

# **Cross-border dynamics and the role of intermediaries in the political economy of DRC.**

**Giulia Ferrato**

[giulia.ferrato@gmail.com](mailto:giulia.ferrato@gmail.com)

**University of Naples “L’Orientale”**

## Introduction

Cross-border dynamics has been recently emphasized, with recognition of the importance of African border zones as sites of wealth production and accumulation, and identity formation of increasing relevance. Scholars have recognized the importance of re-conceptualising borders and national identity as part of a multi-dimensional and more contextualized framework of analysis (Asiwaju, 1986; Nugent and Asiwaju, 1996; Igue, 1982, Bøas, 2003). At the same time, others have pointed out that borders should be considered as transition areas, closely connected to their hinterlands, rather than a clear-cut dividing line defined by geography alone.

The starting point of the analysis is based upon the notion that regions are not natural or given. Regions are in a process of constant redefinition, continuously constructed, de-constructed and reconstructed through political technology, circuits of economic exchange and social practices by a variety of actors which are permanently crossing boundaries or living on borders. Furthermore, Niemann has highlighted that it must be recognized that “the existence of regions is always preceded by the existence of region-builders”<sup>1</sup>, in whatever form they would take.

The panel’s theme suggests that regions exist at different spatial levels; nevertheless, if we want to attempt to understand how territorial reconfigurations do influence and interact with local communities and local actors, it will be important to focus on the emergence of micro-regions. Let us consider the following questions as a point of departure. Which actors have emerged during the nineties around eastern borders of the Democratic Republic of Congo? What are their activities? How do they relate to national authority as well as to local society? Could these territorial transformations be perceived as attempts to redefine the state relationship and simultaneously to reorganize the productive and “usable” spaces? In this context, what is the meaning attached to the concept of sovereignty? Finally, how do these transformations impact on social relationships? In attempting to develop these points, the first part of the paper will briefly sketch the history of Kivu, focusing on the development of cross-border practices and the consequent growth of unregulated markets (e.g. informal sectors).

“Historically speaking, micro-regions have primarily existed within a particular state (i.e., sub-national micro-regions). However, in the post-Cold War era and in the context of globalization and regionalization, micro-regions are increasingly becoming cross-borders rather than being contained within a nation state”<sup>2</sup>.

Micro-regions, thus, are largely transforming themselves into a hub where local, regional, national, trans-national and global dynamics interplay simultaneously, reconfiguring the territory, producing new forms of economic and social interactions or, purely, reassembling the old into new patterns.

Furthermore, during the nineties, cross border regions have changed shape several times, depending on the outbreak of wars, but also on the kind of economic relations and social practices that were herein displayed.

It should be pointed out that these areas emerged more and more as the centre, where hegemonic relations were about to happen, where state and non-state actors competed or cooperated for the monopoly of regulatory bodies. A central place wherein these non state actors – for example small scale merchants and trans-national

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<sup>1</sup> Niemann, M., *Globalization and Regionalization from a Spatial Perspective*, Space and Polity 2, no 2, 1998, p. 115.

<sup>2</sup> Grant, A., Söderbaum, F., (ed.), *The New Regionalism in Africa*, ASHGATE, 2003, p. 6.

traders, smugglers, warlords – demonstrate their agency and attempt to assert their authority over spaces and peoples. At the same time, however, for the great majority of the local population, borders remained often as those lines which demarcated their social exclusion, their political insignificance and revealed their physical insecurity. In other words, these spaces generate a paradox: borders are an important source of political, economic and social mobility for those who have both the ability and potential to exploit the opportunities offered; but on the other hand, borders may represent binding places, where social mobility is constrained arbitrarily by the most powerful actors.

Furthermore, borders are also centres of economic activities of different kinds; under the influence of these territorial transformations, new forms of trade have arisen. Commercial networks using international capital started to inter-link increasingly with the informal local circuits of exchange, producing a variety of commodity chains (e.g., consumption, raw and luxury goods, licit and illicit, imported and locally manufactured) and the coexistence of markets at different levels (e.g. local, domestic, regional, international). This paper will attempt to understand how, during the nineties, informal regionalisation and cross-border practices with an increasing number of new non-state actors have contributed to reconfigure power relations and redefine the relationship between state and territory in Kivu.

From this perspective, cross-border practices could be seen as crucial to understand what actually happens around borders and to what extent these combined factors can affect the social and economic space of a country, where the spread of insecurity and violence has become a common feature for a significant time.

