo embarked on a transition from war to peace and democracy' Clark (2006) – state failure coupled with intervention of neighbours 'Congo's weakness was a 'permissive condition' but it was scarcely an efficient cause… one must look inside the intervening neighbouring states for an explanation for the Congo war'; Nzongola-Ntalaja (2002) –neo-colonialism 'the struggle for democracy in the Congo is inextricably linked to the struggle for national liberation… genuine liberation from colonialism and neo-colonialism in all its forms'; Stearns (2011) – state failure 'But instead of being a story of a brutal bureaucratic machine, the Congo is a story of the opposite: a country in which the state has been eroded over centuries'; most NGOs (e.g. Global Witness, Enough!) – illegal resource exploitation 'This is the key to unlock the drama of Ituri. The drama played out there is not a question of one community against another. There are individuals who are benefiting from these confrontation' (Pole Institute, 2003)

approach. The introduction of different views on the conflict from those who have lived through it aligns with complexity theory's emphasis on bringing in multiple lenses. It is particularly important to include the views of those who are involved in the conflict in any conflict mapping exercise as the way individuals on the ground frame the conflict can fundamentally shape the way the conflict is interpreted and the way it plays out (Ricigliano, 2011; Ropers, 2008). As such, I decided to travel to the Ituri region of the DRC to conduct my own small-scale interview-based study; the methodology of this study is analysed in this chapter.

Data collection

From the 25th August-3rd September I travelled around the North Eastern DRC in order to conduct interviews with individuals who had experienced the war in Ituri. During the short period I was in the DRC I managed to meet and conduct recorded interviews with eight people and talked informally with a number of others; all the people I spoke to had been affected by the violence which has afflicted Ituri since 1999.

I was only able to travel to the DRC thanks to the help of a contact with roots in the Ituri region. Her contacts in the DRC are mainly in the Anglican religious community in Bunia and Aru, and therefore the people I met and spoke with mainly fit this profile. Whilst some of the interviewees had remained in their home towns throughout the war, others had fled to other places within the DRC, or to other countries, once the violence began, and returned to Ituri only when it ended. However, all of the interviewees had had some direct experience of the violence; generally, those who were in Bunia experienced more intense violence than those in Aru. The interviewees came from a range of social backgrounds, with incomes ranging from very low to middle range. All had received primary education, and as such were able to converse with me in French; however, whilst some had no secondary education, at least two were educated to University level.

I was able to talk with eight people who allowed me to record the conversation. These interviews were conducted in French, and professionally transcribed and translated upon my return to the UK. For both practical and ethical reasons, the identities of the interviewees will remain anonymous. On the practical side, it was easier to convince people to talk to me, and to allow me to record our conversation if I assured them that their testimony would remain anonymous. This was undoubtedly because, on the ethical side, whilst the situation in Ituri is no means as volatile as it once was, it is still dangerous and many of the tensions which precipitated the outburst of violence in 1999 still have some traction. What's more, the government is now also perceived to constitute a threat to those who do not tow the official line. As such, in order to increase the amount of people who would be willing to talk to me and who would allow me to record our conversation, and to ensure that these people would be protected from the retaliation which might occur if their testimony was revealed, the identities of the interviewees will not be revealed.[4]

It is of course important to note that this is a small-scale study using a convenience sample and results cannot be generalised to the wider population, particularly given the homogeneity of the interviewees' geographical locations and backgrounds. Nevertheless, the interviews provide a very important insight into how the war has been understood on the ground by at least some of those who have been affected by it. Whilst the bulk of my argument is based upon secondary sources, these primary sources supplement my argument in many important ways whilst also grounding the topic in the individual realities of those who experienced the war. This is important because, according to Geertz (2003: 156) we should use 'the power of the scientific imagination to bring us into touch with the lives of strangers'.

In analysing my data, I first want to draw on a distinction made by Wolcott (2008) between analysis and interpretation of qualitative data. Analysis, according to Wolcott, 'follows standard procedures for observing, measuring, and communicating with others about the nature of what is 'there"; data is subjected to 'procedures generally understood and accepted' among social scientists (Wolcott, 2008: 29). Interpretation, on the other hand, arises from our efforts at 'sense-making' which Wolcott defines as an activity which includes 'intuition, past experience,

4. This is standard practice for interview data from the DRC; see e.g. Autesserre (2012; 2012). Ethical permission was obtained from the University of Oxford; a risk assessment was also completed for the university and travel insurance obtained.

emotion' (Wolcott, 2008: 30). In this write up of my findings I will be attempting to interpret the data to discern the ways in which the apparent attitudes of the people I interviewed either confirm or contradict my theory. This will be approached in a more normative way drawing on my own intuitions and experience, as well as on insights from systems theory.

The first thing to note is the large variation in respondent's views on the causes of the war in Ituri and in the DRC more broadly; this is perhaps surprising given the relative geographical and social homogeneity of the group. The data was coded based on whether participants identified the causes of the war in Ituri and in the DRC more broadly as economic, political, foreign, land-/ethnicity-based or 'other'. Whilst some respondents were more likely to prioritise certain causes over others, none gave a mono-causal account of the emergence of the war, and each gave an account which combined these factors in different ways. Many participants, when asked about the causes of the war, claimed that they believed there to be a number of causes.[5]

In constructing a model of any conflict it is important to include the perspectives of as many stakeholders as possible; as such the model I created was based not only on secondary sources, but also on the accounts of those I interviewed. Whilst there was not a huge amount of divergence between secondary sources and my interviews, the interviewees tended to emphasise certain factors (for example, political corruption) over others. Whilst it would have undoubtedly been preferable to conduct interviews with a larger sample, the inclusion of interview data in the model gives an insight into individual sense-making on the ground which would be missing in a model based solely on secondary data. Insights gained from the analysis of the interview data are discussed in more detail in second last chapter.

3. Background and Literature Summary

Background to the national war

The first Congo war began in 1996 as a regional intervention to overthrow the then-leader Mobutu Sese Soko. The operation was spearheaded by Rwanda and Uganda. Rwanda, after the victory of the Tutsi Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF) in the civil war and the mass exodus of 2.1 million Hutu refugees, including a number of genocidaries[6], primarily into Zaire, had been experiencing incursions into its territory by the former regime and saw it necessary to invade Zaire in order to resolve this problem (Prunier, 2009). Uganda was also concerned about the presence of armed movements such as the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) and Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in the eastern Congo which, Kampala alleged, posed a threat to its security and led to its desire to create a 'buffer zone' on its western border (Reyntjens, 2009: 59). Similarly Burundi, concerned about the presence of groups such as the Conseil National de Défense de la Démocratie and the Forces de Défence de la Démocratie (CNDD-FDD) in the eastern Congo as well as the embargo which had been recently imposed on it, joined Rwanda and Uganda's foray into the Congo (Reyntjens, 2009). Mobutu's toleration of the rebel groups operating in the east of his country and the presence of a hostile, stateless territory on their eastern borders was the first, but by no means the only reason for the hostile relationship between Kinshasa and Kigali-Kampala-Bujumbura; the motivations for their interventions were multifarious, and continued to evolve throughout the conflict (Prunier, 2009; Reyntjens, 2009, 2006; Lemarchand, 1997).

