

**A PEOPLE TRAPPED IN NARRATIVES AND MEMORIES: FACING  
PACIFICATION IN THE GREAT LAKES REGION OF AFRICA**

**A FOCUS ON EASTERN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO**

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**DECLARATION**

I, David Ngendo Tshimba, hereby declare that this work entitled *A People Trapped in Narratives and Memories: facing pacification in the Great Lakes Region of Africa (A focus on eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo)* is my original work and that it has never been submitted in any institution for any degree or qualification.

I have read and understood the regulations of Uganda Martyrs University on plagiarism and here declare that I abide by all of them.

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Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this study to all individuals whose lives were prematurely taken away with no homage, by this contemporary regional armed conflict. May this study serve all these souls as the humblest memorial for the life story and memory we dearly treasure.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writing a dissertation like this is essentially a business that can only be conducted with the support and assistance of many souls. Without the generosity and scholarship of my academic supervisor, Rev. Fr. Dr. Maximiano Ngabirano, it would have been impossible to conduct the library research that has led to this piece of work.

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For a good many months now, my cherished family-- held together by mum, Paola-- has suffered considerably due to my passion for the Great Lakes region of Africa, and I am sorry to say that they will probably endure more in the future. I thank them all for their sacrifice and patience and let me promise them that I will remain faithful to their loyalties.

## **ABSTRACT**

Conflict has persisted in the Great Lakes region of Africa since time immemorial, yet the challenges of a peaceful coexistence in this region continue to manifest themselves in an even escalating manner. Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, in a particular way, has experienced a vicious circle of tragedy and victimhood, from un-lived memories, through constructed memories and narratives, to lived narratives and memories. Hence, people in this part of the DRC find themselves trapped in specific conflicting memories and narratives. This conflict has dragged in armies of the neighbouring countries to the East of DR Congo and a myriad of 'Congolese' guerrilla movements and ethnic militias; millions have died in massacres, displacements, and of starvation, disease, and rape.

Given the impossibility of removing the bitter past from history, together with the geographical disparities of the region, stability in eastern DR Congo is sometimes difficult to imagine. The roots of this conflict are grounded in the failure to acknowledge the humanity of the 'other' and looking at variances that come with other community narratives as a threat to future prosperity, leading to alienation of 'those who do not belong' to the in-group. Thus, solutions to durable peace in this region do not exist in the often flawed ideals of politico-military as well as economic manipulations, but rather in the often forgotten fundamental beliefs of accepting ethnic differences, by accommodating them in one's community narratives and through concerted willingness to heal the wounded memories as well as poisoned narratives.

## RÉSUMÉ

*Le conflit a toujours persisté dans la région de Grand Lacs d'Afrique depuis le temps immémoriale alors que les défis pour une coexistence pacifique dans cette région y sont innombrables et continuent à se manifester d'une manière exorbitante. L'Est de la République Démocratique du Congo en particulier, a été soumis à un cercle vicieux de tragédie et de victimisation d'abord à partir de mémoires non vécues, au travers de mémoires et récits fabriqués, vers les mémoires et récits vécus. Ce conflit a hébergé les armées des pays au voisinage de la frontière Est Congolaise, et une myriade des mouvements guerriers soi-disant congolais et aussi facilité de milices ethniques. Des millions de personnes sont déjà mortes dans les massacres, le déplacement, de faim, de maladies, et violences sexuelles.*

*Etant donné l'impossibilité d'enlever de l'histoire son passé sombre, y compris des inégalités géographiques que comporte la région, la stabilité dans l'Est du Congo est bien souvent un fait difficile à s'imaginer. Les profondes causes de ce conflit sont fondées dans la faiblesse d'accepter « l'autre » et considérer les différences comprises dans leur récit collectif comme un danger se posant sur la prospérité future des uns et donc liant au fait de l'aliénation de 'ceux qui ne racontent pas le même récit collectif que le nôtre.' C'est pourquoi, les solutions à la paix durable dans cette région n'existent pas malheureusement dans les très souvent faux idéaux politico-militaires ou bien même dans quelque manipulations économiques, mais plutôt dans les croyances fondamentales très souvent oubliées qui concernent l'acceptation de différences ethniques tout en les recevant dans son récit collectif de manière proprement dite et puis dégager une volonté collective de guérir les blessures de mémoires et le récits collectifs déjà empoisonnés.*

## TABLE OF CONTENT

<b>DECLARATION</b> .....	I
<b>DEDICATION</b> .....	II
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b> .....	III
<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	IV
<b>RÉSUMÉ</b> .....	V
<b>CHAPTER ONE: GENERAL INTRODUCTION</b> .....	1
1.1. Introduction.....	1
1.2. Background to the study.....	2
1.3. Statement of the problem.....	7
1.4. Objectives of the study.....	10
1.5. Research thesis.....	10
1.6. Definition of key terms.....	11
1.7. Scope of the study.....	15
1.8. Significance of the study.....	16
1.9. Justification of the study.....	16
1.10. Research methodology.....	17
<b>CHAPTER TWO: NARRATIVES AND MEMORIES IN THE GREAT LAKES REGION OF AFRICA</b> .....	18
2.1. Introduction.....	18
2.2. Community narratives as a conflict trap.....	19
2.3. Community memories as catalyst for conflict.....	23
2.4. Conclusion.....	26
<b>CHAPTER THREE: THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO AND EUROPEAN IMPERIALISM</b> .....	28
3.1. Introduction.....	28
3.2. A master made slave in the pre-colonial dr congo.....	28
3.3. A slave sold-off in the belgian colonial dr congo.....	31
3.4. The construction of narratives in eastern congo through divide-and-rule politics.....	33

3.5. Conclusion.....	38
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: MOBUTISM AND THE 1994 RWANDAN GENOCIDE.....</b>	<b>40</b>
4.1. Introduction.....	40
4.2. The loaded memories of mobutu regime.....	41
4.3. Bloodshed through politics of annihilation in rwanda.....	45
4.4. Mixed identities in eastern congo.....	51
4.5. Partial conclusion.....	54
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: CONFLICT IN EASTERN CONGO AND THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY.....</b>	<b>56</b>
5.1. Introduction.....	56
5.2. Trouble from eastern congo's neighbourhood.....	57
5.3. A regional armed conflict.....	63
5.4. Conclusion.....	67
<b>CHAPTER SIX: GENERAL SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY.....</b>	<b>69</b>
6.1. Introduction.....	69
6.2. General conclusion.....	69
6.3. Recommendations.....	71
6.4. Suggestions for further research.....	76
<b>APPENDIX: MAP OF THE GREAT LAKES REGION OF AFRICA.....</b>	<b>77</b>



## CHAPTER ONE: GENERAL INTRODUCTION

*As for individuals, obviously many of their personal conflicts may arise from conflicting loyalties to the different communities they may belong to.*

(David Carr, 1986a in Lewis P. Hinchman & Sandra K. Hinchman, 2001)

### 1.1. Introduction

Can people of different backgrounds live together peacefully? This question is at the heart of this library research which has attempted to explain the challenges facing pacification in the region of the Great Lakes of Africa, with a people trapped in conflicting memories and narratives.

Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo has witnessed one of the deadliest hostilities in contemporary history of human race. These conflicts have engulfed the entire region of the Great Lakes of Africa and the African continent as a whole. The study gave attention to the histories and legacies from the Great Lakes region of Africa, framed in people's narratives and memories. In line with these essential factors, it strived to identify some existing challenges of the mechanisms for a peaceful coexistence particularly in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Under this chapter, the study has elaborated a succinct background to the study, the statement of the problem, the study objectives, research thesis, the scope of the study, and also its significance, so as to justify the worth of this research. Finally, the chapter includes working definitions of key terms and/or notions which the entire study emphasises.

## **1.2. Background to the study**

Human beings, like all other creatures, evolve from pre-existing living beings. Some African proverbs point to this as the *Bahema* (an ethnic group in the eastern part of the Congo) recount: 'Human beings did not come out of the tree or a stick.' Hannah Arendt put it clearly: "No human life, not even the life of the hermit in nature's wilderness, is possible without a world which directly or indirectly testifies to the presence of other human beings" (Arendt, 1958, p.96).

The very fact that the existence of someone requires the pre-existence of similar beings implies that everyone possesses a sense of belonging which is significantly dear to them. Emphasising the importance of social memory, Katongole (2005) pointed out that it remains impossible to understand the present without seeing it in some historical continuity with the past. This sense of belonging to a past is not only treasured by members of a given community, as it fully explains their origin (history) but it is also what shapes their primary conviction of good or evil, what they hold onto as 'values'(descriptive ethics); in brief, all that constitutes the "justification of their good." It is true that no one chooses people with whom they share ethnic identity. We just find ourselves belonging to a certain identity circle, "our in-group" which has already been framed in a history that includes and excludes.

### **a) Human experience on the African continent**

History lies heavy on the African continent. Much had happened on the African soil and yet little has been revealed to the entire world. History has demonstrated that European bourgeoisie has been achieved at the expense of slavery and then colonialism on the African continent. Many dedicated scholars such as George Padmore stated: "The black man

certainly has to pay dear for carrying the white man's burden" (Padmore, 1936, p.45). Much as Rodney (1973) acknowledged that underdevelopment does not mean absence of development, however, a dialectical relationship existed between Europe and Africa that worked to the sole advantage of Europe against Africa, for a period of about five centuries.

Africa has been subjected to unimaginable situations of social violence and humanitarian crises, from the slave trade era with all its negativities, to colonisation and post-colonial revulsions. Gérald Prunier put it clearly: "In 1885, at the heyday of European imperialism, Africa was a continent apart..." (Prunier, 2009, p.xvi). This means that at this point in history, in order to resolve their own troubles and in quest of global white supremacy, European powers came together to map out the innocent African continent, oblivious to what life would look like there afterwards.

#### **b) Time and Space of the Great Lakes of Africa**

The Great Lakes region of Africa is an area of lakes in and around the geographical Great Rift Valley formed by the action of the tectonic East Africa plates which comprises, in its restricted sense, Burundi, Rwanda, North-eastern D.R. Congo, Uganda, North-western Kenya and Tanzania. Anthropological and historical studies of the people of this region reveal that the Great Lakes of Africa had witnessed a succession of immigrations coupled with a massive expansion of the ruling class of cattle-keepers over the agrarian people, while the former lived with the latter in tensions that cannot be dated to a particular period of history. Ngabirano (2008) has noted that conflict in this region which often exhibited political and ethnic dimensions seem to have been intensified by colonial policies and border formation, reinforced by religion. These Conflicts, stresses Ngabirano (2010), exhibit a notable difference from others, in that they very often

involve people who share the same geographical territories, same water-wells, same church, same trading centres, same land, and language. Nzongola-Ntalaja (2002) reveals how no region of the African continent has known so much political strife, loss of life, and social violence and dislocation during the last half century as the Great Lakes region of Africa.

The complexities of the geographical and historical background of the Great Lakes region of Africa have surely fashioned among many peace-building organisations, if not all, a new point to be focused on. The realities of the Great Lakes region of Africa are so complex that they unfortunately cannot be made to agree with the traditional ways of peace-building and conflict-resolution that need to be resolved, for they contain both historical and geographical features. How would the geographical together with the historical jeopardise a peaceful coexistence of people on this region. In any case, although the historical background constitutes a significant reservoir for achieving stable structures, any peace arrangement would still call for geographical features that characterise the whole region: presence of lakes, islands, large forests, rivers, extensive mountain ranges, etc. All these are to be taken into account as far as the shift from traditional boundaries to current ones is concerned.

Historically, the Great Lakes region of Africa, like many other regional communities in the world, is constructed on memories of the past that often make a peaceful life difficult to achieve. As conflicts persist in spreading, they continue to portray the extent of hatred between different groups of people including cases of genocide (Rwanda, Burundi), mass killings (Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya), and torture (Uganda, Tanzania).

**c) The Democratic Republic of the Congo in the Great Lakes Region**

Humanity cannot afford not to recall human tragedies recorded on the soil of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Even before the country of the Congo had acquired its political independence and national sovereignty, Congolese people suffered countless atrocities and aggressive wars, fuelled by the country's vast lands with unimaginable riches: coltan, copper, cadmium, petroleum, industrial and gem diamonds, gold, silver, zinc, manganese, tin, germanium, uranium, radium, bauxite, iron ore, coal, hydropower, fauna, timber, to mention but a few. The memories of Congolese people remain so bitter that they bear much heavier on the present as well as the future lifestyles of these people in relation to others.

With a passion to resurrect its past through documentation, Hochschild (1999) noted that the regime of King Leopold II in the Congo caused the death of more than ten thousand Congolese people, silenced by history. The legacy that the DRC inherited from Belgian King Leopold II is singularly outrageous, after his 23-year tenure as an absentee landlord, where the inhabitants were not citizens with democratic rights but enslaved subjects of a sovereign they never saw. Following that period, the legacy that the DRC inherited from Belgian colonial power is no less devastating: taxes, conscription, and compulsory labour recruitment were significantly a major source of discontent, as was the loss of political autonomy by traditional rulers or chiefs, some of whom rebelled against the new order (Nzogola-Ntalaja, 2002). All these contributed to conflict escalation and mal-development.

**d) Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo: A corridor in perpetual tension**

Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo shares borders with five different countries, namely; Sudan, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, and Tanzania. This zone has witnessed one of the bloodiest cataclysms in contemporary history of human race. Over the past one and half decade, this under-reported humanitarian crisis, characterised by catastrophic political strife and mass violence, has resulted in an estimated 1.7 million Congo fatalities only since 1998 attributable to the dislocations of internal war (Clark, 2003). Even though this part of the country has witnessed significant atrocities of a geopolitical and economic character, ethnic hostilities within this zone remain so profound that they have engulfed the region of the Great Lakes of Africa and the continent as a whole.

Differences among the various existing ethnic groups (framed in their memories and narratives) have manifested a high level of hatred that led to massacres, genocide, torture, and rape, as well as many other evil scenarios. Only in the past fourteen years this conflict has caused the death of millions people (both civilians and soldiers), being referred to as the "Great African War" in the words of Filip Reyntjens (2009).

Though it should be remembered that conflicts (especially ethno-centric ones) in the region and most essentially in eastern DRC, have existed since time immemorial, the study has however maintained that colonial administration and legacies, the 1994 Rwandan Genocide, and then Mobutu's downfall (1996-7) with its aftermath, are the historical events that have framed the entire region's ethnic conflicts and mass violence.