From another point of view, looking at informal regionalization as an ongoing process rather than a result, one should also consider the various ways in which different conceptions of territory have been assumed by local actors as well as the population and whether or not they may in some way induce a change in regional and national identities.

The second part of this paper is devoted to explore the dynamics of those actors, which are contributing to forge, as Ian Taylor has argued, an informal “regionalisation that may not be recognizable at first glance, but is surely as “real” in the DRC as any formal regionalism”, investigating, in particular, the role of intermediaries. A topic that is therefore problematic due to issues of subjectivity.

In the pages that follow, attempts will be made to discuss who the intermediaries are, the kind of aims they intend to achieve; whether they are emerging as relevant non-state actors at present time, or rather whether they have established, in some way, a continuity from the past through the rearrangement of traditional patterns of social and cultural relations.

In this regard, a brief historical report of the intermediation will be traced, which could be perceived as a factoring an on-going dialectical tension between social and economic capital.

## Border permeability and population

Since independence, the political instability, the establishment of patron-client networks within the state - with the consequential co-existence of bureaucratic and personal rules (Brown, 2003) - and the persistence of a state of political transition vis-à-vis the declaration of a state of emergency and the reproduction of conflicts seems to have led the Democratic Republic of Congo to an on-going process of territorial fragmentation, intensified by the degeneration of any kind of infrastructures, particularly transports<sup>3</sup>. Nevertheless, it was only after the process of state deregulation, occurred during the eighties, and under the effects of the structural adjustment programmes, that such territorial re-configuration became evident, intensified by the complete erosion of the state's capacity to control its own territories as to ensure any form of security to the population. The country has, thus, progressively got an archipelago dimension, with an increasing fluidity of international borders and, at the same time, a multiplication of the internal borders, which did not correspond any longer to previously existing national lines.

These processes have particularly affected the eastern parts of the country, such as the two Kivus, which were both apart and thus quite far from the influences of the state and of any other national authority. Thus, entire regions and micro-regions remained isolated from each other and marginal to the rest of the country.

On another hand, they started to interface with a complex of trans-state and trans-regional informal networks. As Daniel Bach suggested, the latter “drew their strength and weakness from their correlation with patterns of de-territorialisation and de-institutionalisation”<sup>4</sup> and contributed to the emergence of “hybrid configurations” in a precarious balance between integration and disintegration, between inclusion and exclusion. A process, thus, of informal regionalization which took into account configuration, where beside the state - that was no longer the only key player - frequently a variety of non-state actors were about to emerge. Migrants and refugees flows; formal and not formal, legal and illegal trans-border commercial networks, smuggling, all of these phenomena seems to bring about the definition of Kivu's cross-border dynamics.

The re-configuration of increasingly permeable micro-regions, which is emerging all over the world, is a contemporary phenomenon. It has to be noted that in Kivu geographic, political and economic reasons give evidence that this process of promotion of alternative cross-border spaces is deeply historically rooted. Migrant flows, spontaneous or induced, and economic intermediation value chains are continuously present. But, during the nineties, in a framework of globalization and of neo-liberalism, they become massive phenomena so deeply unstructured to build-up an “informal regionalization through patterns of interaction which challenge state territorial control through the pervasive influence of trans-state networks”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Since the sixties from the eighties, Congo transport infrastructure decreased from 88,000 miles to 12,000, which only 1,400 miles were asphalted. B. Davidson, *The Black Man Burden, Africa and the curse of Nation-State*, James Currey, Oxford, 1992, p. 257.

<sup>4</sup>D., Bach, *New regionalism as an alias: regionalization through trans-state networks*, In Grant, A. and Söderbaum, F., *The New Regionalism in Africa*, p. 22.

<sup>5</sup>D., Bach, *Ibidem.*, p. 23.

Cross-border practices could be perceived as one of the factors that have originated the borders porosity that have assured and maintained over the centuries both escape and trading routes, and have guaranteed an identity resource reservoir.

In the 1920s Kivu experienced a deep change because of the diffusion of the highly labour intensive coffee cultivation. It was one of the reasons why, on August 21, 1925, the Belgian colony took the Rwanda-Urundi under trusted administration. An enlarged economic and human resource basin was created. In 1928 the Kivu National Committee dealt with an important territorial reconfiguration. The political organisation of immigration zones was planned. Local population territories were significantly reduced.

On one hand this unification reflected a social and cultural homogeneity that was already present in pre-colonial time. On the other hand, M.I.B. (*Mission d'immigration des Banyarwanda*) was forced to move. This induced an additional migration flow, beside the physiological one.