The aggressors created an organisation, the AFDL, led by Laurent Kabila, and disguised it as a Congolese rebel movement, thus portraying what was in fact an invasion as a Congolese insurrection (Prunier, 2009; Stearns, 2011). Owing to the years of decay facilitated by Mobutu's kleptocratic 'vampire' state, and particularly to the fact that the army had not been paid, trained or equipped in years, the AFDL swept through the country with unanticipated speed (Thompson, 2000; Prunier, 2009). Many of the Rwandan and Burundian refugees present in eastern Congo were forcibly repatriated, other primarily Rwandan refugees fled west. When the rebels caught up with them they were either rounded up by the RPA and returned to

5. 'Here, in the DRC, there are really a number of causes' (interview 2) Well, I really think that there are multiple causes' (interview 5) 'In general, there are a number of causes' (interview 7).

6. The number of refugees in Zaire and the proportion of genocidaires among them is disputed, but estimates are not dissimilar: 1.5 million refugees in Zaire, 15% of which were genocidaires according to Reyntjens (2009); 850,000 refugees in North Kivu, 30,000-40,000 of which were genocidaires according to Prunier (2009); 1.1-1.25 million refugees in Zaire of whom 20,000-25,000 were ex-FAR and 30,000-40,000 were ex-militiamen according to Kisangani (2000)

Rwanda or killed; the fate of most of the refugees is unknown, attempts by Robert Garretón to investigate on behalf of the UN were continually thwarted, but reliable estimates put the figure at around 210,000-260,000.[7] Witnessing the success of the AFDL, and aggravated by Mobutu's support of UNITA, at that time a genuine threat to the MPLA regime in Luanda, Angola declared their support for the rebellion and sent troops to support the AFDL. These troops facilitated the almost bloodless overthrow of Mobutu in May 1997 after which point Kabila was sworn in as president.

Kabila soon fell out with the regimes in Kigali and Kampala; there was a growing sense among Congolese that the rebellion had been less a Congolese initiative and more of an external invasion, and that Kabila was nothing more than a Rwandan puppet (Reyntjens, 2009; Deibert, 2013). He began to manoeuvre himself away from his former backers, replacing the Rwandan Tutsi James Kabarebe as head of the armed forces and, in July 1998, making the directeur de cabinet of the Defence ministry declare that 'Rwandan and other foreign military' were to leave the DRC (Reyntjens, 2009: 293).

Seeing that their puppet was going to be increasingly difficult to control, Rwanda and Uganda launched another rebellion to replace him (Reyntjens, 2009; Deibert, 2013). They created another 'rebel' movement, the Rassamblement Congolais pour la Democratie (RCD) and attempted to retake Kinshasa. However, this time Angola, as well as Zimbabwe and Namibia, intervened to defend Kabila; later troops from Chad and Sudan were also sent to bolster the regime. Meanwhile, divisions had opened up between the two belligerents and in November Uganda began backing its own rebel movement, the MLC (Prunier, 2009). Increasing differences between Rwanda and Uganda also came to manifest themselves within the RCD itself. The pro-Kampala and pro-Kigali wings of the RCD were moving further apart, both ideologically and geographically; Wamba dia Wamba, Uganda's man, had moved the RCD faction which supported him to Kisangani whilst the faction loyal to Rwanda remained in Goma. As such, they came to be known as the RCD-Kisangani (RCD-K) (by the end of 1999 it had become the RCD-Mouvement de Libération (RCD-ML)) and RCD-Goma (RCD-G) respectively. In August 1999, these differences exploded into violence as the RPA and the UPDF

7. Again, the number of refugee deaths is also disputed, not least because of the political implications of the figure (discussed by Reyntjens (2009: 80-110) and Prunier (2009: 143-148)) but from estimates compiled by the following authors the number is likely to be somewhere around the 200,000 mark: 300,000 refugees dead in total, including 35,000 from Burundi, so 265,000 Rwandan refugees dead in total according to Prunier (2009); Kisangani (2000) puts the number at 232,000; Deibert (2013) puts the number at 213,000

fought one another on the streets of Kisangani.

By 1999, whilst Kinshasa and the surrounding areas (bas Congo, the Kasais and most of Katanga) were safely under Kabila and his allies' control, the rest of the country was controlled by the now multiplying rebel movements, and the DRC was divided into three main sections. Most of the North including Equateur and Orientale provinces were controlled by the Ugandans and Bemba's Mouvement de Liberation du Congo (MLC), whilst the RCD and the Rwandans held a very large zone centring on the two Kivus, but including parts of Katanga the Kasais and Orientale (Reyntjens, 2009).

Meanwhile, on the diplomatic font there had been a number of abortive attempts to negotiate ceasefires and peace agreements. The first major hurdle was crossed when the Lusaka accord was signed on 10th July 1999 with 15 countries represented and most of the main rebel groups. The basic principles of the Lusaka agreement were that a ceasefire would commence within 24 hours, that the armies involved would create a Joint Military Council (JMC) to organise the disarming of negative forces, that a national dialogue would take place 45 days later and that after four months, all foreign forces would leave the Congo to be replaced by a UN force (Prunier, 2009). The agreement was effectively ignored, especially in the east where the 'confused violence' went on as always (Prunier, 2009: 227). In late 1999 Wamba renamed his movement the RCD-ML and a new faction, the RCD-National (RCD-N), had sprung up under the leadership of a former RCD-G leader. By 2000 it was evident that Lusaka was dead, as skirmishes between the various rebel movements and 'negative forces' continued in the east and the fighting resumed between the government and the RCD-G and the MLC; for Prunier (2009: 225) this was the moment at which the 'reality gap' opened up.

Literature Summary

Those theorists studying the Ituri conflict separately from the wider Congo war, the most prominent of which are Vlassenroot and Raeymaekers (2004), Vircoulon (2010), and Pottier (2003; 2008; 2009), tend to put primacy on the micro-level issues of ethnicity and land (Camm, 2012). Vlassenroot and Raeymaekers (2004: 385) claim that: 'the outbreak of violence in Ituri has been 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.' They, in a highly detailed and insightful article, chart Hema-Lendu relations from pre-colonial times, through the colonial and post-colonial period to the emergence of the war in 1999. The 'root causes' of Hema-Lendu tensions, it is argued, are the 'inequality in land acquisition… along with the dominance of one particular community in terms of education, politics and economics' (Vlassenroot & Raeymaekers, 2004: 388) These have been present since pre-colonial times, however they were exacerbated during colonial rule because the Hema, who better understood the advantages the colonists could offer them, gained privileged access to education and the colonial administration.