Against the background sketched, the study seeks to identify the challenges facing pacification in the Great Lakes of

Africa, in light of people's narratives and memories in the Eastern Congo.

### **1.3. Statement of the problem**

Conflicts have existed among the people of the Great Lakes region belonging to different communities. These conflicts consist of exclusion, hatred and incompatible memories and narratives to which these respective communities belong. Ethnic clashes in this region have led to mass violence and annihilation of "those who do not belong," because those who belong to a common community narrative look at the variances in others' community narratives as a threat to their survival and prosperity. Furthermore, antagonism between people of this region is intertwined in issues of identity and land. Hence, the people are trapped in dangerous narratives about their sense of belonging and core values of life.

On the side of the DR Congo, her history during Leopold's rule as well as Belgian colonialism has greatly been affected by constructed narratives and memories. This culture of mischievous imperialism constitutes a strongly bitter legacy which is at the core of peoples' memories in the Congo. In essence, the greed and hostility of King Leopold II considered master of the Congo and whose subjects were but slaves for about a quarter of one century, had instigated hatred between the 'master' (foreign oppressor) and the 'slave' (the oppressed indigenous) and between the 'slaves' themselves to an even greater extent once the latter were subjected to politico-economic manipulations. With the Belgian colonial policies based on 'divide-and-conquer' politics, alarming social disruption remained the indicator of conflict in the colonial Congo. Formulations of antagonist theories developed from anthropological and historical assumptions were used as means for colonisation, leaving the people in eastern Congo

trapped in conflicting narratives. These narratives became nothing other than a basis for conflict escalation in this zone. Due to some distinctions in terms of labour, responsibilities and other social privileges given by the colonial ruler to different communities, class struggles through exclusion and elimination of the 'other' remain the stimulus for antipathy among people belonging to different narratives.

Another fuelling factor of conflict in this area appears to be the Mobutu regime and its impact on memories and narratives of communities in Eastern Congo. A unique combination of circumstances from the collapsed Zairian state and the continuation of the Rwandan civil war across borders to the shifting of alliances in the region, explains the true picture of this unravelling conflict in eastern Congo. Exclusion and intolerance are viewed among those who claim to be indigenous from those who are regarded as non-native of eastern Congo. With the sheer lack of compromise among the various communities over the issues of land and citizenship, controversies about who has had the right to national identity and land ownership set the grassroots and their leadership poles apart. Systematic killings at the grassroots level have been the manifestation of such antipathy during Mobutu's rule.

Further escalating conflict in this area, the 1994 Rwandan genocide came in as worsening an already bad situation. Massive population influxes and displacements in eastern DR Congo further complicated the issue of people's identities and sense of belonging in this area. The escalation of conflict in eastern Congo from a post-genocide Rwanda came along with the re-construction of dangerous memories and narratives, still in a more pronounced antagonist manner. The fight for recognition of narration on the one hand and that against victimisation on



the other hand, becomes the new explanation for antagonism and ill will among communities in this zone.

Lastly, the sheer lack of concerted effort or unexpected silence from the international community has only allowed the persistence of eastern Congo's conflicts. The conflict which erupted in the D.R. Congo in August 1998 is arguably the most important crisis Africa has experienced in its post-colonial history. The United Nations peace-keeping forces initially called for in the Congo to ensure respect for ceasefire in accordance with the Lusaka Peace Accord signed in July 1999. Since then, these interventions have not only made a bad situation get worse, but most importantly refused to acknowledge and address the real causes of conflicts in eastern Congo. Prunier (2008) has referred to the past eleven years of conflict in the eastern Congo as a catastrophic decade of human violence that has led to a staggering 5.4 million deaths that, far more than any war elsewhere since World War II.

The underlying question at the bottom line of this study is asked in the following terms: how has it been possible that, albeit all socio-cultural, politico-economical as well as institutional similarities among communities in the Great Lakes region of Africa, the latter have demonstrated an ontological predicament about peaceful coexistence? The study thus strives to establish what could be the reasons underscoring the challenges of pacification in this region.

#### **1.4. Objectives of the study**

##### **a) Broad Objective**

To establish the challenges of pacification in the contemporary Great Lakes region of Africa, with emphasis to eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo

##### **b) Specific Objectives**

In the endeavour to achieve the goal outlined for this research, the researcher has assigned these specific objectives to this study:

- To trace the impacts of colonial rule on the construction of memories and narratives of the people living in this region and most especially eastern DR Congo.
- To identify the impact of the Mobutu regime on memories and narratives of eastern DR Congo.
- To explore the effects of the 1994 Rwandan Genocide on people's identities, narratives, and memories in eastern Congo.
- To scrutinize the roles played (or not) by the international community in the eastern Congo's conflicts.

#### **1.5. Research Thesis**

Conflict has persisted in the Great Lakes region of Africa since time immemorial, yet the challenges of a peaceful coexistence in this region continue to manifest themselves in an even escalating manner. Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, in a particular way, has experienced a vicious circle of tragedy and victimhood, from un-lived memories, through constructed memories and narratives, to lived narratives and memories. Hence, people in this part of the DRC find

themselves trapped in specific conflicting memories and narratives. Given the impossibility of removing the bitter past from history, together with the geographical disparities of the region, stability in eastern DR Congo is difficult to imagine. The roots of this conflict are grounded in the failure to acknowledge the humanity of the 'other' and looking at variances that come with communal narratives as a threat to future prosperity, leading to alienation of 'those who do not belong.'

## **1.6. Definition of Key Terms**

### **a) Narratives**

The word "narrative" comes from the Indo-European root "gna," meaning both 'to tell' and 'to know' (Hayden White, 1984 in Lewis P. Hinchman & Sandra K. Hinchman, 2001). Even though some scholars may affirm that knowledge is no longer essentially narrative, the Hinchmans (2001) remind us that in traditional cultures, where social bonds are created and sustained by custom, narratives well define what has the right to be said and done. Actually, the overwhelming return of the term 'narrative' in human sciences today leads many social science scholars to claim that "everything is a story, including even mathematics and scientific theories" (L.P. Hinchman & S.K. Hinchman, 2001, p. xiii). So narrative has emerged in human sciences today as a form of cognition, that of storytelling.

The study generally understands narratives as stories with a clear sequential order that connect events in a meaningful way for a definite audience, and thus offer insights about the world and people's experiences of it. Such stories are to be compared with a thread binding together a given group of people of a shared past (community). So they are central to a given community, for they provide not only a basis for

conviction and action to people who belong to that community, but leaving such stories out of account would mean renouncing the best clues about why people belonging to that community act as they do. These stories told and retold (narratives), as Gadamer (1960) pointed out, communicate something that transcends time and is believed by all 'those who belong', yet conveys a truth unverifiable by methodological means proper to science. The study refers to them as "communal narratives," for they are a set of stories connecting individual minds with a social world.

#### **b) Memories**

The faculty of the thinking self to represent or mirror a reality outside of the thinking self, is what the study refers to as 'memory.' In line with this, the Hinchmans (2001) clearly stated: "An attribute that may be uniquely human is consciousness of ourselves as temporal beings— beings with history" (Hinchman, L.P. & Hinchman, S.K. 2001, p.1). Furthermore, the notion of memory constitutes a foundation for understanding narrative. In fact, the category of memory anticipates one's identity, and this identity in turn defines one's community; so these three (memory, identity, and community) correspond to the fundamental elements of narrative. In respect of this, the study has presumed that memories and narratives represent two inter-related dimensions which mutually influence and reinforce each other.

Communities crystallise around a set of memories which the study refers to as grand memories (community memories), rejuvenated in communal stories similarly referred to as grand narratives (community narratives). It therefore follows that the memories herein concerned with this study are "authoritative memories." These memories are considered to be authoritative from the fact that they are passed on from one generation (parental and trusted) to another (loyal and

reliable to the experiences of the older generations). This reality of memory is rightly noticed by the Hinchmans (2001): "Both as individuals and members of various groups, our present existence is powerfully shaped by recollections of the past and anticipations of the future" (Lewis P. Hinchman & Sandra K. Hinchman, 2001, p.3).

### **c) Great Lakes Region of Africa**

The term 'Great Lakes' originates, as Ngabirano (2010) acknowledges, from the French term, *Grand Lacs*, which formed the economic corporation of the former colonies of Belgium-Burundi, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo. This corporation of former Belgian colonies in parallel to that of former British colonies of East Africa, which in the beginning comprised Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania, was formerly known as the *interlacustrine* region (Ladislas Buzimana, 1999 in Maximiano Ngabirano, 2010).

The Great Lakes Region of Africa is the area lying between northern Lake Tanganyika, western Lake Victoria, and lakes Kivu, Edward, and Albert among many other small lakes. Topographically, this is an area of lakes located in or around the geographic Great Rift Valley formed by the activity of tectonic plates in East Africa. As a geopolitical entity, the Great Lakes region comprises Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, North-east Democratic Republic of Congo, and North-west Kenya and Tanzania. In a wider sense, the region is extended to all of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya and Tanzania.

It is further germane to this study that recent political developments for integration frame the region politically under the *International Conference for the Great Lakes Region* (ICGLR). From a periodical, *The East African* of July-August 2010, it was reported that the ICGL came under the Nairobi Pact, which also developed the protocol on non-aggression and

mutual defence to dismantle unwanted armed groups in member states. This pact on security, stability, and development in the Great Lakes region was signed by the eleven member states (Angola, Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Republic of Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia) on 15 December 2006, and entered into force on 21 June 2008. The ICGLR still deals with cross-cutting issues and criteria of states' membership to the organisation.

#### **d) Pacification**

As we all know, conflict is not an abstract thing, nor is pacification. We are inevitably called to live with each other, to share resources of the same earth (air, water, land, energy, and so on), and so make our world a better haven for our progeny to live in. Perhaps the biggest challenge of living together differently starts with an appreciation of difference as such, proceeding to recognition of otherness. These two necessary conditions are often difficult to realise and acknowledge, and yet they remain paramount for pacification. That is why tireless effort to understand how conflicts, however intractable, may be solved is the only path towards genuine reconciliation and peace-building.

The study uses the term pacification for the purpose of stressing the meaning of peace herein considered. The peace in question cannot be understood from the secular meaning of the Greek word, *eirene* or the Latin word, *pax*, that equate peace with absence of war. The study rather uses this terminology with the Hebrew connotation of *shalom*, designating not merely the absence of war/conflict but emphasising living in a serene atmosphere where sustainable socio-political and economic structures/institutions can be built (Ngabirano, 2010). Thus, for the purpose of the study, pacification expresses a situation where the conflicting parties enter into

an agreement that addresses their central incompatibilities, accepting each other's continued existence as parties through mutual understanding, and cease all violent action against each other to commit themselves to building stable political, social, religious, and economic systems.

### **1.7. Scope of the Study**

#### **a) Conceptual Scope**

The research carried out focuses on the way memories and narratives form a people's identity and ethos, as well as the challenges facing a process of pacification among communities with such conflicting views of good and prosperity.

#### **b) Geographical scope**

The research paid attention to communities in the Great Lakes region of Africa, with special mention given to eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo as a case study. In the development of the research topic, the researcher selected the three main provinces of the area: the *Province du Nord-Kivu* (North Kivu Province), the *Province du Sud-Kivu* (South Kivu Province), and the *Province Orientale* (Oriental Province). Bordering four countries of the region, namely; Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, and Tanzania, it is believed these three provinces could offer a more realistic picture of issues pertaining to ethnic conflicts and challenges of pacification in the Great Lakes region of Africa.

#### **c) Temporal Scope**

Because (ethnic) conflicts have been going on in this region of the continent since time immemorial, the researcher limited the study to the period from the time of European imperialism in late nineteenth century to the arrest of Laurent Mihigo

(also known as Laurent Nkunda or Nkundabatware) by Rwandan Officials in January 2009 (Nkunda was the leader of a militia and political party in the North Kivu Province, *Congrès National pour la Défense du Peuple*). The researcher believed that such a delimitation of time would be helpful in attempting to portray the communities' narratives and memories as well as address the underlying contemporary challenges of conflict-resolution and peace-building in eastern DRC and the Great Lakes region of Africa as a whole.

### **1.8. Significance of the Study**

The researcher believes that the findings of this study will subject to academic scrutiny a range of issues that underline the challenges of peaceful coexistence in a region torn-up by ethnic conflicts since time immemorial such as the Great Lakes of Africa. On the other side, and perhaps more significantly, this study attempts to generate some specific suggestions the researcher believes can be ways-forward that various key interveners may take up in designing approaches to pacification (where these communities are to live together differently, but still peacefully) in eastern Congo in particular and the Great Lakes region of Africa as a whole.

### **1.9. Justification of the Study**

Eastern DRC has witnessed one of the bloodiest contemporary conflicts. This conflict has dragged in armies of the neighbouring countries and a myriad of 'Congolese' guerrilla movements and ethnic militias; millions have died in massacres, displacements, and of starvation, disease, and rape. The study has given emphasis on eastern DRC due to the fact that while much effort had been concerted to understand and eventually address conflict in this zone, the former has so often forgotten or undermined the fundamental clues about why people in the region have been subjected to endless



conflict. That is why the study has strived to emphasise that solutions to durable peace in eastern DRC do not exist in the often flawed ideals of political as well as economic manipulations, but rather in the often forgotten fundamental beliefs of accepting ethnic differences and living together in their contexts.

#### **1.10. Research Methodology**

The research carried out consisted of a library research. The researcher has resorted to library research because conflicts in this region are still on-going, and even more seriously because the study's interest remains somehow threatening to various sectors of the study population. Unless the researcher had sufficient security guarantee from a loyal institutional body (something which was not available to the researcher), it could still be a big and uncalculated risk to carry out this research as a field study. Nevertheless, a covered observation was undertaken by the researcher in order to criss-cross the secondary data (existing literature) available.

The secondary data analysed in this research was based on judgmental sampling, in that, the researcher purposefully utilised a critical judgment (based on the content and credibility of information available on the one hand and the sheer interest in the research carried out, on the other hand) to select from a wide range of various existing sources of information.