Tutsi and Hutu farmers forced immigration lasted from 1930<sup>6</sup> to 1956: in 1937 more than 20 thousand Banyarwanda were installed in the Masisi<sup>7</sup>; others were placed in the fields of the northern, southern and central Kivu region. The peak of the transfer flow was recorder in 1949. As of 1956, colonial authorities had transferred from Rwanda 80, 000 Hutu farmers. The real figure is much higher. Between 1945 and 1969 a large number of Rwanda farmers had crossed the borders, looking for new land and because of periodical famines.

Before the independence a new kind of settlement took place: that of the first Rwanda refugees (Tutsi) running away from the social revolution. Starting 1959 (1961, 1973, 1990), the Rwandan originated population became the majority in Masisi (70,6%), followed by the one in Rutshuru (24,4%), Goma (23,7%) and Walikale (2,4%)<sup>8</sup>.

Part of the refugees were easily integrated in the original, rather wealthy, Rwanda people colony. They contributed with small capitals, in form of feedstock, money, commercial and cultural experiences. These capitals allowed a smooth settlement that did not put pressure on the modest regional economy, but helped an economic evolution.

In 1973-1994, a new exodus toward the Kivu<sup>9</sup> took place. This time with some friction. According to Pourtier (1996) and other scholars, the real population density at

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<sup>6</sup> In 1930, of 350.000 *homes adultes valides*, which were registered in Rwanda-Burundi, 7.000 were living in Congo and 4.000 in Katanga.

<sup>7</sup> In colonial times, 300.000 people have been forcibly resettled or moved to Kivu on the whole, some of them pushed by repeated food crisis taking place in Rwanda. In 1937, Hunde chiefs were forced by Belgian settlers to surrender to incoming Rwandans the lands of Gishari and Masisi regions, scarcely populated areas endowed with flourishing forests. In the 40s, Belgian authorities allowed the creation of an autonomous chefferie. This notwithstanding, when Rwandans attempted to enlarge their territory five years later, a strong reaction of traditional chiefs ensued, to the point that, in 1957, the colonial authorities suppressed Gishari chefferie, bringing back Hunde chiefs to rule the region. Immigrants stayed there provided their allegiance to traditional chiefs. Cfr. P. Mathieu & A. Mafikiri Tsongo, *Guerres Paysannes au Nord-Kivu (République Démocratique du Congo), 1937-1994*, Cahiers d'études africaines, 1998, pp. 385-416

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 389.

<sup>9</sup> During the 40s Kivu population had quickly increased. At the beginning of 40s, Masisi - and the entire North Kivu - was less populated: in Masisi population density was around 12 hab/km<sup>2</sup>, while in Bwito and Bwisha, which were the most populated zones, was around 25 hab/km<sup>2</sup>. In the '70s, density was 62 hab/km<sup>2</sup>

the beginning of the years 1990 was in the order of 300 p/km<sup>2</sup> and this demographic pressure was a highly critical factor of social conflict.

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in Masisi and 103 hab/km<sup>2</sup> in Rutshuru. In 1990, population density in relation of arable land was 108 hab/km<sup>2</sup> in the entire Kivu mountains ( game riserve and forests), and of 111 hab/km<sup>2</sup> for Masisi alone. Nevertheless it must be considered that a great part of these territories was assigned for intensive cattle breeding, which increased speedily during these years. Cfr. *Ibidem*.

## Border permeability and trading networks.

During the XX century, the Great Lakes region as a whole experienced a significant economic growth, favoured and fed by its elliptical position relative to the central government, by the delay with which it was interested by the insurrectional movement of the Sixties<sup>10</sup> and by its peculiarity of being a border country. Starting 1925, in conformity with the economic policy of the colonial administration, which tended to favour the large company monopolies, small commercial activities survived at the margins of the large distribution, at the margins of the colonial system. There were not many small indigenous traders, but almost all of them, trading agricultural goods and always seeking liquidity, did their best to exploit custom tariffs disparities at the borders of the colony<sup>11</sup>. Smuggling allowed to overcome some strictly enforced rules, defined by the central colonial administration, limiting people and goods circulation. However, autonomous commercial activities managed by Congolese were put in place. It happened where social links - ethnic sometimes, sometimes family based or consequence of acquaintances or neighbourhood relationships- could be re-activated once they had been broken by colonial reconfiguration, which had imposed a new ethnic order, territorially based, coherent with the national border. "At the beginning of the Second World War, the Congolese economy was deeply troubled: the war had brought evidence that the clan based African economy was able to provide at a competitive price, resources never thought of; for the first time agricultural credits were allocated to African cooperatives for production and sales"<sup>12</sup>. In this period across border smuggling played an important role because it could guarantee the capital needed in the start-up of new activities and to find money to be invested in the agro-food sector. The non-equivalence among market spaces and exchanged products became, one step at a time, the mechanism which allowed the surplus creation.