The policy of Zaireanisation further privileged a select group of Hema families and created a 'landless rural class' of Lendu (ibid: 390). During democratization the tense relations between the two groups were exploited by local politicians 'in search of a new power base', partly as a result of the Mobutuist strategy of divide-and-rule (ibid: 390). The AFDL rebellion promoted the proliferation of light weapons and of armed groups in the region, coupled with total state and economic collapse. At this point, they argue, 'the conflict… has to be seen in the larger regional context of economic competition and the privatisation of violence' (ibid: 391). The authors go on to discuss how other variables, such as Mobutuist clientelistic relationships, the proliferation of light weapons, and tension between the Hema and Nande traders from North Kivu came to interact with the aforementioned factors to shape the way the war played out. Though Vlassenroot and Raeymaekers (2004) claim that land, ethnicity and foreign intervention were the primary causes of the war, their essay suggests that a plethora of different variables interacted in a non-linear fashion to create the 'perfect storm' in Ituri. They make this explicit when they say that it was the 'interplay between… interconnected dynamics' which has caused the violence in Ituri (ibid: 412).

..war between Hema and Lendu was primarily based on an historical ethnic cleavage which was aggravated by competition over 'agriculture and gold'.

Vircoulon (2010: 209), similarly to Vlassenroot and Raeymaekers, argues that the war between Hema and

Lendu was primarily based on an historical ethnic cleavage which was aggravated by competition over 'agriculture and gold'. When Hema domination was fully consolidated under Mobutu, a series of clashes broke out; these escalated into full-blown war 'when Lendu peasants were expelled illegally from 'their' land by Hema landowners' (ibid: 209). He then argues that this conflict 'coupled with the direct military interventions of neighbouring countries and the absence of a stable political authority, led to a full-scale ethnic war' (ibid: 211). The proliferation of armed groups which accompanied the national war and the concomitant shifting of alliances between them exacerbated this and made the Ituri war look like 'a confused war of proxies' (ibid: 211). However, what actually connected the local and regional dynamics was the issue of land. This account, very similar to the one given above, also clearly emphasises complex causal interaction between different dynamics as opposed to a more simplistic, linear account.

Pottier (2003; 2008; 2009), the last of the three major scholars on Ituri, presents a slightly different account to those outlined above, though it is similar in most important areas. He presents a similar account of the evolution of Hema-Lendu relations, though questions some of the received arguments about the structure of pre-colonial Lendu society; for example he challenges the assertion that pre-colonial Lendu society was rife with infighting, and points out that relations developed differently between the two groups depending on whether they were north or south of the Irumu-Bogoro-Kasenyi route (Pottier, 2008; 2009). He also places more emphasis on the social construction of ethnicity and warns against essentialist portrayals, maintaining that both groups have always been highly interrelated and have resisted attempts to separate them, highlighting the ethnicity-land nexus as a primary driver of conflict as opposed to ethnicity per se (Pottier, 2008; 2003). He claims that the conflict in Ituri is a modern one and that conflict over land for both resource-extraction and agricultural purposes is the main driver of the conflict (Pottier, 2008). The main reason for land conflict is, according to Pottier, Mobutu's Zaireanisation campaign and specifically the Bakajika land law (Pottier, 2008; 2003). The land laws, however, would not have been as successfully exploited by wealthy Hema had they not co-opted the opportunistic UPDF into conducting land seizures for them (Potier, 2009). He also argues that national politics, the national army and the international community, especially the UN, have either failed to prevent or, in some cases, exacerbated the crisis (Pottier, 2008). Overall, similarly to the accounts above, he argues that tensions result from the interaction of a number of variables including competition over land, historical Hema-Lendu relations, foreign intervention, resource exploitation, the proliferation of armed groups in the area, as well as international support for the rebels in the form of 'elite criminal networks' (Pottier, 2003: 5). All of these points, he claims, 'reveal the full complexity of the Ituri crisis' (Pottier, 2003: 6).

Similarly, for Autesserre (2010) the land conflict-ethnicity nexus was a primary driver for the Congo wars, including but not limited to the Ituri conflict. According to Autesserre (2010: 9), 'the causes of the ongoing conflict were distinctively local', based on a number of different conflicts between various different groups primarily over land, some dating back decades. These conflicts were exacerbated and sustained by a number of different top-down dynamics, including interventions by neighbouring states, ethnic entrepreneurship by local and national politicians and certain unscrupulous individuals attempts to enrich themselves through corruption and pillage. It was the interaction between these bottom-up and top-down causes which made the war so intractable. Autesserre argues that the dominant international peace building culture prioritise top-down causes over local issues, and this is the reason that violent micro-level conflict continued even after the official end of the war. Whilst Autesserre undoubtedly prioritises local over national explanations for the war (understandably given the nature of her argument), she demonstrates an acute appreciation for the fact that it was the interaction between micro and macro level tensions which gave the war its distinct character. She writes:

> *'The interaction with regional and national cleavages during the war thus reinforced local hostilities: It induced a series of new local cleavages, enhanced decentralized violence in places where it existed prior to the generalized fighting, and transformed latent antagonisms into open conflicts in places where tensions had been previously contained' (ibid: 150)*

Such accounts would, according to the Pole institute (2003: 3), place too much emphasis on the so-called 'cultural dimension' without adequately presenting the

political or economic stakes; the institute argues that the war in Ituri is a 'game in which Hema and Lendu are only pawns in this murderous farce'. This account places emphasis on Ituri as a 'war within a war'; i.e. local issues are ignited by the broader conflict taking place in the DRC. It is argued, correctly, that 'even at the nadir of Mobutu's regime, the conflicts between the two communities never reached such a level of horror and destruction as today' (ibid: 1). As such, the drama is not one of communities fighting each other, it is of 'arms dealers, the mafia networks exploiting precious metals who shrink at nothing to carve out their territory and keep it through a rule of terror, silencing anyone who works for or leans towards peace in this Wild West, where war lords, mafia lobbies and Ugandan army officers hold sway' (ibid: 3). What is really at stake in Ituri, it is argued, is political power and individual economic gain; this is '[b]ecause the ghost of King Leopold still haunts the Congo' which has meant that 'violence has been transformed into a political system' (ibid: 3). The Pole Institute argues that violence in Ituri is the result of collusion between rebel groups, neo-colonial states and elite criminal networks engaged in the exploitation of Ituri's mineral resources for personal gain, which, in turn, can be seen as a legacy of colonialism.

The Ugandans sponsored rebel groups 'acting like puppet masters, wielding control and providing arms and advice' so that they could conduct their illegal mineral exploitation under the cover of chaos.

Eichstaedt (2011: 36) presents a similar account to this, giving primacy to illegal resource exploitation as the cause of the conflict in Ituri. He writes in his chapter 'gold from blood' that the Ituri conflict and those like it are not 'spontaneous events arising out of raw ethnic hatred.' Rather, they are caused by 'outside interests, specifically those of Uganda and Rwanda' who are aware 'how easy it is to manipulate and control Eastern Congo' and they do so for one reason: gold (ibid: 36). The Ugandans sponsored rebel groups 'acting like puppet masters, wielding control and providing arms and advice' so that they could conduct their illegal mineral exploitation under the cover of chaos (ibid: 37). Linked to this is Young's (2006) argument about the emergence of a new type of war in Africa; wars are no longer driven by ideology, but instead have been replaced by wars between warlords vying for control of natural resources and political power. This is linked to the collapse of the Cold War and the consequent increase in the pace of globalisation which makes it easier for relationships between nonstate actors such as warlords and large multinational corporations to develop (Clark, 2006). This can be seen as part of the 'New Wars' discourse outlined by Kaldor (1998).