## CHAPTER TWO: NARRATIVES AND MEMORIES IN THE GREAT LAKES REGION OF AFRICA

*Every phenomenon social scientists investigate arises out of a web of communication that, in turn, depends largely on personal or social narratives.*

(L.P . Hinchman & S.K. Hinchman, 2001)

### **2.1. Introduction**

This chapter explores existing community narratives and memories in the region of the Great Lakes of Africa even prior to colonialism. Under this chapter, the study gives a critical look at the dangers in different narratives among communities living in this region and the way the past is recollected, memorised, and passed on with some sentiment of victimhood. That people have behaved barbarically in the Great Lakes region of Africa is undeniable. Actually, this region's horrors are chilling examples of what people are capable of doing to one another when narratives and memories from a given community are told and/or lived in an antagonist manner vis-à-vis another community. Therefore, the promise of the future is often hidden by the trials of surviving in the present, which justify the extermination (annihilation) of one community by another in a way to prosper and live longer.

The aim of this chapter is to establish the linkage between community narratives and memories of people of the Great Lakes region and eastern Congo in particular, and how these two form the basis for a very difficult peaceful coexistence among communities in the region. Narratives that communicate to its community members a history that includes those 'who belong' and simultaneously excludes those 'who do not belong' are reviewed over a period of time. Both lived and inexperienced memories are looked into as to how they shape and influence

the current status quo of communities in this region. Also, the chapter pays attention to constructed narratives and memories in the way they have greatly affected various communities of the region in the public sphere.

## **2.2. Community narratives as a conflict trap**

The region of the Great Lakes of Africa has been subjected to human tensions characterised by the sheer extent of conflicts since time immemorial. These conflicts have essentially been framed in memories and narratives of people belonging to different communities in the region. That is perhaps why the Hinchmans (2001) stated that to leave out stories (narratives) out of consideration would mean to reject the best clues about why people of this region have acted the way they have always done, since there is no uninterpreted data. Fisher (1992) further acknowledged the power of community narratives in the making of society when he wrote: "communities are co-constituted through communication transactions in which participants co-author a story that has coherence and fidelity for the life that one would lead"(Fisher, 1992 in L.P. Hinchman & S.K. Hinchman, 2001, p.214).

It is telling to distinguish clearly between theories and narratives in the way these two explain the making of a society. Many social scientists such as Fisher (2001) and Carr (1986a) hold that theories (essentially theories in human sciences) attempt to capture and elaborate some timeless, essential reality constituting the world of human events; narratives, on the other hand, according to the understanding of the Hinchmans (2001), undertake the more modest task of organising and rendering meaningful the experience of the narrator in that world. Hence, the notion of location or space is central to the understanding of narratives; narrators situate their stories (narratives) in a specific location. That is, narrators belong to a particular space, and relate

their stories from the viewpoint of the physical space they belong to. That is why such stories are not mere fruit of speculative abstractions or imaginary thinking; they are organically connected with the realities of the community to which the narrator belongs (Fisher, 2011).

Like in many other parts of the world, people living in the eastern part of the Congo are affiliated with communities; they are members of distinct communities, from which they obtain their identity (belongingness) and core values of life (moral reasoning/ethos). These people therefore live as communal individuals rather than as individuated individuals. Since eastern DR Congo is geographically part of the Great Lakes region of Africa (a region peopled with similar culturally-related groups) and politically borders on five countries of the region, these overlapping communities in eastern Congo have shared many resources over time, especially land which remains the people's most valuable asset. That is why Coles (1995) reminds us that the link between a people and a land is so profound. Paraphrasing Ngabirano (2010), the study acknowledges that there is no any appropriate analogy with another region that be taken as a substitute for the understanding of the complex particularities of the entangled contemporary history of the Great Lakes region of Africa. Actually, there are very few in Africa and the world at large with similar mixed identities cutting across geopolitical boundaries as found in the Great Lakes region.

Communities in this region, many of which being linguistically similar to each other, remain separated from each other by different narratives which draw a fine line distinguishing "those who belong" from "those who do not." Due to intensive migrations of people of this region over time, community narratives of a given group evidence antipathy and hostility towards other's narratives. Ngabirano (2010) rightly

demonstrates that these parallel narratives in conflicts possess dangerous moral standards which often lead to exclusion, disregard, and even destruction of other groups viewed as opponents. Worst still, anthropological theories about the people of this area have made these communities' narratives even more dangerous by undermining the vital need to strengthen an ethic directed to universal human dignity and thus enhancing closed particularities.

Anthropological studies have constructed theories (constructed narratives) stating that the pre-colonial Great Lakes region has seen successive waves of migration (mobility). According to Linden (1977) the agrarians (most of who are Bantu) seemed to have been settlers, living on subsistence farming, and less eager to develop politico-military alliances whereas their counterparts, the cattle-keepers (most of who from the Hamite group), seemed to have been semi-nomadic with some form of politico-military organisation, capable of dominating their agrarian neighbours. Historical studies have demonstrated that migrations are said to have originated in Rwanda. Nzogola-Ntalaja (1986) wrote extensively on the history of Rwandan people migrating to the Congo, Uganda, Tanzania, and Burundi during the sixteenth century. Inter-marriages among these communities (settlers and semi-nomadic) created similarities that cut right across the region while intermingling thus created a complex web of relationships that still persist today. Narratives can therefore be best explained as peoples' identities expressed in ethnic groupings (Ngabirano, 2010).

To illustrate the conflict-trap in which people of this area are found, both North Kivu and South Kivu (two provinces in eastern DR Congo) testify antagonistic relationships between the so-called *Banyamasisi* and *Bahunde* in North Kivu on the one hand, and between the so-called *Banyamulenge* and the *Bashi* and the *Balega* in South Kivu on the other hand. Equally, the

*Balendu* and the *Bahema* in Oriental Province in eastern DR Congo have resisted living together peacefully for a long time in that one community excludes the other whom they view as enemy and thus deserve to be neutralised, injured, or eliminated, sometimes through violent means. And as conflict persists among these different people and many others in this area, the sheer extent of hatred, leading to torture (in all its forms) and mass killings among different groups of people, continues to seek the exclusion (if not elimination) of "those belonging to a different community narrative."

In North Kivu province, for instance, Prunier (1995) noted that the conflict has initially consisted of antagonist narratives about land and belongingness (ethnic nationality versus civic citizenship) between *autochtones* (indigenous communities), which essentially are the Banyanga, Bahunde, and Banande on the one hand, and the *Banyarwanda* (both Hutu and Tutsi). It is only later that it turned into a triangular ethnic war among the indigenous ethnic groups, the Tutsi, and the Hutu.

In respect to this, Beck (1999) pointed out that members belonging to the same group generally have stereotyped images as well as a biased interpretation of the other group's behaviour. Furthermore, Ngabirano (2003) emphasised that these conflicts engage the higher echelons of leadership who structure the ideology, middle echelon perpetrators who make implementation possible, and the rank-and-file who personally carry out the execution. This is exactly what Beck meant when he stated: "group members are tuned in to special meanings assigned to events affecting the group, and they readily accept opinions and policies advocated by the leader" (Beck, 1999, p.145).

### **2.3. Community memories as catalyst for conflict**

While it is important to look at different conditions that generate conflict in the African Great Lakes region, the influence posed by any category of people's memories in this region remains central to a deep understanding of the nature of conflict in this region. Inasmuch as we can learn from the past means to tackle present violent conflicts among communities, the same past can still provide dangerous memories. Even though Amadiume and An-Na'im (2000) refer to memory as an interdependent process of remembering and forgetting, Ngabirano (2003) stressed that reconstruction of such a region torn-up by conflicts and divided by its past memories, demands that the past be given the focus it deserves, for communities in eastern DR Congo always link their present actions and/or states mainly to their past (narratives/stories) which also serve as anticipation of their future. Hence, there exists a strong connection between the individual self's capacity to think and the representation of a reality different from the self.

The basis for conflict in the Great Lakes region lies in the issue of narratives (which formulate community identities) largely based on past memories. Communities in eastern DR Congo are obviously shaped by the different categories of memories influencing convictions and actions of the people belonging to them. The study is concerned with the three categories of memory, namely; memories of events not directly experienced, constructed memories, and experienced memories. These are what Ngabirano (2003) refers to when locating the current crises in this region in past memories both experienced by the current generation and reconstructed from a past of which the current generation has had no direct experience. This only corroborates the power the past has on both the present and the future, through the mechanism of

memory. For, although one may forgive past evil deeds, they still cannot forget. Still further, once conflicts have taken place (the current crises in eastern Congo being a case in point) they seem to lead to a situation which Hannah Arendt (1958) calls "the predicament of irreversibility" meaning the inability to undo what has been done. So, any occurrence of crisis in this area only contributes to burdening a memory already tired of bitter experiences.

With reference to the inexperienced memories of events not directly experienced by the current communities of this region, the history (long memory) of the *Leopoldian* rule in the Congo 'Free' State as well as the colonial policies put in place by Belgium in the colonial Congo seem to have escalated in a more pronounced manner conflict among ethnic communities in this area. Both Hochschild (1999) and Nzogola-Ntalaja (2002) echoed that King Leopold's rule in the DR Congo, later on passed onto the Belgian government, was characterised extensive violence and sheer exploitation of the Congolese economic as well as cultural wealth. Similarly, constructed narratives from anthropological theories such as the famous *Hamitic hypothesis* reveal a succession of migrations, first from massive expansionism of the agrarian peoples over a pygmoid community, followed by another massive expansionism of cattle-keepers over the agrarian peoples (Newbury, 1988).

Lastly, experienced or lived memories by the current generations refresh the appalling situation in this area: the vicious citizenship crisis in eastern Congo, where a community of those referred to as the *Banyarwanda of Congo*, speak a language alien to national ethnicities, coupled with "warlordism" and external interventions both by neighbouring countries and by more distant international players. Maquet (1954) reported that the Kinyarwanda-speaking people in the Congo (especially the Banyamulenge) separated from other



Rwandans who are in Rwanda by the fixing of national boundaries in late 19<sup>th</sup> century; therefore, from this perspective they remain Congolese subjects (nationals).

Insofar as community memories in South Kivu province are concerned, there exist divergent views (witnesses of remembrance) and explanations as to how long the *Kinyarwanda*-speaking people in this province (the *Banyamulenge*) have been living in the DR Congo. Ruhimbika (2001) wrote that the Banyamulenge belong to the Tutsi ethnic group, who settled on the hills of *Mulenge* not far from Uvira in South-Kivu province, eastern Congo. Some scholars like d'Hertlelt (1962) maintain that the Banyamulenge have been on the Congolese soil since the last century (20<sup>th</sup>). They migrated from western Rwanda during the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, most probably for motives which are political in nature, and established themselves in the high hill of *Itombwe* in South-Kivu province. While one group of scholars still maintain that the Banyamulenge have been in the Congo since time immemorial, hence, they are autochthones (indigenous Congolese) the way are the Babembe, Bafulero, Bavira among many indigenous ethnicities; another group of social researchers, however, continue to ascertain that the Banyamulenge are simply Rwandan refugees who occupied the hills of Mulenge at successive waves of migration. Mbavu (2003) wrote that the first group must have settled in the area in the early 1950s, during the wake of Rwandan nationalism. The following wave, relatively larger than the first one, joined after 1959, during the very first massacre of Rwandan Tutsi who left Rwanda in large numbers and sought refuge in neighbouring Uganda, Tanzania, and the Congo (North and South Kivus). Lastly, recurrent power struggles in Burundi (1972) and Rwanda (1994) also contributed to the migration of both Hutu and Tutsi from both Rwanda and Burundi.

The study ultimately identifies a corresponding cycle of un-lived and lived memories. Since memories of events not directly experienced become part of the collective experience of the current generation through narratives, it follows that experienced memories will become part of the experience of those yet unborn, again through narratives. This is precisely what Ngabirano (2008) meant when he pointed out that people are inevitably born within a community that possesses a past, so this past automatically becomes the past of the new-born, but also the past of those not yet born. The study thus underlines what it refers to as 'authoritative memories,' from a communal past, a past which will influence those who are now living, those just beginning to live, and those yet to be born. Furthermore, Ngabirano stressed: "identity of human beings does not only depend on genetics and ancestry but also on memories... These common memories and other factors become a narration that forms their identity" (Ngabirano, 2010, p.85).

#### **2.4. Conclusion**

The conditions for pacification in the Great Lakes region of Africa are complex, intertwined, and multifaceted such that any endeavour to bring about holistic stability in this area ought to take into account the intricate character of the region's challenges of pacification. Conflict in this region rests on narratives and memories (which are the basis for community identities) where millions of innocent people have undergone suffering ranging from discrimination and torture, to massacres and genocide.

Because communities often focus on retaining their identity against odds that would deprive them of their worth, the current conflict in the Great Lakes region coupled with Rwandan Hutu refugees in eastern Congo was exacerbated by the consecutive political victory of the minority Tutsi in Rwanda

in July 1994 and the then sheer political will of the minority Tutsi to maintain themselves exclusively in power in Burundi. Unless past memories are looked at from the perspective of the cohesion they offer to community members [an idea which Wiesel (1996) refers to as combat against oblivion and the rejection of death] they will remain a catalyst for conflict in this area for the time to come.

## **CHAPTER THREE: THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO AND EUROPEAN IMPERIALISM**

*Humanity is divided into two: the masters and the slaves.*  
(Aristotle, *Politics*.)

### **3.1. Introduction**

In this chapter, the study tries to situate the country of DR Congo in the historical timeline. From the onset of European imperialism at the Berlin Conference, the study traces the suffering of the Congolese associated with such sentiment of global White supremacy. The study proceeds in exploring the Belgian colonial rule in the Congo and its effects on the already existing parallel narratives in the region.

As Prunier (2009) pointed out, African social and cultural ways of doing things were neither taken into account nor questioned; they were simply made obsolete. Boundaries did exist even before the colonialism, but not in the European sense. The DR Congo in a particular way has had diversified traditions, social, political, economic, religious or ethnic institutions, though they tended to crisscross and overlap. Nzogola-Ntalaja (1999) rightly noted that in addition to the linguistic unity binding the majority of the peoples of Central Africa, the Congo's ties to its immediate neighbours were reinforced by the fact that many of its ethnic groups straddle national boundaries.

### **3.2. A master made slave in the pre-colonial DR Congo**

About a century and two-and-a-half decades ago, the country of the DR Congo was mapped out the way we can see it on the current African map. With an estimated population of 68 million people (UN Estimates, 2010) and a Gross National Income per capita equivalent to US\$ 280 (World Bank, 2008), the DR Congo is centrally located in a vast area comprising

linguistically and culturally related peoples, the overwhelming majority of whom speak Bantu languages: four national languages namely Lingala, Kikongo, Tshiluba, and Swahili as well as one official language, French. The second largest country in Africa and bordering nine countries (Republic of Congo, Central African Republic, Southern Sudan, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Tanzania, Zambia, and Angola), the DR Congo occupies an area of 2,345,409 square kilometres (almost the size of western Europe); it is landlocked, except for a coastline of 40 kilometres containing the mouth and lower reaches of the Congo River, which connects the country to the Atlantic Ocean (Nzogola-Ntalaja, 1999).