Since the Fifties, "official regulatory rules and commercial rules where not enforced and in some areas (Kivu) custom controls almost did not exist. Internal and across borders commercial networks dealing with smuggled goods proliferated rapidly.

These circuits, out of state control, became increasingly competitive relative to market mechanisms, induced a growth in manufacturing prices"<sup>13</sup>, and were deeply connected with official national and international circuits.

"Border cities like Aru (Congo-Sudan) and Kasindi<sup>14</sup> (Uganda) became renowned centres of commerce where agricultural and ore products - gold and diamonds - originated in the Kivu northern territories and from the Eastern province, where exchanged with household and luxury goods, coming from far away places"<sup>15</sup>.

In the general population perception, illegal across border exchanges did not have neither a negative connotation, nor a criminal one. Congolese considered smuggling a form of adaptation. Sometimes it was considered a form of resistance. "Africans do not see anything wrong with smuggling. It is a perfectly legal form of economy, that

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<sup>10</sup> Coquery-Vidrovitch et al., *Rébellions-Révolution au Zaïre, 1963-1965*, L'Harmattan, Paris, 1987.

<sup>11</sup> D. Bach, (sous la direction de), *Régionalisation, mondialisation et fragmentation en Afrique subsaharienne*, cit., p. 21.

<sup>12</sup> B. Jewsiewicki, *Le colonat agricole européen au Congo-Belge, 1910-1960 : question politiques et économiques*, In *Journal of African History*, n. 20, 1979, p.568.

<sup>13</sup> J. MacGaffey et al., *The real economy of Zaïre. The contribution of smuggling and other unofficial activities to National Wealth*, cit., p. 117.

<sup>14</sup> Kasindi is the second more important duty in the Congo. For example, in 1965, 81% of the official diamond production was illegally exported from Kasindi.

<sup>15</sup> M. Vwakyankazi, *Import and export in the second economy in Nord Kivu*, in *Ibidem*, p. 53.

bypasses the regulatory authority, which is perceived as an interference created by the bourgeois state (...) It is, relative to the artificial official boundaries, a form of social solidarity... a viable strategy with the goal of preserving commercial ties that are otherwise menaced”<sup>16</sup>.

The dynamic exchanges of intermediaries and traders became “socially important activities”, up to the point to receive the local communities support. Nande’s smuggling organisations, for example, allowed local population to cope with their difficult economic condition. Not only did they guarantee a minimum income, of vital importance for those that were ejected by the manufacturing sector, but offered to those placed at medium-high levels of the economy interesting investment possibilities. One could reinvest in illegal activities, which high risk was a guarantee of high returns, but it was also possible to invest on legal activities (cattle and transports), creating de facto, an osmosis and synergies between the two economic spheres.

During the “Zaireanisation process, Nande in North Kivu exploited more and more their political marginalisation, which was turned into autonomy in the economic sphere. With the returns coming from the heavy coffee smuggling<sup>17</sup>, they were able to put in place their own distribution system through a network of kin and ethnic ties. As Janet Mac Gaffey pointed out, they “made up a trade diaspora: an interrelated net of commercial communities forming a trade network (Curtin 1984:2)”<sup>18</sup>. By 1979 the Nande had a near monopoly in the shipping of vegetables by road from Kivu to Kisangani and they were the principal shippers of beans down river to Kinshasa”<sup>19</sup>. Thanks to these trades, the community starts to hold important positions also outside the North Kivu. This dynamic, later on (1998), induced the definition of Nande “strong men”.

During the nineties, following the lost of the control of the territory by the neo-patrimonial Mobutu state, the monetary crisis, a sort of territory control could be assured only through the interaction of non-state actors with the various trade networks, that continued to proliferate in the war context. Small traders found themselves, together with trans-national ones and mediators, to cross boundaries under military control by local warlords. A progressive and profound military control of the informal economy took place. Check points, informal customs defining new internal boundaries, areas of hegemony continually changing ownership characterised this dynamic. As Boas pointed out “regional and trans-national networks are in general exchange relationships between unequals across time and spaces. Access to participation in these networks is thereby highly uneven, extremely competitive and may lead to violent conflict when the competition takes place within the context of high degrees of state fragmentation”<sup>20</sup>.