This debate should be seen in the context of the literature on greed and grievance; those who argue for a more sociological approach to the study of the conflict in Ituri can be placed in the grievance camp, whilst those citing economic factors are advocating a 'greed' approach (Collier & Hoeffler; 2004). For scholars such as Vlassenroot and Raeymaekers, conflict in Ituri arises from historical conflict over identity combined with the more immediate issues of land, natural resources, and foreign intervention, among others; as such, the motives for the belligerents in Ituri are seen as historically rooted grievances. However recent scholars such as Paul Collier (2004; 2006) have disputed this logic, claiming that the fundamental motive of the belligerents in most modern African civil wars is to capture revenues, whether this derives from capturing the state itself, or merely from controlling the trade in resources. This economic approach to the study of conflict has been in particularly influential among many international institutions, and the idea that the war in the DRC is primarily a 'resource war' is one which has gained a lot of traction (Autesserre, 2012). Many NGOs and IFIs released reports on the war in the DRC highlighting illegal resource exploitation and the problems associated with it; Global Witness was one of the first NGOs to bring public attention to this trend which led to the creation of the UN Panel of Inquiry to investigate illegal resource exploitation in the Congo (Autesserre, 2012; United Nations, 2003; HRW, 2005; Pole Institute, 2010). This increased awareness of and sensitivity to the question of illegal resource exploitation was institutionalised with the inclusion of Section 1502 in the Dodd-Frank act, passed by the United States Congress in 2010, which increases scrutiny of natural resources emanating from the DRC and surrounding countries.

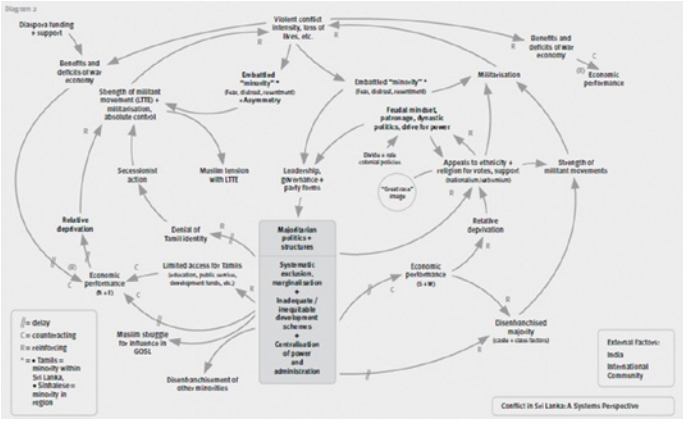
Another prominent perspective is that the primary reason for the conflict in Ituri is the decay of the Congolese state. For example, Nzongola-Ntalaja (2002: 214) claims that: 'the major determinant of the present

conflict and instability in the Great Lakes region is the decay of the state and its instruments in the Congo'. He claims that it would only be possible for a 'Lilliputian state' the size of Uganda or Rwanda to invade and loot the Congo had the DRC government not exercised effective control over its territory; Rwanda and Uganda 'took advantage of the disintegration of the Congolese state and armed forces to create territorial spheres of interest within which they could plunder the Congo's riches' (Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2002: 214, 227). For Nzongola-Ntalaja the story of the Congo wars is one of state failure, partly due to a colonial legacy, coupled with resource-driven neo-colonialism on the part of Congo's irresponsible neighbours. Clarke (2002) also claims that one major perspective on why the Congo wars emerged was the collapse of the state facilitated by irresponsible colonial rule and Mobutu's particular brand of 'nondevelopmental authoritarianism' (Clarke, 2002: 2). However, as in Nzongola-Ntalaja's account, the collapse of the state is seen as a 'permissive factor' rather than an 'efficient cause' of the war because it enabled unscrupulous neighbours to intervene in the Congo for the purposes of regime security and economic gain (Clark, 2006: 4). Another advocate of the state collapse view is Lemarchand (1997) who conceptualised this state collapse in the Great Lakes region as arising from a number of dynamics. These include the 'head-on collision between the 'premise of inequality' inherent in [great lakes societies'] traditional value orientation and the egalitarian message of liberal democracy', 'violence on a genocidal scale', refugee movements, the 'kin-country' syndrome and the end of the Cold War, accompanied by catalysing 'triggering events'.

These perspectives can be linked to the broader African literature on state failure. Zartman (1995: 1) argues that the phenomenon of state collapse is very widespread in modern Africa, defining it as 'a situation where the structure, authority… law and political order have fallen apart and must be reconstituted in some form, old or new. On the other hand, it is not necessarily anarchy'. Jackson and Rosberg (1990) advance the model of the 'juridical state' in contrast to the 'empirical state'. The former is propped up by the recognition of the international system that entitles it to claim various economic and political benefits (e.g. aid transfers) despite the fact that these states often do not live up to even the most minimal definitions of Weberian statehood. Davidson (1992) claims that the state in Africa is a colonial imposition, the 'black man's burden', which completely alien to Africans. The nation-state was artificially grafted onto pre-colonial African social relations and which is therefore doomed to failure due to its lack of internal legitimacy. Cooper (2002: 157) argues for African states as 'gatekeeper states' which gain revenue from taxing imports and exports but are weak in most other areas and have had difficulty making themselves into 'something which inspired loyalty'. There is a vast literature on the state in Africa which generally paints it as weak or illegitimate; other examples include Mamdani's 'bifurcated state', Bayart's 'criminal state' and Bratton and Van de Walle's 'neopatrimonial state' (Mamdani, 1996; Bayart et al., 1999; Bratton & Van de Walle, 1994). The Zairean state had, by the 1990s, clearly ceased to exist in even a minimal Weberian sense, and propped itself up in the areas which it controlled based on international recognition, heavy taxation and through sustaining clientelistic networks of patronage.

Needless to say, not every perspective has been outlined here, and those that have have not been elaborated in extensive detail; however, most of the major perspectives have been covered in as much detail as possible given restrictions on space. Whilst some of these accounts undoubtedly have more explanatory value than others, they all point to dynamics which have either at least partly caused or exacerbated the violence in Ituri and in the DRC more broadly. Most of them recognise the multiplicity of variables involved in the outbreak of violence, however most are then drawn to emphasise one particular cause over all the others.