True that there shall always be masters on the one hand and slaves on the other, but the case where masters of their own land, water, minerals, forests, food, language, art, and destiny have been made slaves, only to be restricted from enjoying their own privileges, is an undeniable fact in the history of the DR Congo. History will testify that the people of the Congo have not only been subjected to poverty, but mostly to anthropological impoverishment in its profound sense; that is the denial to live and grow to become their best possible selves. Anthropological poverty remains so profound that it erodes self-confidence and creates an inferiority complex (Kanyandago, 2008). Little wonder that the right to freedom is perhaps the ultimate aspiration of a people. That is why the realisation of development and peace can only be possible within the scope of freedom. Only free people can develop and live at peace with one another.

In 1885, at the Berlin Conference, European imperialism exercised its hegemony over Africa. Out of a sentiment of global white supremacy, the continent of Africa was set apart, to be divided into nation-states. The European states then in principle shared Africa according to their contacts with and

claims on the continent. They split numerous kingdoms and chiefdoms of the Great Lakes region including the Congo into colonial states. Ngabirano (2010) reveals us that Belgians applied forced labour in Rwanda and the Congo. With much pity, Hochschild (1998) reported that about ten million Congolese lost their lives during King Leopold II's rule. Markowitz (1973) narrated that King Leopold II of Belgium found Congo a vast storehouse of natural wealth. In this regard, no Congolese could know what would occur the following day; no one could tell or even predict future occurrences. Everything remained out of control; people controlled neither their minerals, nor their land, nor their foods, nor their precious timbers, nor their crafts, nor their own destiny.

European imperialism in the Congo did not touch the Congolese people individually; this situation perturbed communities' ties and troubled the legitimate relationships of the people vis-à-vis their organisational leadership. Quoting Mortimer (1969), Arnold (2005) reiterated that European colonial powers, in the beginning, cherished the assumption that they had a natural right to rule the 'uncivilised' and that the very assumption had been strengthened by a widespread acceptance of it even among natives to the extent that white power was assumed to be invincible. This episode of slavery and alien dominion over the Congolese people as echoed by Hochschild (1999) was not only the negation of what we call today human rights but indeed the simple and pure negation of their being human. What remains particularly indignant is the fact that this slavery was mainly the work of Christian Europe. Mveng (1984) pointed out that one could even believe at some extent that Europe's Christian conscience was going to apologize before a strangled and exhausted Africa by slavery. But the history of colonialism shows that according to Europe, with its good will, Africa and the DRC in a particular way, was not made to live in liberty.

No wonder when the partitioning of Africa occurred, both the coloniser and the missionary were in agreement, pushing Africa and the DRC particularly in its phase of deep anthropological poverty. The missionary served as the closest assistant of the colonizer, without any interest for the poor black Congolese who found themselves in this new form of exploitation (Mveng, 1984). Briefly, European imperialism in the DRC denied the Congolese people the right to be themselves, to feel free and sovereign, and to handle their own destiny; the Congolese condition was characterised by insecurity, fragility, and dependence. No one was sure of their daily bread; nor could one tell or even predict future occurrences, everything was out of their control. As previously masters on their history, Congolese people were simply made slave in their own land by the plot of European imperialism. Almost everything of theirs, their solidarity and their ethnical care, was unfortunately attacked at its roots, got damaged, and almost destroyed.

### **3.3. A slave sold-off in the Belgian Colonial DR Congo**

One might wonder how this study can refer to the DR Congo, a Belgian colony as a slave sold-off. Actually, many scholars including Guy Arnold never got this point quite right. In Arnold's writings one can read: "...the Belgian parliament finally, in 1908, deprived the king of control and turned his territory into a colony" (Arnold, 2005, p.21). It is important to note that Belgian rule in the DR Congo resulted from financial arrangements prior to the annexation of the Congo as a Belgian colony. Contrary to the idea put forth by Guy Arnold (2005) that the Belgian parliament deprived King Leopold II of the Congo's control, Hochschild (1999) rightly reveals that the annexation of the Congo to Belgium as its colony required a series of financial negotiations between the Belgian government and their king. Negotiations concluded with the following resolutions: Belgium agreed to pay 45.5 million

Belgian francs towards completing certain of the King's pet building projects, while the King was to receive, in instalments, another 50 million Belgian francs 'as a mark of gratitude for his great sacrifices made for the Congo' (Hochschild, 1999, p.259).

Surely, the Congo under the rule of Belgian government was not a safe or peaceful haven either. Belgians themselves were not much different from their predecessor, King Leopold II. To illustrate this, Arnold (2005) wrote that when the Belgian Congo was gaining its independence in 1960, the Belgians acted as if very little had changed in reality and assumed that they would remain to control the Congo, or at least to control its vast mineral wealth. In fact, when the Belgian government was buying off Leopold II's Congo 'Free' State, all the funds were expected to be extracted from the colony itself.

Furthermore, Nzogola-Ntalaja (2002) reveals us that the new sold-off colony inherited the *Leopoldian* legacies of economic exploitation, political repression, and above all, anthropological annihilation of Congolese people. The latter took place through cultural oppression and intense social violence. These were nothing other than the death of the community narratives that gathered communities together and at the same time the birth of bitter communal memories that would negatively shape the future of coming generations. If the Atlantic slave trade could still be registered as one thing underlying the bitter memories of Congolese people, the other thing remains colonialism.

Because people's memories and narratives are what crystallise their sense of belonging as well as their justification of good, anthropological annihilation through cultural oppression became the last resort taken by the coloniser to ensure the disruption of community existing memories and narratives. Nzogola-Ntalaja wrote: "In the context of colonisation as a



structure of domination, this negation is a necessity inherent in the colonial system because indigenous culture is a potent means of resistance against colonialism" (Nzogola-Ntalaja, 2002, p.38)

#### **3.4. The Construction of narratives in Eastern Congo through divide-and-rule politics**

Prunier (2009) reiterated that African borders were more or less porous membranes through which communities regularly criss-crossed. However, the coloniser rationalised ways of dealing with the colonised, their culture, their narratives as well as their memories. And it is that contrived rationality that they bequeathed to the colony when they departed from the continent in the 1960s.

As part of the Great Lakes region, eastern DRC is an area characterised by presence of lakes serving as natural borders and with interposed islands; cross-flowing rivers; expanded forests and extensive mountain ranges. All these, however, consist of the region's natural borders as well as places where communities can either dwell or perform their day-to-day activities to earn their living. That is why Coles (1985) reminds us that a 'people' is formed by physical propinquity, a native soil and a shared history that has formed common beliefs and values, and conferred on it an identity. It is thus clear that the link between a people and its land is a profound one.

Nonetheless, the history of eastern DR Congo has also been a litany of half-told (if not at all untold) stories of atrocities. Having occupied both Rwanda and Burundi, Belgium (which was also the Congo's colonial master) formally took over their administration as mandatory power under the League of Nations mandates system in 1921, and remained as the administrative authority under the United Nations trusteeship

system from 1945 to 1962. However, although Belgium had to submit annual reports on its administration of the trust territory to the United Nations, as well as deal with periodic inspections from the UN Trusteeship Council, the territory was already administratively annexed to the Belgian Congo in 1925. Thus, from that time on till Congolese independence, as acknowledged by Nzongola-Ntalaja (2002), Belgium governed the three territorial units as a single colonial entity known as *Le Congo Belge et le Ruanda-Urundi*, with a single army, named the *Force Publique* and a single governor-general in Kinshasa, the Capital city of DR Congo. Partly, this political mélange could be a potent source of the region's decay after the less knowledgeable or perhaps careless colonial master had left.

More still, eastern Congo, just like all other parts of the country was originally peopled by the Twa, a pygmoid people concentrated in the equatorial forests of Central Africa. Hunter-gatherers, these people occupied the region before its settlement by the Bantu, an agrarian people. After the Bantu had conquered and settled in this region, the history of migrations and refugees did not stop. Indeed, the history of the peopling of eastern Congo differs from any other border region in Africa and was so complex that it has definitely led to severe citizenship and land crises along with disagreeable ethnic conflicts. Mamdani (2001) affirms that the depth of this crisis in eastern Congo cannot be understood unless we see it as the result of a confluence of two distinct processes: the social crisis of post-genocide Rwanda and the citizenship crisis in the entire region. Millions of people have spilled over into eastern Congo, mainly into the North and South Kivu provinces, a region that hosted most of the *Kinyarwanda-speaking* population in the Congo since time immemorial.

As mentioned above, the study reiterates that the two dimensions of ethnic identity and land tenure are intimately linked. The predicament of the *Banyarwanda* (people of Rwandan origin) in the Congo flowed directly from the political arrangement put in place by Belgians in the colonial period. At the core of the colonial master's ideology was the politics of "divide and rule." The Belgian administration noticed overpopulation in the western part of Rwanda and at the same time remarked the fertility of the Kivus highlands and its favourable conditions: That is why Belgians decided to move these people from Rwanda, the *Banyarwanda*, to fruitfully exploit the eastern Congolese soil. According to Prunier (2009), this came under the *Mission d'Immigration des Banyarwanda* created by the Belgians in 1937 to bring agricultural workers from an already overpopulated Rwanda into what was seen as an underpopulated Kivu. Both Prunier (1995) and Mamdani (2001) noted that by the year 1957, Masisi-- a territory in the North Kivu-- had a population density of 38.9 which became almost tripled, 101 by the year 1984.

However, both Mamdani (2001) and Prunier (2009) have acknowledged that there have been *Kinyarwanda* speaking people in eastern Congo since time immemorial and they were divided into many small communities (the *Banyabwisha*, the *Bafumbira* migrants from Uganda; the *Banyamasisi*, the *Banyaruthsuru*, the *Banyamulenga* migrants from Rwanda). In addition to this, Mamdani stresses that the *Kinyarwanda* speakers in eastern Congo comprised three distinct groups: First are the 'nationals' who could claim the greatest historical depth; they were already resident in the territory that Belgian colonialism demarcated as the Congo in the late nineteenth century. Second are the 'migrants' who crossed the border at different times during the colonial era, either voluntarily in search for livelihood or under compulsion. Thirdly, we have

the 'refugees' who, in contrast, are wholly a post-independence phenomenon.

The narratives of the people of the eastern part of the Congo are complex, for they have majorly been constructed in the interest of the colonial master. Colonisers believed that it is only after people living in communities have been divided that they can systematically rule over them for an indefinite period of time. Besides, these narratives are differently told by their narrators and differently listened to by their audiences. Colonialists (white-settlers and missionaries), anthropologists, and members of various local communities all had different (and so often conflicting) stories about origin and social strata of various communities in the region.

Because it is believed that this part has had people we can refer to as autochthones or indigenous to the place, the narration of the peopling of eastern Congo told by the indigenous people still remains far different, if not contradictory to the one told by those referred to as non-native. Still further, these narratives borne out of lived memories have undergone constructions to suit the interests and claims of its audiences. On the one hand, one community will endlessly express a sense of victimhood, and on the other, another community will tirelessly express their rights of belonging. One would hear, for instance, Bahunde, Banyanga or Banande in North Kivu referring to ownership of land and to belongingness to the Congolese nationality as their sole privilege that cannot be shared with the *Kinyarwanda*-speaking people, whether Hutu or Tutsi, always viewed as strangers.

In reaction to the above, as one might notice, the *Kinyarwanda*-speaking people in the eastern Congo successfully attempted to shift from a descent-based identity to a territory-based 'political' identity: From being *Banyarwanda*

(those ancestrally belonging to Rwanda) they had claimed to be, for instance the *Banyamasisi*, those living in the territory of *Masisi* in North Kivu; the *Banyamlenge*, those living in the hills of *Mulenge* in South Kivu among other examples. These changes in the narration of origin and peopling of eastern Congo consist of the baseline for incompatibilities of living together peacefully among the communities in eastern Congo.

Nonetheless, two main issues had remained unresolved throughout the times and thus fuelled the inevitable conflict: the issue of land and that of citizenship. In North Kivu, both issues seemed to be far more complex than they were in South Kivu. In the former, the Kinyarwanda speakers (who are predominately Hutu) were caught in a serious dilemma designed by the Belgian indirect-rule colonialism, being regarded as native Congolese (those who had come to Congo in the colonial period) and at the same time being non-indigenous to Congo. This historical circumstance left them without any claim to a 'Native Authority' in the Congo, so they were definitely regarded as ethnic strangers.

Equally, the so-called indigenous Congolese in the North Kivu, the *Bahunde*, the *Banyanga*, and the *Banande* treasured the idea that they were landowners, and the immigrant Banyarwanda, tenants. In the territory of *Masisi*, for instance, the tension of land ownership turned into an ethnic conflict between the Hutu and the *Bahunde* over whether the former should have the right to their own Native Authority. Contrary to the North Kivu that has had a Banyarwanda Native Authority in *Bwisha* and *Gishari* from 1938 to 1957 (Mamdani, 2001), South Kivu has never had a Banyarwanda Native Authority. This particular province has been affected by the history of Rwanda and Burundi.

The question of ethnicity and nationality in South Kivu, as Prunier (2009) pointed out, was and still is posed in different terms: the main 'non-natives' are the *Barundi*, who curiously have had only limited problems with their autochthon neighbours, mostly the *Bavira* and the *Bifulero*, unlike the much smaller *Banyamulenge*. The so-called Banyamulenge remain a group of Banyarwanda migrants, predominantly Tutsis who have come from Rwanda at various points in history. As Prunier (2009) pointed out, they received a further influx of migrants in 1959, 1964, and 1973, as anti-Tutsi persecutions took place in Rwanda.

### **3.5. Conclusion**

This chapter attempted to recapitulate conflict among communities in this region along historical lines. With the deliberate arrival of colonialists in this region and with no consent whatsoever from the existing local communities, the study has scrutinised the impact of colonial policies on memories and narratives in eastern Congo and the catalyst legacies of conflict left behind by the colonialists.