The nature of the causation in the complex conflict system which has emerged in Ituri is such that particular causes cannot be isolated and given an independent weight; what determines the emergence of violence, and the severity and development of that violence, is the way in which these multiple variables interact (Loode, 2011; Hendrick, 2009). In such a scenario, simple lines of causation cannot be perceived, and the properties of the system itself cannot be reduced to the sum of its parts; it is thus important that the system is conceptualised in a holistic manner (Ricigliano, 2011). What is important is not identifying the mythical 'main cause' of the Ituri conflict, but analysing the dynamics involved in the emergence of violence and attempting to analyse the relationships between them (Gray & Roos, 2012) . In doing so, dynamics such as positive feedback loops and



attractors which make conflict particularly intractable can be identified and, hopefully, broken (Coleman et al., 2005). As has been demonstrated on a number of occasions, logic of the kind 'the conflict in the DRC was caused by state failure. Therefore we must rebuild the state' involves a hopelessly simplistic and flawed description coupled with an equally flawed and in some cases dangerous prescription (Gray & Roos, 2012; Körppen, 2011). It is hoped that by analysing the conflict in Ituri as a dynamic system of conflict the complexity of the conflict can be elucidated in a way which is comprehensible, and, as a result, that analysts and the practitioners might come slightly close to understanding what happened in Ituri and what might have been done to prevent it.

As such, the aforementioned perspectives need to be understood as discourses on the war in Ituri; like all the narratives people use to comprehend the world they involve particular ways of framing the situation which include certain dynamics at the expense of others (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Lakoff, 2006). Severrenne Autesserre (2012), in her Dangerous Tales, comments on the role the discourses have played in shaping the international understanding of the war in the DRC. She claims that the dominant framing is such that there is a single cause of the war – resource conflict – a single consequence – sexual violence against women – and a single solution – rebuilding the state. However, according to Autesserre, these frames were chosen precisely because they offer simple explanations for the conflict, suggest workable solutions and resonate with international audiences (ibid). As such, these discourses tell us less about the conflict itself than they do about the motives and interests of those utilising them. Whilst most of the perspectives outlined above do not simplify their analyses to the same extent as the NGOs and international institutions to which Autesserre is referring, and indeed some show an acute appreciation for the complexity of the conflict, they still constitute distinct discourses which privilege certain explanations of the conflict at the expense of others.

4. Analysis of Ituri war from a systems perspective

Using a systems theory as a metaframework for analysis can significantly enrich our understanding of contemporary African conflicts (Gray & Roos, 2012; Khuzwayo et al., 2011; Coleman et al., 2010). Such an approach has been used before in the study of a number of other intractable conflicts. Some examples include the protracted conflicts in South Sudan, Mozambique, those in Sri Lanka and Nepal, and post-electoral violence in Kenya; In each case, the use of systems theory has yielded important insights, aiding the comprehension of the conflicts but also assisting in their resolution (Smith, 2008; Gray & Roos, 2012; Coleman et al., 2011; Ropers, 2008; Baechler, 2008; Ibrahim Abdi, 2008). Through analysing the 'complex emergency' in Ituri from a systems perspective, I will attempt to show how such an analysis renders the complexity of the Ituri conflict comprehensible without reducing it to simple narratives.

Similarly, in Ituri the usual explanations for the conflict such as Ugandan intervention, historical inter-group conflict over land, and competition over natural resources are all important elements of the conflict but should not be seen as efficient causes in themselves; rather they, and a number of other factors should be analysed as interrelated elements of a complex, dynamic system. That the nature of the violence in Ituri is the product of the interaction of a number of different variables is a fairly uncontroversial claim, however this insight has not yet been developed into a broader framework of which such non-linear causal interaction is a key element in the context of Ituri.

Modelling

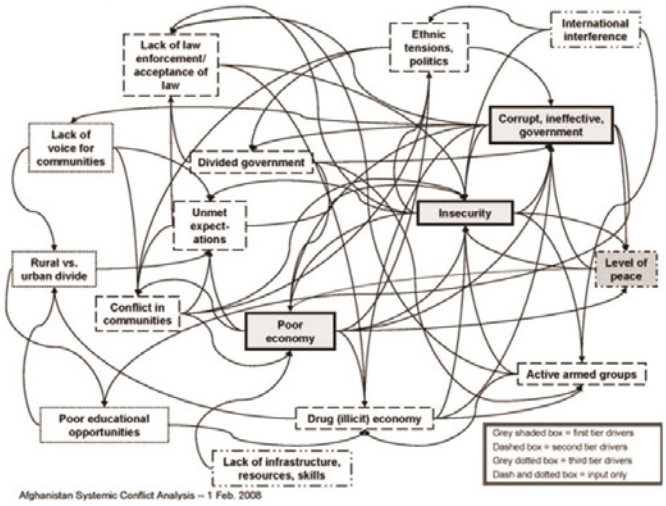
Systems dynamics, writes Stroh (2011: 170), 'are often pictured as maps of dynamic interdependencies'; indeed, this is the way complex conflict systems are most commonly modelled. In order to map a particular conflict, first the boundaries of the system under examination need to be defined (Gallo, 2012). Whilst it is a central tenet of systems theory that systems are intimately connected with their environments, in order to address a particular problem it is important to isolate only the most important variables for inclusion in the model (Forrester, 1987). Multiple

maps can also be used to highlight different sides of the problem (Stroh, 2011). These factors should, where possible, be drawn in an 'adequate diagram' or simulated in a computer model (Ropers, 2008: 16). A typical example of a conflict map can be seen above in Figure 1.

According to Ropers (2008: 15) one advantage of mapping is that it 'offers a practical tool for understanding and explaining non-linear developments and complex social and political change'. Stroh (2011: 169) writes that '[s]ystems maps evoke a more complete picture of a very complex Problem'. They also 'incorporate and illuminate interdependencies across a range of explanatory factors over time' and can be designed to 'catalyse new thinking and conversations' (Stroh, 2011: 170).

Ropers (2008: 13) writes that 'all analytical models are a reduction of the complex reality (and are necessarily perspective-dependent) and are, therefore, only ever a tool and not 'the reality'' (ibid: 13). Models can be a very helpful heuristic tool, however they will never capture the full complexity of the conflict being modelled; the researcher must determine what questions they are attempting to answer and construct the model accordingly. The results of a model will always be determined by the 'variables used, the model structure and the causal assumptions' (ibid: 15). Conflict maps allow us to achieve the balance between a balance 'depicting a system in all its complexity and contradictions, and the need to reduce this complexity to something manageable and amenable to intervention' (Bernshausen & Bonacker, 2011).

The map pictured in Figure 4 is an attempt to demonstrate this in the context of Ituri. It is not intended to present an exhaustive picture of all the variables which were involved in the emergence of violence in Ituri, as with any systems map it is 'limited in terms of the causal relationships that can be represented in one diagram' (Ricigliano, 2011: 187). However, it is an attempt to identify the most important factors which are continually emphasised in the literature and discern how these elements are linked to one another. The map privileges 'dynamic complexity' over 'detail complexity'; if a map is high in the former then it places emphasis on identifying all the causal links which exist between the factors which have been identified (ibid: 187). If it is high



in the latter, then it places a greater emphasis on identifying 'distinct subsytems which exist within the overall system' than on identifying all discernable causal links (ibid: 187). An example of a map which is high in detail complexity is given in Figure 2. Ricigliano (2011) claims that dynamic complexity is better used when attempting to understand a distinct element of the system; in this case, we are attempting to understand the emergence of inter-group violence and therefore such a model is more appropriate.