Communities were what mattered in the pre-colonial Congo, and the notion of nation-state was a foreign construct. These communities understood the meaning of living together in unity and harmony, so crystallised around their communal memories and narratives. Much as boundaries were porous (allowing easy entrance and exit of peoples and their belongings), the latter did not undermine the notion of belongingness and identity among different communities. Geographic limits of one community in the pre-colonial times were therefore depicted through community narratives specifically narrated in that community language.

However, legacies that the DR Congo inherited from Belgian King Leopold II remain outrageous. During his entire twenty-three-year tenure as the Congo's king-sovereign, Leopold II ruled the country as an absentee landlord who left day-to-day affairs to professional managers and created a state, paradoxically called Congo Free State, where the inhabitants were not citizens with democratic rights, but enslaved subjects of a sovereign they never saw. Living under such harsh conditions of horror and oppression, the Congolese people were left without any option other than bitter memories of an institutionalized genocide, the encouragement of crime, along with the silence or complete support of other colonial powers. All these unhealed communal memories were eventually passed onto next Congolese generations through even more bitter narratives.

The repercussions of the politics of 'divide-and-rule' implemented by the Belgian colonisers over their entire dominion (the DR Congo, Rwanda, and Burundi), have resulted into long-standing antagonism between certain ethnic groups in eastern Congo and so these community narratives have been constructed accordingly both by the narrators and their audience. In this respect, we may recall the ethnographic divisions designed by the coloniser and based on some anthropologically construed narratives, made to systematically differentiate the Hutus from the Tutsi in the neighbouring colonial Rwanda and Burundi. One of the legendary anthropological and historical studies developed the so-called *Hamitic hypothesis* that was later used by colonialists to classify people of this region along the lines of origin (Ngabirano, 2003). Thus, constructed narratives remain a driving force in consolidating those who belong to the 'in-group' on the one hand and on the other hand, excluding (if not eliminating) those who do not belong.

## CHAPTER FOUR: MOBUTISM AND THE 1994 RWANDAN GENOCIDE

*The last battle of the colonised against the coloniser will often be the fight of the colonised against each other.*

(Frantz Fanon, 1961)

### 4.1. Introduction

This chapter attempts to explore some key phenomena that led to the new developments of conflict in the Great Lakes region and more so in eastern Congo. Contemporary history of the Great Lakes region of Africa still rotates around two pivotal circumstances which have boldly contributed to the making of a continental catastrophe: the failure of the state in the DR Congo and the making of the civil fabric in Rwanda. This is why the study deliberately juxtaposed the Rwandan civil war that culminated in the poignant bloodshed in 1994 with the Mobutu regime and the collapse of the Zairian state in 1997. Much as conflict had been ongoing in these two countries even prior to their access to political independence, the Rwandan Genocide of 1994 and its aftermath together with President Mobutu's fall from power in 1997 and the subsequent Congolese State's failure are the most salient contemporary variables of the historical background to conflict and violence in the Great Lakes region today, and more so in the Eastern Congo.

No region of the African continent has known as much political strife, loss of life and social dislocation, and violence during the recent half-century as the Great Lakes region, mostly in the eastern part of the DR Congo. During the past two decades, millions of people have died in both Rwanda and the Congo, fighting for political hegemony and control over land and other natural resources.



#### 4.2. The loaded memories of Mobutu regime

Born Joseph-Désiré Mobutu on 14 October 1930, as Wrong (2000) noted, in the central town of Lisala from the union of Albéric Gbemani, a cook working for a Belgian Judge and Marie Madeleine Yemo, Mobutu Sese Seko Kuku Ngbendu-wa-Zabanga was the Congo's Head of State from 24 November 1965 until 17 May 1997. Mobutu, whose name had warrior connotations, was a member of the Ngbandi tribe, one of the smallest DR Congo's ethnic groupings. Concerning his ethnic origin, Wrong wrote:

Anthropologists believe the Ngbandi trace their lineage in back to the central Sudanese regions of Darfur and Kordofan, an area that was repeatedly targeted by Moslem conquerors from the sixteenth century onwards... Fleeing the slave raids and Islamicisation... heading for the very equatorial heart of the continent, where they in turn subjugated the local Bantus... The Ngbandi who took their name from a legendary fighter, gradually acquired an identity... They emerged as a loose affiliation of war-like tribes speaking the same language and straddling the Ubangi... with one foot in what is today Central African Republic and another in Congo (Wrong, 2000, p.68).

For a quarter of a century, between 1965 and 1990, Mobutu was the undisputed master of the country, the "big man," a new King for the Congo and true successor to King Leopold II as the owner of the country and its resources (Nzogola-Ntalaja, 2002). With steady Western sponsorship the all-powerful and charismatic dictator plundered his country's wealth, leaving absurdity, anarchy and corruption as the nation's legacies. As most autocrats, Mobutu held frequent rallies in sports stadia and halls where every member of the Congolese society automatically belonged to the *Mouvement Populaire de la Révolution* (MPR), the Party-State he had founded. Five years after his military coup d'état of 1965, Mobutu became increasingly aware of the need to launch the most ideologically ambitious project of his career, *Zaireanisation*.

In 1971, the country (DR Congo) was rebaptised *Zaire*, and the national currency and main waterway (the River Congo) similarly renamed. At its best, as Wrong (2000) acknowledged, "authenticity" was an admirable attempt to recover a sense of African identity and pride crushed by the colonial experience: the realisation by the Zairean people that they must return to their origins, seek out the values of their ancestors which contributed to their harmonious and natural development. Mobutu once described to the United Nations this philosophy of authenticity as the refusal to blindly embrace imported ideologies. While the country [Zaire] must modernise, it would do so in a framework of ancestral spiritual values, not by aping Western materialism.

Consequently, Christian names left by European missionaries were abandoned and African names revived; meanwhile, almost all foreign-owned farms, plantations, commercial enterprises, schools (mostly in the hands of Portuguese, Greek, Italian, Pakistani, and Belgians) were turned over to the 'sons and daughters of the country,' the Zairian people. Many acknowledge that some presents Mobutu made himself were simply too exaggerated to remain secret for long. According to Wrong (2000), most notorious was the US\$5.2 million Villa del Mar in Roquebrune Cap Martin, not far from King Leopold's former French Riviera estate.

Straddling origins himself, and coming from one of the smallest ethnic minorities, Mobutu favoured collaborators of mixed blood. Wrong (2000) reminds us of his collaboration with men like Bisengimana Rema of Rwandan origin, Leon Kengo Wa Dondo, the son of a Polish magistrate, Seti Yale and so on. Under the then constitution, these "métis" (of mixed blood) could never legally aspire to the presidency, for they were regarded by many Zaireans as foreigners. In the provinces of

North and South Kivu for example, one can find a people known as the "Banyarwanda of the Congo" (Congolese of Rwandan origin, then numbering fewer than one million) who already had a distinct political reality by the early 1990s.

Communities' narratives and memories in eastern Congo crystallised around two intertwined realities of land ownership and national identity during the Mobutu regime. These two crises of land ownership and citizenship were at the core of what set local communities apart, dividing those considered to be native from those considered non-native. Prunier (2009) relates to us that in January 1972, at the height of his power, Barthélémy Bisengimana, a Tutsi refugee from Rwanda who was Mobutu's right-hand man as the chief of the presidential office, had managed to get the Political Bureau of the *Mouvement Populaire de la Révolution* (MPR) to pass a citizenship decree whereby "all the persons originating from 'Ruanda-Urundi' and residing on the Belgian Congolese territory in or before January 1950 were automatically Zairian citizens" (Article 15). This venture took place as the aftermath of the massacre of about 200,000 Hutu in Burundi in 1972. Faced with a growing refugee influx, the local population began to see themselves as an imperilled 'original' majority.

But even before Bisengimana fell from power in 1997 there was intense pressure to change the law, and a new one was passed on June 29, 1981, abrogating the famous Article 15. The 1981 law was said to have been passed under strong pressure from Nande and Hunde politicians from North Kivu. It stipulated that 'only those persons who could demonstrate an ancestral connection to the population residing in 1885 in the territory then demarcated as Congo would qualify to be citizens of the Congo.' Local Banande worthies counterattacked and tried to cut down Banyarwanda landholdings and businesses. They managed to get the support of the Bahunde and Banyanga minority ethnic

groups, who had always been at the wrong end of the deals, whether it was the Banyarwanda or the majority Banande who had been on top.

To further their aims, Prunier (2009) delineates how the Banande used the democratization movement then taking place in Zaire. They used the decisions taken by the *Conférence Nationale Souveraine* (The Sovereign National Conference-- The National Zaire Reform conference that convened between August 1991 and December 1992) to completely overhaul the local administration in North Kivu, putting new judges and police who were Banande, Banyanga, or Bahunde, prejudiced against the Banyarwanda.

However, it was one thing to pass this law and quite another to implement it. According to Mamdani (2001), in this context, the 'indigenous' majority improvised a solution: the *Kinyarwanda*-speaking population may vote in provincial assembly elections, but none of its members may run for office. Yet, of course, this solution only compounded a problem; the response of the *Kinyarwanda* speaking minority united (regardless of how long different sections had been on the Congolese soil), and most particularly the Tutsi (a minority within the minority) was to smash ballot boxes. As a result, no provincial assemblies were elected in either North or South Kivu.

Nevertheless, this issue pertaining to citizenship remains so critical that Kivu civil society up to now cannot afford to accept an order whereby every immigrant who comes in is granted citizenship automatically, a practice that came in when Bartélémy Bisengimana became Chief of Staff to Mobutu.

#### **4.3. Bloodshed through politics of annihilation in Rwanda**

Mamdani (2001) reminded us that many accounts of the 1994 Rwandan genocide, whether academic or popular, suffer from three main silences. The first concerns the history of genocide, in that many write or narrate as if the Rwandan genocide had no precedent; the second concerns the agency of the genocide, where so many accounts have highlighted its design in a one-sided manner. The third silence concerns the geography of the genocide, given that since genocide happened within the boundaries of Rwanda, there is a widespread tendency to assume that it must also be an outcome of processes that unfolded within the same boundaries. Yet the study highlights the regional processes that fed the dynamics leading to the 1994 Rwandan genocide. In the same way, Prunier (1995) rightly pointed out that any attempt to try to study the history of a genocide must begin with a basic choice about the moral propriety of their endeavour.

It is now overwhelmingly agreed that the 1994 Rwandan genocide was the result of a process which can be analysed, studied and explained, just as one can analyse, study, and explain the genocide of North American Indians in the nineteenth century or the Holocaust of the Jews during the Second World War or again the genocide in Bosnia-Herzegovina. In 1994 the popular press portrayed the Rwanda genocide as a tribal war between ethnic groups. But since then, scholarly research (most especially from Prunier, 1995 and Uvin, 1998) has rejected this view. Reporting in the *Journal of Peace Research* (2006), Verwimp wrote that hatred between conflicting parties is very often one of the consequences of a conflict but rarely the main cause of such a conflict. He further emphasized that hatred or grievance is not a necessary (or even less a sufficient) condition for genocide or less lethal ethnic conflicts to occur.

Actually, the country of Rwanda can best be considered to be an exceptional African Great Lakes country, supposing that all the others remain rather normal. It is very small with an area of only 26,338 sq.km and a post-genocide population of about 6.9 million (hence 261.97 individuals per sq Km) according to Prunier (1995). But Verwimp rightly showed that following a Hutu-led revolution from 1959 to 1962, the percentage of Tutsi in the Rwandan population declined sharply, from 17.5% in 1952 to 8.4% in 1991.

It is hardly an exaggeration to say that no event in recent human history has challenged ethical reflection and pacification in the Great Lakes region of Africa more than the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. Research from a variety of scholars such as Prunier (1995; 2009), Uvin (1998), Lemarchand (2000), Reyntjens (2009) as well as many accounts like Dallaire's (2004), acknowledge that more than 800,000 Rwandans were killed by fellow Rwandans, as the rest of the world stood by and watched. The fact that the majority of the killings were carried out by ordinary Rwandans against their neighbours, and moreover in a close and intimate way, mostly using machetes, hoes, hacks, axes, and clubs with nails, makes the Rwandan genocide one of the most unimaginable tragedies of our time.

What makes the Rwandan genocide an especially chilling and challenging event for peace-building is the fact that the inhabitants of Rwanda, whether Hutu or Tutsi or even Twa, all speak the same language, Kinyarwanda, and that Rwanda has been, and perhaps remains, one of the most Christianized nations in Africa. It was estimated that as much as 90% of Rwandans in 1994 were Christians, 62.6% Catholic; 18.8 % Protestant; 8.4 % Seventh Day Adventist (Longman, 2001). Yet the Church was not merely silent, but was intimately associated with the genocide; not only did the majority of

killings take place within or around churches, they involved Christians killing other Christians as well as monolingual neighbours killing themselves (Musekura, 2010).

Though the 1994 genocide in Rwanda had been politically engineered, the study indeed realizes that to admit that the Rwandan genocide was a clear case of conflicting narratives and memories (a history that excludes and annihilates those who do not belong to a story or narrative) may appear to be a convenient explanation, and one which seems to challenge Western understandings of Africa and Africans in general. Dallaire (2004) expressed what finally took place in Rwanda in 1994 as a story of betrayal, indifference, hatred, failure, inhumanity and evil: in just one hundred days over 800,000 Rwandan men, women, children borne and those yet to be borne were brutally murdered and millions of others injured, displaced or made refugees while the rest of the world remained quite aloof, sitting back to watch the unfolding apocalypse.

Without going into detail about the different theories of Tutsi and Hutu identities as developed in the *Hamitic* theory, the study rather attempts to understand how these identities, whether from their mythological compositions, anthropological studies or out of recollection of memories, had become operational factors in the making of the Rwandan society. But whatever the case, since time immemorial there were two sharply diverging views of Tutsi and Hutu identities, separately drawn along the line of conflicting narratives.

Without weapons, acknowledged Verwimp (2006), a conflict between groups or factions among the population would not reach the toll of human lives that we have seen in the recent bloody conflicts in Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of

Congo, Sudan, or Rwanda to name just a few. In any case, if individual characteristics of victims (gender, age, occupation), location of atrocities, and timing have an impact on the use of different kinds of weapons, this will only add to our understanding of the organized nature of the 1994 Rwandan genocide. In fact, Mamdani (2001) reminded us that if the genocidal impulse could as old as the organisation of power, and one might be tempted to believe that all that has changed through history is the technology of genocide.