Elaborating the model

The model charts some developments in Hema-Lendu relations from the pre-colonial period up to 1999, citing factors which are thought to have caused a deterioration in these relations and which have often resulted in violence. Whilst it would be possible to chart the development of the war along different lines, I am primarily trying to understand the dynamics which led to the eruption of inter-ethnic mass violence in Ituri in 1999 and therefore will chart these dynamics in terms of relations between the two groups under analysis. It is clearly important to note that Hema and Lendu are not distinct, coherent and essential categories of identity in Ituri; there is considerable variation within these two groups and also in patterns of relations between them (Pottier, 2009). However, the importance of the categories should not be understated as social constructions which came to have real power over the determination of identity in Ituri and which translated into distinct patterns of social organisation; Hema and Lendu had their own political parties, militias and leaderships capable of expressing but also augmenting the concerns of the group they sought to represent (Pottier, 2009; HRW, 2005; interview 3).

The diagram develops in a roughly chronological way; at the top, some of the dynamics which have caused a domination of Hema over Lendu in the political, economic, administrative and educational spheres from the pre-colonial period to the 1990s are identified and links between them established. The dynamics which reinforced or detracted from such a pattern are incredibly complex; the diagram cites only the major factors which are identified by most of the main authors in the field. These dynamics include the pastoralist/agriculturalist divide present in the pre-colonial period, the pro-Hema policies of the Belgian colonists (based on the Belgian theory of the Hema as a superior race, leading to increased Hema access to education, which in turn bolstered the Belgian superior race thesis), Mobutu's Bakajika land laws (which, again, the Hema were better placed to take advantage of due to their increased access to education), Mobutu's policies of Zaireanisation and 'divide and rule', the Hema-UPDF alliance and imported discourses with Rwanda which led to identification of Hema with Tutsi and Lendu with Hutu (Vlassenroot & Raymaekers, 2004; Vircoulon, 2010; Pottier, 2009; 2008; Anten, 2010; van Woudenberg, 2001; van Puijenbroek, 2008).

Another key dynamic present after 1996 was the presence of Ugandan troops in Ituri. A number of the interviewees cited foreign intervention in the DRC by neighbours as a primary cause of both the national and Ituri conflicts (interview 3; interview 2; interview 6; interview 7). This precipitated the development of the Hema-UPDF alliance mentioned and this, combined with the Bakajika land laws, the already established domination of Hema over Lendu in all the aforementioned spheres and competition between Hema and Nande over land in Ituri led to the forced evictions – some legal, some not – of Lendu by Hema supported by the UPDF (HRW, 2005; ISS, 2005; Pottier, 2003; 2008; Vlassenroot & Raymaekers, 2004; interview 1; interview 5). The Ugandans also engaged in a significant amount of ethnic entrepreneurship, deliberately manipulating tensions between the two groups in order to justify their presence (Reyntjens, 2009; Pottier, 2008; HRW, 2005; Vlassenroot & Raymaekers, 2004; AI, 2003). Mobutu's policy of divide and rule which facilitated the emergence of hundreds of opposition groups, leading to local politicians manipulating parochial interests, including ethnic identities, to achieve power and all the economic advantages associated with it, fed into the Ugandan ethnic entrepreneurship (Vlassenroot & Raymaekers, 2004; Wrong, 2000; Stearns, 2011; interview 2). Many of the interviewees emphasised the role of politicians in exacerbating tensions between groups, or actively supporting armed groups for the sake of personal profit (interview 2; interview 4; interview 6; interview 7). This policy of divide-and-rule was partly caused by Mobutu's reaction to a democratization which arose in part both from internal and external pressure for reform (Dunn, 2003; Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2002; Wrong, 2000; interview 2).

All of these factors, and a number of others, contributed to increasing inter-ethnic tensions which had become apparent by 1998 (Anten, 2010; Vlassenroot & Raeymaekers, 2004; Reyntjens, 2009) . Such tensions become reinforcing on the affective side when violent attacks lead to fear or anger n the part of members of each group which can lead to further violent attacks (Azar, 1990; interview 5). The process by which this occurs in protracted social conflicts such as that in Ituri is described by Azar; the different fears, experiences and beliefs systems of the groups generate 'reciprocal negative images which perpetuate communal antagonisms and solidify the protracted social conflict' (Azar, 1990: 15). The Ugandan presence in the area, coupled with the broader war taking place nationally and the collapse of the national state which had been underway from the 1970s all combined to create a proliferation in small and light weaponry (SALW), intensifying the climate of fear and aiding the proliferation of armed groups (Wairagu 2011; Vlassenroot & Raeymaekers, 2004; Bouta, 2005).

The national war and the collapse of the state also contributed to increasing the opportunities for illegal resource exploitation on the part of the groups involved in the violence in Ituri; this primarily took the form of different groups vying for control over gold mines (Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2002; Clark, 2002; HRW, 2005; Vlassenroot and Raymaekers, 2004; interview 2). Many of the interviewees also made the claim that the war in their country was primarily driven by both national and foreign actors who wanted to exploit Congo's resources; several also claimed that what had begun as a tribal war was now becoming a political and economic one (interview 3, interview 6, interview 2, interview 7). The gold would either go back to Uganda if controlled by the UPDF, thus entrenching Uganda's interest in Ituri, or it would accrue to armed militias, consolidating their power and allowing them

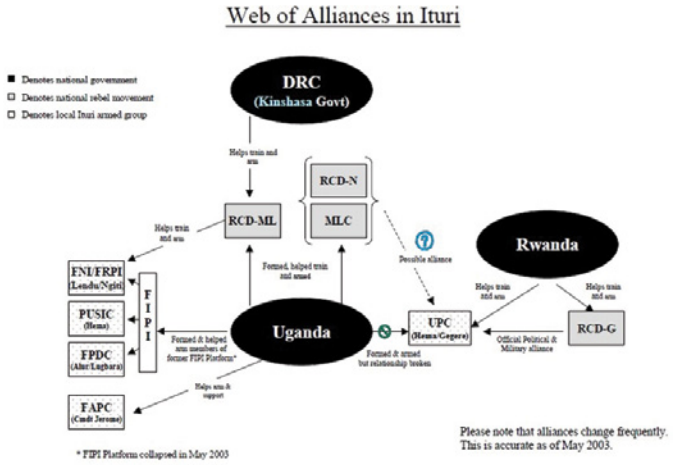
to buy more weapons, increasing the proliferation in SALW (Githaiga, 2011; Pottier, 2003; interview 3; interview 7). The state collapse, caused in part by the national war, also led to the collapse of local dispute solving mechanisms which increased incentives to solve disputes violently (Vlassenroot & Raymaekers, 2004). This process was intensified by the increase in the number and intensity of disputes occurring as a result of the aforementioned forced evictions taking place (Pottier, 2008). All of these variables, coupled with splits in the RCD itself, led to the proliferation of armed groups in Ituri (Vlassenroot & Raymaekers, 2004; Anten, 2012; Reyntjens, 2009). This, in turn, led to a privatisation of state violence which reinforced state collapse, and also increased opportunities for illegal resource exploitation (Reyntjens, 2009; Vlassenroot & Raymaekers, 2004; Githaiga, 2011). The broader context of the national war also made Ituri a stake in a larger game, or a 'war within a war'; competition by the various national groups for control over Ituri has intensified the conflict being waged by local groups (Sematumba, 2003).

It did not take a lot for this melting pot of multifarious and mutually reinforcing tensions to erupt into mass violence; the catalyst being the appointment by the UPDF of a Hema as governor of Ituri and Haut-Uele (Reyntjens, 2009; ISS, 2005; Pottier, 2008; Fahey, 2011). This, accompanied by an intensification in the forced evictions and land seizures being conducted by Hema with the help of Uganda was all it took to push Ituri over the edge and cause all out inter-ethnic war in 1999 (Pottier, 2003).

After this point a number of dynamics caused the escalation of violence and its settling into a destructive but stable pattern. Firstly, the violence created or exacerbated a great deal of fear and anger on the part of those affected; anger caused by violence having been committed against oneself or one's family led to an increase in reprisals and in recruitment by armed groups, this then fed back into the violence itself (ICG, 2008; Vlassenroot & Raeymaekers, 2004; interview 5). Fear of being attacked and the destruction of homes caused a great deal of displacement leading to a great many refugees both within the DRC and in surrounding countries (Pottier, 2008; interview 5). The increase in refugees and the negative emotional experiences of those involved in the conflict contributed to a growing environment of insecurity, which in turn fed back into the violence. In this climate of uncertainty and insecurity, extremist political views found fertile ground, and it became increasingly difficult to see a way out of the violence (Vlassenroot & Raeymaekers, 2004). This process of the institutionalisation of violence is described by Azar who writes:

> *'As the protracted social conflict becomes part of the culture of the ravaged nation, it builds a sense of paralysis which afflicts the collective consciousness of the population. An environment of hopelessness permeates all strata of society, and a siege mentality develops which inhibits constructive negotiation for any resolution of society' (Azar, 1990: 16)*

What's more, new ethnic communities became involved in the violence, allying with either Hema or Lendu, leading to a geographical spread of the violence and an increase in its severity (HRW, 2005; van Woudenberg, 2001; interview 7). Furthermore, in this climate of uncertainty in which the stakes were very high – both politically and economically – shifts in alliances became commonplace, as did splits within armed groups which only exacerbated inter-group tensions (HRW, 2005; Sematumba, 2003: Autesserre, 2010). The chart created by Human Rights Watch in its report Covered in Blood (see figure 3) aptly depicts the complex web of alliances which emerged in Ituri between various armed groups and national governments. Eventually the UPC was created and, with Ugandan help, began to exert total dominance over large parts of Ituri; this fed into the dynamic of Hema domination which was the first catalyst to a breakdown in Hema-Lendu relations (Vlassenroot & Raeymaekers, 2004). The Rwandan courting of the UPC later in the period only increased this dominance (Reyntjens, 2009; Vlassenroot & Raeymaekers, 2004).



The chaos which was playing out in Ituri was the perfect climate for illegal resource exploitation, and this eventually became a driving force behind the violence (Sematumba, 2003; HRW, 2005; Githaiga, 2011; Reyntjens, 2009; interview 2, interview 7). Uganda was legitimising its presence based on the violence which it had helped to create in order to extract gold in Ituri which was used to enrich a select group of elite Ugandan army officers, who were decreasingly subject to the control of President Museveni (Sematumba, 2003; United Nations Security Council (UNSC), 2001; Prunier, 2009). It is not hard to see how this mix of foreign occupation, resource exploitation and personal enrichment was self-reinforcing and, as we are still seeing to this day, difficult to break. Finally, the breakdown of social relations, the economy and the political and administrative structure in Ituri, as well as the collapse of the state's monopoly on violence, further contributed to the collapse of the state which had been the major permissive factor in enabling the outbreak of violence to begin with (interview 6; Vlassenroot & Raeymaekers, 2004; Prunier, 2009; Reyntjens, 2009). What's more, decreasing economic opportunities led to many more people becoming engaged in the war economy, either directly as rebels or indirectly as miners under the control of one of the various armed groups in the area (Attah-Asamoah, 2011; Pottier, 2009). The privatisation of state violence was also a consequence of the collapse of state control (Reyntjens, 2009). The coloured nodes in the second diagram map onto the nodes of the same colour in the first map, demonstrating how a system of conflict was created which became completely entrenched in every aspect of social, economic and political relations. Such a dynamic fits well with Azar's (1990) description of protracted social conflict.

Evaluating the Model

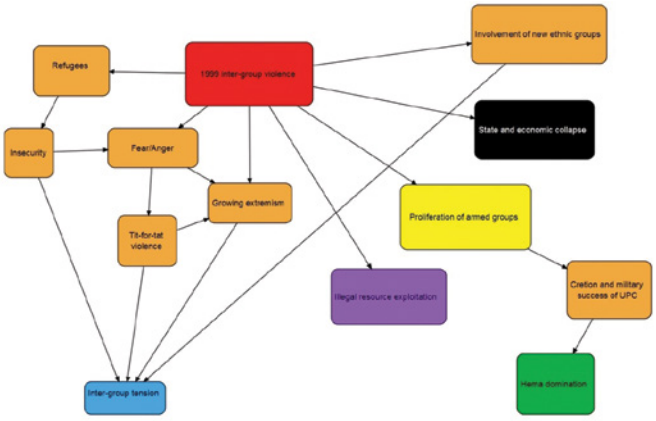
It is important to note that each of the factors identified in the model could themselves each be the subject of individual models. The process of democratization which is included in the diagram is itself a complex system, caused by the non-linear interaction of a plethora of local, national and international causes none of which it is possible for me to elaborate in the small space of the model; the same could be said for most of the other dynamics identified. This is a necessary consequence of the way in which I have framed my question and determined its boundaries; it is never possible to illustrate complexity perfectly in a model, nor was this my intention. The model is intended to demonstrate the extent of the complexity of the conflict in Ituri by highlighting a number of important factors and establishing links between them.

This is important in order to identify positive feedback loops which can make a conflict particularly intractable and which are very rarely captured by other models (Coleman, 2011; Forrester, 1987). Clearly it was the interaction between variables which made the conflict in Ituri so intractable; frequently cited factors like Ugandan intervention or resource exploitation are only parts of the broader picture. These variables were not sufficient to cause violence in themselves, but only as part of a system of interacting and mutually reinforcing dynamics; Gray and Roos (2012: 3-4) note the same pattern in South Sudan when they write:

> *'Through the systemic lens, conflict arises in fragile states not because of linear cause and effect relationships like 'cattle raiding causes violence' or 'resource competition and guns cause violence', but is rather seen as an emergent property of a complex system that evolves according to the dynamic interaction of these factors (and more) over time.'*

Feedback loops are identified by red arrows in the diagram; other, longer-term feedback loops can be

identified by mapping the coloured nodes found in figure 5 onto the nodes of the same colour in figure 4. The diagram demonstrates how the dynamics which emerged in the conflict became self-reinforcing and created a cycle of ongoing and increasingly severe violence.