In January 1994 (three months before the genocide), Human Rights Watch report presented evidence that the government (predominantly Hutu) was buying weapons to be paid for partly in cash and partly with the future harvest of the Mulindi tea plantation. The same report stated that the Habyarimana regime was distributing weapons among the population, using the Rwandan administrative organization as part of a so-called civilian self-defence programme. Human Rights Watch had also documented on the one hand how, in 1992-93, *bourgoumestres* (the head of the communal authority) ordered quantities of arms and ammunition that far exceeded the needs of their local police forces under the auspices of Colonel Nsabimana, chief of staff of the Rwandan army, who proposed that the civilian population should be instructed in the use of machetes, spears, swords, bows and arrows.

Katongole (2005) maintains that what makes the Rwandan genocide a particularly chilling and challenging event for Christian reflection is the fact that Rwanda has been, and perhaps remains, one of the most Christianized nations in Africa. Much as both Longman (2001) and Katongole (2005) echoed this bloodshed unfolding a very much Christianised Rwanda, the study profoundly wishes to underscore another appealing factor that the killing in 1994 took place among



people who remain linguistically the same; both the Hutu and Tutsi are Kinyarwanda-speakers.

On the other hand, the very Human Right Watch report published in January 1994 also documented the purchase of arms by the rebels, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF). For many researchers of the Great Lakes region like Prunier, Uvin, Reyntjens or Lemarchand, the RPF is an oddity among guerrilla movements for many different reasons. It was created outside the country of Rwanda where its members were initially recruited among armed forces of a foreign power, most of its combatants had never set foot in the land where they were going to fight, and they never managed to get any support from the masses of the population in whose name they were struggling. Prunier (1995) put it that the key to understanding the RPF paradox lies in the very peculiar nature of the Rwandan people and of its history, especially since the end of colonial rule.

Des Forges (2003) reported that in a radio address, four days after the February 1993 attack by the RPF, President Habyarimana advocated a self-defence force armed with traditional weapons, an idea he repeated in a speech to army commanders on 13 March when he called for the population to 'organise to defend itself.' The hypothesis drawn from the latter on the objectives of the Habyarimana regime is that enemies were defined as the Tutsi and their accomplices, more particularly all members of the RPF, the Tutsi inside the country and Hutu opponents of the current regime. In this definition, enemies are to be killed, as many as possible, using any available means under the constraint that firearms and bullets were in short supply.

On 06 April 1994, the then President of Rwanda, Juvenal Habyarimana, was assassinated in a plane crash at the Kigali international airport (Dallaire, 2004). Within hours, a carefully framed policy of genocide was implemented which first sought to eliminate the leaders of all the newly formed internal opposition parties, the majority of whom, according to Reed (1996), came from the dominant Hutu community, as well as the supporters of the RPF. As the killing intensified, the RPF mobilized its forces, advancing on Kigali while the then government of Rwanda fled to the then Zaire.

In referring to the organizers of the 1994 Rwandan genocide, Prunier means: "the people who actually carried out the organization of murder squads, distributed weapons and gave or relayed instructions at a high level" (Prunier, 1995, p.239). These, according to him, do not refer to the intellectual inspirators such as Ferdinand Nahimana or Casimir Bizimungu, however profound their responsibility may be; neither do they refer to the gun-and-machete-toting actual killers.

Some names crop up again and again, whether in the reports of human rights groups or the testimony of independent observers of various political persuasions. Special mention has to go to Colonel Theoneste Bagosora, director of services in the Ministry of Defence and behind-the-scene creator of the Provisional Government' for having organized the whole operation. Major-General Augustin Bizimana, the Defence Minister; Colonel Aloys Ntabakuze, commander of the paratroopers; Lieut.-Colonel Protais Mpiranya, head of the President Guard; Captain Pascal Simbikangwa who supervised the militia killings in Kigali; Joseph Nzirorera, the then secretary-general of the Mouvement Revolutionnaire National pour le Developpement et la Democratie (MRNDD) who coordinated the *Interahamwe* (literally meaning "those who fight together"

for extremist Hutu) operations; Pascal Musabe, a bank director who was one of the militia organizers at the national level; the businessman Felicien Kabuga who financed the Radio Television Libre de Mille Collines (RTLMC) and the Interahamwe, to mention just a few.

These organizers, and many others behind the extremist ideology, came up with what they referred to as "the final solution" which would solve both the ethnic problem (by killing all the Tutsi) and the threat of democratization (by killing all the moderate Hutu) (Prunier, 1995, p.222). And amidst all this mess, Church hierarchies were at best useless and at worst accomplices in the genocide.

#### **4.4. Mixed identities in eastern Congo**

Conflict in eastern DR Congo had been ongoing since time immemorial. However, the arrival of over 1.5 million Banyarwanda Hutu refugees in 1994 pushed things one notch further (Prunier, 1995). Both North and South Kivu have sizable Banyarwanda populations, a minority in the south but a near majority in the north, and in both cases the relationships between the autochthones (native groups) and the relative newcomers (non-native or alien to the region) had been poor.

Mamdani (2001), however, indicates that the RPF victory in Rwanda set off a massive exodus of Hutu from Rwanda to eastern Congo (Kivu provinces). As they crossed the Congo-Rwanda border in mid-1994, the million-plus refugees literally brought the trauma of the post-genocide Rwanda to the region of Kivu, worsening an already dire situation in the entire eastern Congo. Already at the end of 1993, wrote Reyntjens (2009), some 200,000 Burundian refugees inundated eastern Congo provinces, followed in mid-1994 by 1.5 million Rwandan

refugees. So the escalating crisis in Rwanda introduced a double tension in both Kivu provinces, both internal and external. This tension, according to Mamdani (2001), grew in intensity as the Kinyarwanda-speaking refugee and exile population in Kivu grew in size, increasing the demands of refugees and exiles while blurring the distinction between them and earlier immigrants.

As pointed out by Ngabirano (2010), people tend to identify their differences with historical factors, some of which are mythical, others constructed theories, and yet others direct consequences of the conflict itself. From his research, Mamdani (2001) revealed that conventional wisdom in eastern Congo, especially in North and South Kivu provinces, holds that losers from the Rwandan genocide ended up in the Kivu provinces in eastern Congo, and it is from the Kivu that they prepared to return to power in Rwanda.

The so-called 'indigenous' Congolese in the North Kivu, the *Bahunde*, the *Banyanga*, and the *Banande* dearly held onto the idea that they were landowners with the immigrant *Banyarwanda* as tenants. In the territory of Masisi, for instance, the tension of land ownership turned into an ethnic conflict between the Hutu and the Bahunde over whether the former should have the right to their own Native Authority.

At the outset, Mamdani (2001) tells us that the Tutsis joined the 'indigenous' Bahunde and the Banyanga, eventually aligning against the Hutu. By the end of the year 1993, however, as the conflict came to focus on the question of who was entitled to a 'customary' right to land through a 'customary' authority, it pitted the "indigenous", the Bahunde and the Banyanga against the "non-indigenous", the Hutus and the Tutsis.

Whereas refugees were part of a volatile political diaspora, nationals and migrants were part of a more stable cultural diaspora. Before the great overflow of Rwandan refugees in

1994, nationals and migrants far outnumbered the refugees, but after 1994 the relationship was reversed. As the number of the refugees began to exceed those of nationals and migrants, the political diaspora came to dominate and define the life circumstances of the cultural diaspora. That is why Reyntjens (2009) stresses that 1994 Rwandan genocide remains a fundamental reference not only because hundreds of thousands of Tutsi got killed, but its aftermath has consisted in the violent restructuring of the whole Great Lakes region.

It is to be understood that being defined as a people of non-indigenous origin entailed the denial of 'customary' access to land, since non-indigenous people do not have their own Native Authority, so in order to access land in customary areas they are compelled to pay tribute to customary authorities in these areas. In addition, the Native Authority in Kivu, in general, was in a three-tiered system: at the lowest level, according to Mamdani, is the *Chef de localité* (chief of locality), then comes the *Chef du groupement* (chief of the in-group), and then finally the *Mwami de la collectivité* (Sultan of the chiefdom). Thus, those considered non-indigenous and living in some rural areas may, and usually do, have a chief of the lowest tier, who is answerable to the higher authority for their immediate governance. And only those considered indigenous have the right to a chief of the second and third tier from their own, and for whom the customary power really rests.

Unlike in North Kivu, where the situation has a longer and complex history, the situation in South Kivu is different because it is less populated, which results in less pressure on land issues, yet this region has been far more affected by the history of both Rwanda and Burundi. Contrary to North Kivu, that had a Banyarwanda Native Authority in *Bwisha* and *Gishari* from 1938 to 1957 (Mamdani, 2001), South Kivu has never had a Banyarwanda Native Authority.

Just like the Banyamasisi in North Kivu, as colonial power came to a close and the politics of Rwanda took on exploitative dimensions, the Banyarwanda immigrants in the hills of Mulenge, a village on the Itombwe, began to distance themselves from their ancestral world and define their identity and hence their future much more in line with their 'new home' due to the triggering event of the genocidal killing of Hutu in Burundi, leading to the unpopularity of the Tutsi in the entire area. That is how the identity 'Banyamulenge' (those from Mulenge) came about, with the solely objective to avoid being called 'Banyarwanda' (those from Rwanda) and hence being seen as "foreigners." Moreover, for access to land, the Banyamulenge paid homage to existing chiefs where they settled because the Banyamulenge chiefs were still confined to the first level, the chief of locality and therefore they have never had their own Native Authority.

#### **4.5. Partial Conclusion**

This chapter mainly focused on the course that conflict in the Great Lakes region took under the Mobutu regime in the Congo and in the highly dismantled Rwandan society after Belgian colonialists had left. The chapter explored the trend of community narratives and memories in eastern Congo just before the collapse of the Zairean state and then the new characteristics of these narratives and memories in the aftermath of the Rwandan Genocide.

Since the beginning of belligerent conflict in the DR Congo in 1996, there has been debate about the relationship between ethnicity and the pressures for re-drawing the boundaries in the Great Lakes region, pressures driven by deep-seated ethnic conflicts. Nevertheless, as Nzongola-Ntalaja (2002) points out, it has been shown that secessionist movements, with cross-border invasions by neighbours pursuing their own

national interests, have been a greater threat to Africa's existing political map than ethnicity per se.

While conflicts have older roots, there are various reasons for the violence that could best explain the underlying issues of contemporary eastern Congo: first, as only nationals exercise political rights in the would-be democratic state of Zaire/Congo, citizenship became so important, particularly in territories with a high proportion of Kinyarwanda-speaking communities. Second, in this new relatively overpopulated part of the Congo, wrangles over land set communities against each other. Reyntjens (2009) reminds us that there were two types of land use, agriculture (for agrarian communities) and livestock grazing (for pastoralist communities), entered into competition with each other. On the other hand, the two concepts of land tenure and access to land clashed with each other.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONFLICT IN EASTERN CONGO AND THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

*The violence of humans against humans appals us but continues to take its toll today.*

(Aaron T. Beck, 1999)

### 5.1. Introduction

In January 2008 International Rescue Committee, an international non-governmental organisation dealing with humanitarian crises in conflict-ridden zones, reported that nearly 5.5 million people were estimated to have died in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) since the beginning of the armed conflict in 1998. Still, about four years ago, in April 2004, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) had published in its report that the security situation in the eastern region of the DR Congo was the most worrying in the entire Great Lakes of Africa as a consequence of the fighting and increased tension had resulted into an approximately 35,000 people displaced over the course of that one month.

In addition to such severe and brutal displacements, a report by the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative with support from the Oxfam America in April 2010 reveals that eastern Congo has been marked has been marked by a number of human rights abuses, including the use extreme sexual violence where rape has been a weapon of war used by various combatant forces. Autesserre (2010) has stressed that despite the ceasefire, between 1999 and 2003, up to fourteen foreign armies actively fought on the Congolese territory, each supporting one or more of the Congolese armed groups.

This chapter attempts to elucidate the dynamics of conflict in eastern Congo in juxtaposition with the role played or not by



the international community. Beginning with the various peace agreements signed to end the war, the study endeavours to bring out salient motives that challenge peaceful coexistence among communities living in eastern Congo, considering the shift from ethno-centric dimensions to the economic dimensions of conflict in eastern Congo.

## **5.2. Trouble from Eastern Congo's neighbourhood**

The nature of conflict in eastern Congo shows a repeat of history and one may well ask the question: why are the grassroots and their leaders as well as key interveners in this conflict, not learning from the past? Little wonder that some contemporary scholars of this region are already discovering that limiting these crises to political or military manipulations and economic adventures is missing the point of what actually is at the base of the region's conflicts.

Two great wars can be identified and analysed. First, the war from October 1996 to May 1997, referred to as 'the war of liberation' then from August 1998 to July 1999, referred to as 'the war of occupation.' The country was plagued, in a span of two years, by vicious socio-economic and political crises whose outrageous consequences spared no Congolese community, more so those living in the eastern part of the republic.

On 18 October 1996 in Lemera, a small locality in South Kivu Province in eastern Congo, a protocol of accord among different rebellious groups (forces) was concluded with the goal of toppling the government of Kinshasa. Mbavu (2003) rightly revealed us that the Protocol of Accord signed in Lemera consisted of three major points. First was the creation of collaborative political cadre, given the name of the *Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Congo-*

Zaire (AFDL-C), the Alliance of Democratic Forces for Liberation of the Congo. Second of all, the Accord also stipulated the creation of an organ to be referred to as the 'decision-making centre' for the alliance, which was composed of representatives of the four allied parties, namely, *les Forces Démocratiques* (FD), the Democratic Forces led by André Kisase Ngandu; *le Parti Révolutionnaire du Peuple* (PRP), the Revolutionary People's Party led by Laurent Désiré Kabila; *l' Alliance Démocratique des Peuples* (ADP), the Democratic Alliance of Peoples led by Deogratias Bugera; *le Mouvement Révolutionnaire pour la Libération du Zaire* (MRLZ), the Revolutionary Movement for the Liberation of Zaire led by Masasu Nindanda. Lastly, the Protocol of Accord of Lemera designated Laurent Désiré Kabila as the Spokesperson of the Alliance.

Under the ideology that brought AFDL-C into existence, the primary objective of *Kinyarwanda*-speaking people in the Congo (of acquiring a Zairian/Congolese citizenship) changed drastically to become a war aimed at erasing the corrupt regime of Mobutu once and for all. After much bloodshed and its subsequent collapse of the state (most especially felt by local communities in the East), the Zairian army was not able to put a significant challenge to the upcoming rebellion, with a heavy support of Ugandan and Rwandan troops. By May 1997 Mobutu, recognizing the imminent overthrow of his regime, fled up to Morocco; Kabila renamed Zaire the Democratic Republic of Congo and declared himself President.

Until July 1998, James Kabarebe, a Rwandan military officer served as Chief of Staff of the *Forces Armées Congolaises* (FAC), the Congolese Armed Forces, the new Congolese national army. Deogratias Bugera was removed from his AFDL post in May 1998 and sidelined as minister of the state in the President's

office, with no particular duties, and then excluded himself in late July as his plotting failed to remove Kabila from power (Nzogola-Ntalaja, 2002).

Nonetheless, it should be remembered that following the political victory of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) (with the help of the Rwandan Patriotic Army under the guidance of Paul Kagame) in July 1994 in Rwanda, defeated ex-Rwandan Armed Forces together with their local supporters, the *Interahamwe* militia (often referred to as *génocidaires*). Over two million Rwandan civilians sought refuge in neighbouring countries, the majority of whom crossed over the Zairean/Congolese border to live in the refugees' camps hastily prepared by the international community alongside the Congo's eastern provinces of South and North Kivu (Mamdani, 2001).

Thus far, even some years after the 1994 Rwandan genocide, Rwandan refugees never wanted to return to their homes in Rwanda for many reasons amongst which a strong political regime of dictatorship imposed by the 'winners' (the Tutsi RPF) against all the 'losers' (the Hutu *Interahamwe* militia as well as any other Rwandans who still do not subscribe to the RPF ideology). Mbavu (2003) reported that the daily average number of voluntary returnees did not exceed 20 individual refugees according to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). No wonder a mandatory repatriation policy was taken by the UNHCR in order to deal the precarious situation of refugees in Congolese camps.

Even so, the highly publicised killing of thousands of internally displaced persons (IDPs) at Kibeho camp in April 1995 by the RPF together with the 200,000 refugees reported by UNHRC to have disappeared in the Congolese forests during the so-called war of liberation conducted by AFDL-C, cast much

suspicion both on the new regime in Rwanda and that yet to be established in the Congo. In other similar scenarios, it was noticed that UNHRC camps were the first to be attacked and refugees (both Rwandan and Burundian), rather than returning to their respective countries, they preferred to take the risk of penetrating further into Congo's forests (and even other countries as far as Congo-Brazzaville, Gabon, Zambia) while the international community at large could only afford to call for a 'permanent corridor' in eastern Congo to facilitate the immediate repatriation of refugees in their countries of origin.

Such naivety and/or apathy displayed by the international community not to denounce and take appropriate action against violations and abuses of the international humanitarian law pertaining to the protection of refugees and IDPs, can best be understood either as notorious incompetence and incapacity, or as complicity of the first order from the international community closely networking with the regional aggressive states which were leading the war.

Mbavu (2003) pointed out that Rwanda and Uganda, and later on joined by Burundi, took advantage of the disintegration of the Congolese state and specially its armed forces, to create territorial spheres of interest within which they could plunder the Congo's riches. Refusing to serve the interest of his backers, Laurent-Désiré Kabila instead accused his Rwandan and Ugandan supporters of looting the country's riches at an exasperate rate and thus turned against them all. In July 1998, Kabila removed Commander James Kabarebe as Chief of the Staff of the Congolese army and late that very month, decided to send Commander Kabarebe and his comrades-in-arms back home to Rwanda (Nzogola-Ntalaja, 2002). This unavoidably led to war once again as Rwanda and Uganda troops crossed the border into

the Congo. This time around, the war was referred to among so many Congolese as that of occupation.

Nearly fourteen months after the unilateral swearing-in of Laurent Kabila as President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, his regime suffered from another insurrection, almost the same as the one that brought him to power in May 1997. The key players of this new rebellion remained the same and the rationale for war was not altered. Both Prunier (2009) and Reyntjens (2009) noted that this rebellion aimed to concretise the motives of the first one, the war of liberation. Both Kigali and Kampala soon discovered that Laurent Kabila was not the right choice for Kinshasa, as he seemed not to act in accordance with the interests of Washington, Kampala, and Kigali (and even Bujumbura).

On Sunday 02 August 1998 at 4pm, Mbavu (2003) noted, Sylvain Mbuki who was the Chief Commandant of the 10<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the Congolese Armed Forces (FAC) in North Kivu, read in Goma a special communiqué aired by the *Radio du Peuple* (previously called *Voix du Zaire*), informing the population that Mr. Laurent Desire Kabila was no longer President of the Democratic Republic of Congo. The newly created 'revolution' against to government of Laurent Kabila took the name of *Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie* (RCD) [Congolese Rally for Democracy], logistically backed up by Kigali and Kampala governments and initially supported financially by some great loyalists of the Mobutu regime such as the politician Kengo wa Dondo and Generals Baramoto and Nzimbi, following the renowned principle, "the enemies of my enemy are my friends!"

As it was for the first mutinous war (the war of 'liberation' in 1996-7), again the international community quickly sought for ways to bring this second war (RDC-led war in 1998-9) to

an end by all diplomatic means possible. First was the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC), a regional integration of which the DRC was and still is a member-state, which took interest in the Congolese war of aggression. Discussions concerning whether a military intervention or diplomatic ways ought to be sought, initially set SADC member-states apart. According to Mbavu (2003) successive summits to devise ways-forward for the Congolese crisis ended in adopting the diplomatic solution proposed by Zambian President Frédéric Chiluba, consisting in the signing of the Lusaka Agreement for Ceasefire among fighters.

It is no exaggeration to state that protagonists, most especially those behind the war (RCD and regional as well as international supporters) started to suffer from the counter-offensive of Kinshasa's allies (Angola, Zimbabwe and Namibia) while so much capital was being invested in the war. However, the long-awaited Lusaka Agreement posed serious challenges to all its presumed signatories (*Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie-Goma*, *Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie-Kisangani*, *Mouvement de Liberation du Congo- MLC* and the Kinshasa government).

For the in-charge of the Congolese government diplomacy, Mr. Abdulaye Yerodia Ndombasi, the withdrawal of foreign armed forces (from Rwanda and Uganda), which undermined Congolese territorial integrity and sovereignty, was to be effected soon after the signing off of the Lusaka Agreement for Ceasefire, whereas Mr. Bizima Kahara who by then was spokesperson of RCD-Goma, still emphasised that the setting-up of the Congolese national army has got to precede the withdrawal of foreign armed forces. Meanwhile, respect for the cease-fire in accordance with the Agreement demanded the interposition of military force under the counsel of the African Union (from the South African army) and the funding from the international

community, mostly the United Nations Security Council (Mbavu, 2003).

With much unfinished business and many loopholes, the Lusaka Agreement for Ceasefire was signed off on 31 August 1999 among all parties in conflict, tackling the instauration of the cease-fire and other pacifist dispositions. In fact, Mbavu (2003) reported plenty of accusations of violation of cease-fire by parties (as well as their communities) in conflict already on 16 September between RCD's Rwandan-backed forces and the *Forces Armées Congolaises* (FAC). Though the message of Susan Rice, the then US Under-Secretary of State for African Affairs, cautioned about the importance of the signed Lusaka Peace Accord to all its signatories, Mbavu (2003) rightly pointed out that things did not work out as expected; former UN Secretary-General Kofi Anan convinced the international community (especially the US government) of the necessity to deploy UN peacekeeping forces (500 observers and 5000 soldiers at first) in the DR Congo to enhance the signed Agreement.

The Congolese people (most especially communities living in eastern Congo) will remember that it was one thing to get the Lusaka Agreement drafted and signed, and quite another to make all its signatories abide by what was signed. In the end, all that followed the signing of the Lusaka Agreement for Ceasefire was sheer divisions among local communities and mass violence.

### **5.3. A regional armed conflict**

In an issue of *Regards Croisés* (Mars 2003), Jean-Pierre Kabirigi wrote that the region of Ituri (a district of the Oriental Province bordering Uganda) in 2001 could count about 4,605,403 persons clustered in twelve main ethnic groups namely the Alur, Hema, Lendu, Ngiti, Bira, Ndo-Okebo, Nyari,

Mambisa, Lugbwara, Kakwa, Logo, and Lese. The Lendu ethnic group alone constitutes half of the population of Ituri.

Nevertheless, the Hema and the Lendu remain the two most influential ethnic groups in that region. Human Right Watch, which has intensively researched and reported on the Ituri conflict in detail, estimated that the Hema and Lendu account for 40% of the population of Ituri. This district is one of eastern Democratic Republic of Congo's least stable and most conflict-affected areas.

Undeniably, the conflict in the Ituri area stems from a long standing conflict between two ethnic groups, the Hema and Lendu, over land and grazing rights. Anthropological studies have shown that the Hema belong to the Hamite ethnicity, and the Lendu are Bantu. The Hema are thus known as cattle-keepers and more politically organised compared to the Lendu who are agrarian with simplistic social structures. Relations between these two communities, however, were not always so strained. Both Hema and Lendu were relying on land holdings for grazing their cattle and for farming respectively.

The recent clash which began in 1999 is based partially on claims made by the Lendu that the Hema were attempting to expand their land holdings into Lendu territory using false documents (fake land titles) created with the help of some Hema officials, a charge that the Hema categorically deny.

Meanwhile, in combined circumstances, the province was partially occupied and militarily controlled by the Uganda People's Defense Force headed by Gen. James Kazini who created a new province out of Ituri and named a member from the Hema community as its governor (Kabirigi, 2003). This enraged the Lendu and caused a flare-up between the two groups; this



fighting was intensified by the Ugandan occupation. The town of Bunia alone, which is the second largest city of the province, swelled by displaced families, was thought to hold at least 300,000 people (Human Rights Watch 2000).

As early as October 1999, the UN estimates suggested that more than 100.000 people had been displaced with the death toll estimated to be between 5,000 and 7,000. The death toll has raised over the years, not only because of armed conflict, but also as a result of displacement, lack of food, the poor quality of available food and diseases. Nevertheless, although land tenure was originally at the heart of the Hema-Lendu conflict, it was not until the Ugandan and Rwandan armies became involved that the violence escalated to unprecedented levels. As Nzongola-Ntalaja (2002) points out, it is proven that the secessionist movements and cross-border invasions by neighbours, pursuing their own national interests, have been a greater threat to Africa's existing political map than ethnicity per se.

Analysing this regional armed conflict in South Kivu (another province in eastern Congo), Laurent Mihigo Nkundabatware (a notorious former Tutsi 'Congolese' militia leader) together with his companion fellow, Jules Mutebusi attacked Bukavu, the capital of South Kivu, in 2005 on claims that their actions were aimed at preventing an impending genocide of Tutsis known as Banyamulenge in this part of the Congo. However, most observers say these claims are groundless. Instead, the clashes between Nkundabatware's rebels, the Congolese government forces and other groups continued to foster ethnic tensions in eastern Congo, alongside widespread violence against women. In 2005, the UN estimated that some 45,000 women were raped in the South Kivu alone (Hochschild, 2009). This again bluntly shows the extent to which people belonging to parallel narratives may come to renounce any universal

dimensions of humanity and the good at the expense of long-standing antagonism originating from a history (stories) that excludes, injures and even obliterates 'those who do not belong.'

North Kivu is also another eastern Congo's province with a totally puzzling experience of violence. In January 2008, just two years after the first-ever democratic general elections which legitimised Joseph K. Kabila as the new President of the Congo, a peace conference (*Programme AMANI*) was held in the town of Goma, the North Kivu capital, and chaired by Apollinaire Malu Malu who by then was president of the Independent Electoral Commission. For a period of about one week all different existing political parties and militias in the eastern region, mainly both North and South Kivus gathered together to iron out their differences and then find a new way forward to a peaceful coexistence in the region. The conference ended with the signing off of the Goma Peace Act on 23 January 2008 by all the armed groups.

However, later in August of the same year, the *Congrès National pour la Défense du Peuple* (CNDP), a militia (and later on transformed into a political party) that was led by Laurent Mihigo Nkundabatware and Bosco Ntaganda, and which among all other groups signed the Act, unilaterally broke the ceasefire and launched an all-out offensive that provoked the displacement of more than 250,000 indigenous people (from various native ethnic communities) according to the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. It is said that it is apparently with President Kagame's blessing that a new offense of Tutsi rebels in the North Kivu threatened to capture the city of Goma by uprooting hundreds of thousands of civilians from their respective homes and villages (Rodriguez, 2009).

The *Mission d'Organisation des Nations Unies au Congo* (MONUC), despite being according to Rodriguez (2009), the largest UN peacekeeping mission in the world, has been unable or unwilling to protect the population, who have demonstrated angrily against it. Little wonder that one of its appointed commanders, Spanish General Diaz de Villegas, resigned from the post in a space of two weeks of the appointment. Other MONUC commanders have complained that their mandate and rule of engagement deny them any possibility to launch surprise attacks.

#### **5.4. Conclusion**

This chapter has attempted to explore conflict in the three eastern provinces of the Congo. In so doing, the study established the existing correlations between this conflict and the key interveners from the international community on the one hand, and the local communities on the other hand.

During this period of about one and half decade the country was entering its worst humanitarian crisis since independence in 1960. Over this period of time both regional and international interventions to end the Congolese conflict have only had very meager results; while this region requires serious political 'surgery' to heal its social tensions, temporary dressing bandages are always provided by the international community at large. On top of this pain-killer approach to pacification in this region, the systematic "blame-it-on-victims" game had only worsened an already bad situation. Mainly due to ethno-centric differences among communities, this zone of eastern DRC has been overwhelmed by people transformed into rapists, sadists, and merciless killers, disrupting the region's stable lifestyles by ensuring a culture of violence, thereby making of the region a notable theatre of humanitarian catastrophes of our time.

At the beginning of October 2008, DR Congo's Catholic bishops published a pastoral letter in which they launched a desperate appeal to the international community. This declaration was followed by another one on November 13, 2008, calling the situation in Kivu a 'silent genocide.' Going to the root of the problem, they added it is obvious that the natural resources of our country are feeding the greed of certain foreign powers, and this is not strange to the violence that is being imposed to our population (Rodriguez, 2009).

Besides, many ethnic groups (ethnical communities) in this region acknowledge suffering from constructed narratives born out of a covetous spirit from colonial powers to keep that notorious dependence relationship between the coloniser and the colonised, and manage conflict by the principle of 'divide and rule'. Even though some key warlords such as Laurent Mihigo Nkundabatware have now been silenced or removed from the scene, the region of eastern Congo is not short of armed men; neither have local communities (ethnic groups) stopped from adhering to dangerous parallel narratives, nor have their social memories healed. Due to the lack of comprehensive and sincere responses to this armed conflict from the international community, it is thus certain that conflict is far from over.