This approach is also important in order to link ideas which arise from different perspectives; this model was able to take most of the major ideas on the causes of the war in Ituri and show that they are not mutually incompatible, but are instead fundamentally linked. This should not just be seen as an academic exercise; in fact, quite the opposite. If the intention is to understand a conflict in order to stage an appropriate intervention, then systems theory provides a novel and highly useful means of identifying potential avenues for intervention (Körppen & Ropers, 2011; Hendrick, 2009). Systems theory allows us to take a review of the literature and systematise the major findings of all the authors working in a particular field, establishing how their analyses are linked; incorporating all of these perspectives can lead to 'frame-breaking' insights (Coleman, 2006: 325).

The ability of systems theory to 'make us conscious of the far-reaching interconnections and complexity' of social phenomena, as well as 'establishing connections between hitherto unrelated phenomena' should be seen as one of its key strengths (Skyttner, 2005: v). It allows the researcher to step outside their individual framework for viewing a conflict and gain a systemic and comprehensive understanding of the dynamics involved (Coleman, 2006). However, it can also be seen as a weakness because ultimately it will never be possible to gain a 'perspective from everywhere'as no analysis, no matter how detailed, will be utterly exhaustive (Ropers, 2008; Ricigliano, 2011). As such, modelling a system should be seen as an important exercise for expanding the researcher's or the practitioner's understanding of a conflict, but should not be seen as an objective representation of the conflict itself.

What's more, at some point or another it will be necessary to step away from one's analysis and act. The process by which systemic analysis can feed into action is outlined by Burns (2007; 2011) in his publications on systemic action research. Action research is, according to Burns, based on a series of continuous cycles made up of four key elements – reflection and sense making, planning, action, and observation and assessment. This type of research is based on the belief that 'we learn most effectively through action and experience, and that insight can be most effectively generated through the combined expertise of those who have a stake in the issues' (Burns, 2011: 99). A key part of systemic action research is the creation of conflict maps by stakeholders which reveals primary patterns and societal norms, complex inter-stakeholder relationships of power, the non-linear impact of numerous linear interactions, and the diverging effects which occur at different levels of the system (Burns, 2011). In turn, such maps point to opportunities for intervention, and allow us to learn through action; such action, in turn informs deeper analysis which, in turn generates new action (Burns, 2011).

Whilst systems theory undoubtedly has limitations, it has proven particularly useful for analysing the violent and intractable conflict which took place in Ituri. My study has identified a number of important dynamics, such as feedback loops and causal interactions which have not been analysed explicitly up until now. The use of systems theory not only gives us a better understanding of the conflict in Ituri, it also helps to identify potential avenues for intervention which, had they been available to practitioners at the time might have facilitated the interventions which did take place.

Conclusion

Previous attempts to explain the conflict in the DRC have yielded a number of important insights; however, each has been limited by the explicit or implicit frames the author has brought to analysis. The epistemological lens used by each author to diagnose the causes of the conflict in the DRC illuminates certain dynamics at the expense of others, and often leaves the reader with an incomplete or in some way distorted picture of the

war (Coleman, 2006). As we have seen, Sematumba's (2003) or Eichstaedt's (2011) economic approach to the conflict yields very different insights than does Nzongola-Ntalaja's (2002) Marxist approach, or Pottier's (2009) sociological approach. This process is then augmented by NGOs and IFIs which pick up on certain explanations for the conflict which they find most persuasive, or which they feel will resonate best with donors. The privileging of certain explanations over others leads to the creation of certain discourses surrounding the war, such that any debate is framed in terms of these prevalent narratives (Autesserre, 2012). Once certain discourses become entrenched they start to shape understanding and therefore action in ways which are imperceptible to those involved in the process (Lakoff, 2006).

It is therefore not only important to shed light on these narratives, but also to attempt to provide an analysis which reduces their power in framing our understanding. Whilst it will never be possible to model the conflict in such a way as to include every perspective on the war, by combining a fairly exhaustive analysis of the literature with individual explanations from those on the ground it is possible to paint a picture of the conflict which is more exhaustive and less perspective-dependent. Conducting an analysis from the perspective of systems theory is one of the best means through which this can be achieved (Coleman, 2006). Incorporating insights from a number of different authors and individuals on the ground into a systems framework demonstrates the interconnectivity of dynamics hitherto thought to be mutually exclusive. What's more, it allows the analyst to identify patterns such as feedback loops and causal interdependence which have the capacity to make conflict particularly intractable (Coleman et al., 2007). By picturing all of these dynamics pictorially in a conflict map, one can arrive at a more holistic understanding of the way the conflict is played out, and identify attractors which can make conflict settle into a stable pattern of violence (Stroh, 2011). Perhaps the greatest advantage of illustrating a particular conflict in this way is that it allows the practitioner to identify the most effective points of intervention (Burns, 2011; Woodrow & Chigas, 2011). Strategically intervening to break feedback loops and decrease the value of attractors can break stable patterns of violence and start to create cycles of positive change (Coleman et al., 2007).

The model I have presented of the war in Ituri is not meant to be an exhaustive or objective representation of the conflict; however, it is supposed to challenge the dominance of particular narratives for explaining the emergence of violence in Ituri. The idea that a single issue such as illegal resource exploitation, ethnicity or foreign intervention caused the war is clearly deeply flawed. As demonstrated by my model, the violence which erupted so brutally in 1999 was not the result of any one factor; rather, it arose from the interaction of a number of different dynamics. Some were more significant than others, some were long-term patterns whilst others were short-term catalysts; however the particular nature of the conflict system which emerged in Ituri can only be explained by including every one of the factors identified and analysing the interactions between them.

Whilst such an approach is clearly just one of many possible useful ways of analysing a conflict, it is my opinion that systems theory has a lot to offer modern conflict studies; I hope that my model of the conflict in Ituri has demonstrated the theory's potential utility for analysing the war in the DRC and indeed for African conflict more broadly. Further research would be necessary to systematise my model and include dynamics which have not been represented. The application of systems theory to the social sciences, and especially to the study of conflict, is still in its infancy; further and more detailed research on the applicability of systems theory to the study of African conflict is clearly necessary.

Complex, intractable conflict will be a feature of social relations in Africa and around the world for decades to come; these conflicts by their very nature often involve irreconcilable disputes between historically antagonistic parties. It is not possible, and perhaps not even desirable to prevent groups from forming disagreements with one another. However, if the international community wishes to avoid a repeat of the hecatombs witnessed in the recent war in the DRC, it should think seriously about new methods aimed at preventing inter-group conflict from escalating into stable patterns of violence. Systems theory could be one element of the peacebuilder's 'tool kit'; one which renders the complexity of modern conflict comprehensible.

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