## **CHAPTER SIX: GENERAL SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY**

### **6.1. Introduction**

This study has attempted to analyse secondary data explaining the challenges facing pacification in the Great Lakes region of Africa, with an emphasis on eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. These challenges, in accordance with the study carried out, are broadly framed in community narratives and memories of people living in this region. This chapter will draw conclusions from discussions covered and recommendations will be made in a hope to contribute towards efforts already been made to mitigate or respond positively to the roadblocks to peaceful coexistence among communities of the Great Lakes region of Africa and more so in Eastern DR Congo.

### **6.2. General Conclusion**

This study has consisted of a library research that assigned to itself the purpose to establish the challenges of peaceful coexistence in the region of the Great Lakes of Africa, giving special mention to the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Because the inhabitants of the Great Lakes region of Africa, and eastern Congo in particular, do not originate from a spectrum of differences, but rather possess huge similarities (commonalities) in terms of beliefs, art, language, and institutions as well as similar geographical features, the study therefore was interested in establishing the very challenges that seriously undermine pacification in this region.

In a region with over 200 ethnicities and endowed with unimaginable natural resources, such diversity if not carefully comprehended, can definitely lead to grave human suffering. On top of these challenges, local communities

(ethnic groups) living in this region possess unhealed memories and dangerous narratives that are in themselves catalysts for conflict.

First, long-standing antagonism between certain ethnic groups in this region overlooks the grandeur of peaceful cohabitation. This antagonism is intertwined in issues of belongingness to a community story (core values of the in-group) and resources (most specifically land).

Second, European imperialism imported in this region has also exacerbated conflicted relationships among local communities vis-à-vis most valuable resources (land and social capital). Colonialism indeed remains a bitter legacy which loads heavy on people's memories and still negatively alters their narratives, considering narrative constructions made under the colonial rule. Divisions (class and labour) designed by colonialists, starting from community stories, through labour to adherence to social classes by ascription, constitute a basis for conflict escalation.

Third, the prolonged presence of the cunning Mobutu regime is considered to be another fuelling factor of conflict in the region. With the sheer lack of willingness from the post-colonial leaders to heal the bitter memories and poisoned narratives left behind by colonialists, the unresolved issues of belongingness (identity) and entitlement to resources (land) set the grassroots and their leadership poles apart.

Fourth, the last resort taken up by the Rwandan society to systematically exclude (by all means) those who do not belong to the 'in-group' (parallel narrative) led to an unbelievable bloodshed which drastically changed the socio-political map of the entire region. Further exclusion and intolerance (from the wounded past) came in as worsening an already bad situation.

Massive population influxes and displacements in eastern DR Congo further complicated the issue of people's identities and sense of belonging in this area. The recollection of unhealed memories and re-construction of venomous narratives rejuvenates antagonism in terms of a fight for recognition of narration on the one hand and that against victimisation on the other hand.

Fifth, the sheer lack of concerted (genuine) effort and/or the unexpected silence from the international community through its institutions such as the United Nations and the African Union to rise above the challenges facing its mandate, still pose another significant threat to peace in this region, more so in eastern Congo.

Sixth, and lastly, the strong political commitment of the Congo's neighbouring countries on the eastern borders (especially Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi) to undermine the Congo's territorial integrity for perpetual control over its huge natural resources, provides a new explanation as to the persistence of conflict in the region. As a vast wealthy country (a size of Western Europe) at the heart of Africa, bordering nine countries, the DR Congo tend to give to 'ethnic' warlords and their backers (especially from eastern borders) an additional incentive to fight.

### **6.3. Recommendations**

As Prunier noted, "man is largely a social construct, and to deny a man the social meaning of his death is to kill him twice, first in the flesh, then in the spirit" (Prunier, 1995, p.xvi). That is why the study proposed that to understand how conflict continues to persist in this region, and why so many have died, is actually the best possible memorial one can

raise for the victims, and perhaps the most fitting pathway to the restoration of peace.

In the previous chapters the study has attempted to explore the many challenges of pacification in the Great Lakes region of Africa, and most especially among ethnic communities living in eastern Congo. With the intention to subject to the academic scrutiny a new expansion on the body of knowledge, this research has sanctioned the following recommendations as suggestive ways-forward to peaceful coexistence in the region:

**a) The Inter-Rwandan Dialogue for Pacifist Repatriation**

The Great Lakes of Africa as a region is in dire need of a wholistic political 'surgery' for it to recover from all the past ills of wounded memories and poisoned narratives. Little wonder that the 'blame-it-on-victims' game and the 'pain-killer' approach to conflict mediation in this region will always hinder genuine conflict-transformation and peace-building in this region. This is the reason why the study suggests to the so-called international community that let there be the "Inter-Rwandan Dialogue for Pacifist Repatriation of Rwandan Refugees" under the auspices of the international community through its institutions of the United Nations Organisation (most especially the UN Higher Commissioner for Refugees) and the African Union (most especially the AU Peace and Security Council).

The rationale for this move is that repatriation, according to Turton (1996), still represents one of the most important solutions to the refugee problem. Besides, many peace scholars of the Great Lakes region will agree that Rwanda remains the epicentre of conflict. Since land, at least in the African understanding, is sacred and that everyone ought to live peacefully on the soil of their ancestors, it follows that Rwandan Hutu refugees in eastern Congo should return to the



land of their ancestors and in this regard Rwandan Tutsis in Rwanda ought to welcome their fellow citizens with no any other hidden agenda whatsoever. In this way, the Rwandan forces will have no reason to cross the Congolese border in search for those who otherwise constituted a threat to the Rwandan security and territorial integrity. In the same way, Congolese government forces and militias will be devoid of any motive for war.

**b) Stronger Political Commitment to Peace Arrangements and Fundamental Principles of Democracy**

There should be a much stronger political commitment from all the respective governments involved in the regional armed conflict, to respect for already signed peace arrangements in the region and an undoubted will to logistic support and holistic cooperation for peaceful coexistence among communities of the Great Lakes region of Africa. At home, every government of this region should realise the need to build a strong tyranny-free state that render power and service back to the grassroots, for democracy per se may not be good but the alternatives are always worse. For stability and peace to prevail in eastern Congo and the Great Lakes region at large, political leaders to a great extent should abide by the fundamental principles of democracy. What is most especially needed in this regard is that form of government in which the national sovereign power resides in the hands of and exercised by the whole body of citizens directly or indirectly, through a system of representation, including the formulation of laws and policies and their implementation, and where legal protection of their fundamental human rights and due process under the rule of law are profoundly guaranteed.

**c) The Pedagogy of Tolerance for Reconciliation and Peace  
among Ethnic Communities in Eastern Congo**

The Congolese civil society and many other non-state organisations working in this region should be charged with a new mandate, which is to pass onto local communities the message concerning the teaching of tolerance. Perhaps the biggest challenge of living together differently starts with the appreciation of difference as such, and then proceeds with the recognition plus celebration of otherness. Seligman (2006) wrote that toleration is not born out of dialogues in which people of different backgrounds (ethnic and/or religious) seek to find harmony by identifying their similarities (seeking common ground). Rather, as Seligman believes, people achieve tolerance by seeking the unfamiliar and the uncomfortable, then learning to live with it. Getting people to find their similarities remains an easy task. The hardest task and the most promising approach is in getting people to show their differences, then asking if they can still live and work together. Therefore, confronting and accepting uncomfortable differences between ethnic groups is the key to resolving problems and tensions between them.

On the other hand, whether in North Kivu, South Kivu or Oriental Province in eastern Congo, the Congolese nation and the Great Lakes region at large comprise a myriad of cultures whose customs and beliefs are heterogeneous in nature. It is, therefore, through a deeper comprehension of these cultural variations and dynamics that the case for stability and peaceful co-existence in eastern Congo and the Great Lakes region as whole, can be put within the realms of possibility. The risk of a narrowed and shallow understanding of differences in various cultures very often is the potential for what Haas (1988) calls "genocide ethic," seeing nothing humanly good in the people of the other ethnic group, and the

option left is to eliminate them. Given that no individual can properly grow if their culture is tampered with, therefore, respect and promotion of other people's cultures is not an option but indeed a moral obligation.

**d) The Inter-Faith Message of Peace in the Great Lakes of Africa**

For the sake of harmony in the Great Lakes region of Africa, there is urgent need for an interfaith message of peace. With all that has taken place among communities in this region over time, religious leaders still have a considerable esteem and trust from people as compared to all other leaders. In the context of the Great Lakes region of Africa, and eastern Congo in particular, religion remains one of the strongest social identity to whom people of different ethnic backgrounds adhere. That is why religion as a tool for peace-building is a unique opportunity that communities should not afford to trade-off and not using it to promote peaceful coexistence is the greatest incalculable risk. Religious leaders are thus called upon to present their messages for a better future to the broken hearted.

Being a highly Christianised region, the Christian Church in a very special way has a crucial role to play in the search for peace among these communities of the Great Lakes region. The message expected of the Church is that of conciliation which will enable people around the region to rise above ethnic/religious and self-interest. This is the ability to see the humanity of others and to recognize humanity for what it really is. Equally expected of the Christian Church is the message of hope. This kind of hope is what Freire (1992) refers to as an ontological need, a reflection of the not-yet but what ought to be got, through practical action. Such a hope widens people's horizons by accepting to dialogue with

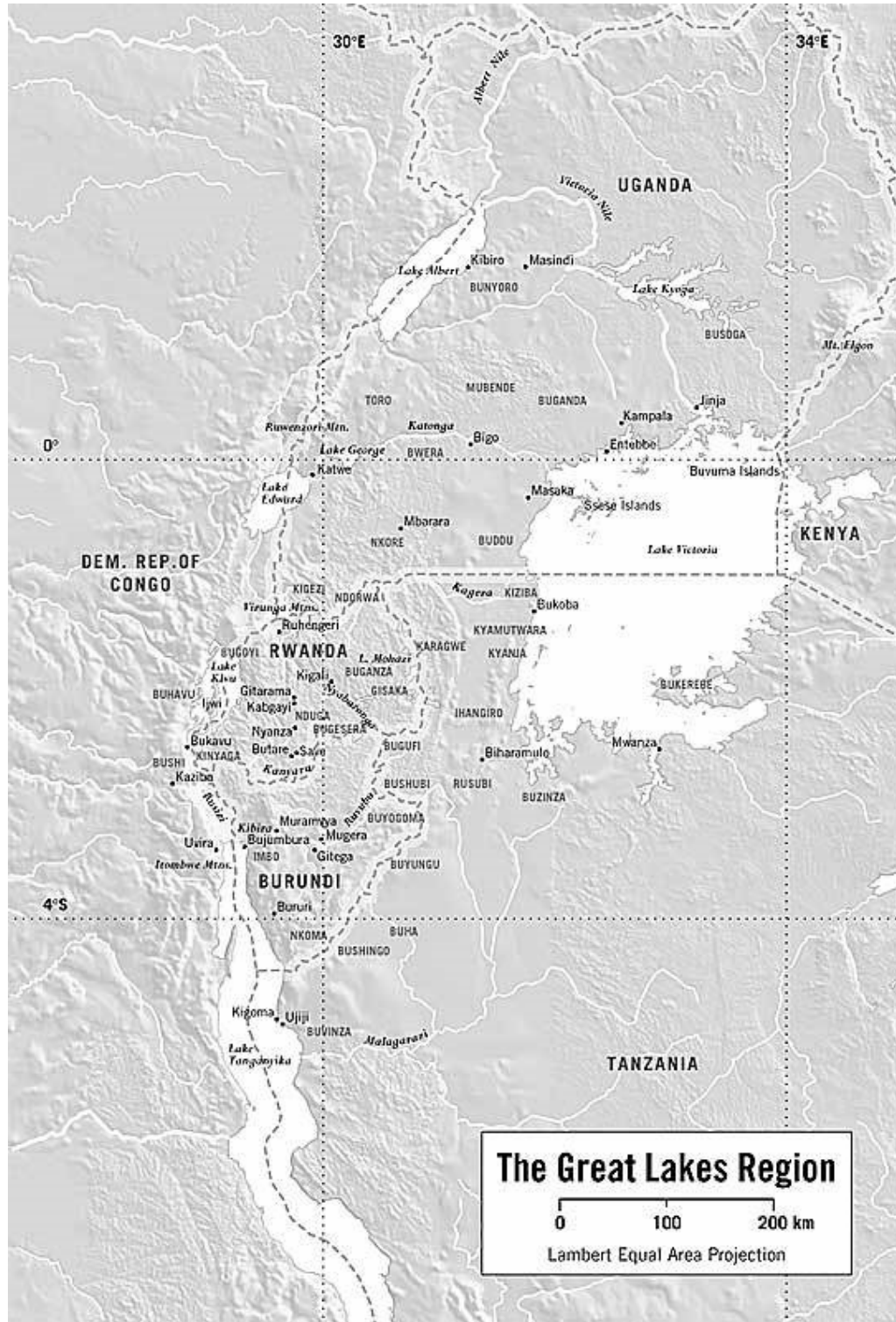
diverse histories, memories and experiences, views and beliefs.

Indeed, in order for religion to effectively and proactively respond to the lifestyle challenges of peaceful coexistence there is great need for it to overcome its own challenges of division, indifference, and lack of a comprehensive as well as coordinated response to the ills of society. As pointed by Curle (1990), these ills (which are mainly ignorance, hatred, and greed) have to be countered by proper knowledge of the other, mutual respect, and a novel attitude of sharing. Ultimately, the Church along with the Nation has to interiorize the grandeur of humanity as designed in accordance with God's will: a panoply of human beings who, in their essence, are of equal dignity, and therefore not to struggle for power and wealth at the expense of life.

#### **6.4. Suggestions for further research**

This study suggests that more research be carried on conflict-transformation and reconciliation with special mention to the history and dynamics of the Great Lakes region of Africa. Equally needful, further research on the psychosocial needs of ethnic communities formerly torn-up by armed conflict and human rights abuses, should be undertaken to establish conditions for peace and justice in this region.

Appendix: Map of the Great Lakes Region of Africa



Retrieved on <http://www.anandaroproy.com/images/slide/image/47/large/0212-Grand-Lacs-Overall.jpg>

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