On the road from Kisangani to Kasindi. Raeymaekers remembers: “regularly one could see young bikers riding reinforced chinese or wood framed bikes, carrying more than 250 kilograms of palm oil from the interior to the main good markets of Beni, Butembo and Lubero. Quite often it is a ride that takes more than four weeks. The

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<sup>16</sup> G. Prunier, *Le Magendo: essai sur quelques aspects marginaux des échanges commerciaux en Afrique Orientale*, In *Politique Africaine*, n. 9, 1983, p. 53.

<sup>17</sup>As Nande accumulated capital, they invested in trucks sometimes imported from East africa in exchange for coffee or gold. J. Mac Gaffey, *The real economy of Zaire. The contribution of smuggling and other unofficial activities to National Wealth*, cit., p. 147.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibidem*, p. 148

<sup>19</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>20</sup> M. Boas, *Weak states, strong regimes: towards a Real political economy of African Regionalization*, In Grant, A., Söderbaum, F., (ed.), *The New Regionalism in Africa*, cit, p. 36.



most courageous fill with gold and diamond the pipes of their bike's frame to avoid road check points and rebels set-up barriers"<sup>21</sup>.

In this even more fragmented context, a new territory configuration can be seen. It is defined by the interaction between the rebels authority and merchant elite. In the middle of these complex relationships one can find structures that can be named intermediary chains. Chains made out of the trajectories that do carry single products from the micro-regions to the international context, being hubs of the trans-national trading spaces.

In the coltan case, the intermediation chain action is such to assure, following a number of steps, the passage of the product from the mining zones to the international market: the digger, after one week of work, waits for an intermediary who will carry the mineral to town where a *comptoir* will find another intermediary, operating at a higher level, who will transport, using his own means, the product out of the national borders, in Rwanda. Once there the intermediary chain will break-up, interrelating and hiding within the trading circuits of the international market.

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<sup>21</sup> T. Raeymaekers, *Su contadini e uomini d'affari: l'economia reale del "Grande Nord"*, in "Afriche e Orienti", n. 1-2/2004, p. 83.

## Border Permeability and Intermediation.

Literally, “intermediary” refers to a person who helps other people or organizations to make an agreement or a deal by being a means of communication between them. It also can refer to a person who has the possibility to create interconnections between two different spaces, subjects and places, between different social and political levels, and between different market spheres.

In contemporary Kivu, intermediaries are neither part of a homogenous social or economic group, nor do they have a fixed identity. To understand the making and remaking of intermediaries role, the following question should be answered: has this job developed from the Congolese informal labour market as a new professional figure or rather has it arisen quite recently as a remunerative activity performed from time to time by a variety of economic actors on a temporary basis in order to achieve an extra income, a surplus, to accumulate wealth?

Historically speaking, the role of intermediaries has been played by very different non-state actors: petty traders, the so called *bagingi* (youth without land)<sup>22</sup>, generic urban unemployed or self-employed in service sector (taxi-driver)<sup>23</sup>. Moreover, with the outbreak of the two wars in the nineties, intermediation became more functional and remunerative around border areas, where trans-regional and trans-national commodity flows needed to be ensured anyway. Other more powerful non-state actors (high level intermediaries and traders linked with trans-national or international markets) started to exploit this activity to accumulate wealth.

In the last century, intermediation has probably arisen not only as an important social and economic practice, but also as a fundamental source of social mobility and of labour and entrepreneurial behaviour.

Its progressive diffusion, starting with the year 1970/1980s, is partially caused by the specificity of the social stratification and partially by the growing importance of the informal economic system.

According to Bayart, the structure of the post-colonial African society is characterised by the presence of three dimensional networks, more than a division based on clearly defined social classes. At the peak of these networks there is the predominant presence of Bigmen who, in Congo, are nicknamed “*Grosse Legume*” (lit. *Big Legume*) or “*Acquereurs*” (*buyers*). At their bases many small boys are very active. Their interrelation is made possible thanks to the never ending circulation of men and women all over the network meshes. They could have a social vector function: it was quite common in Congo that an intermediary, during family or club parties, would invite a “*Grosse Legume*” to sit at a table of ordinary people. The intermediary would, doing this, induce a number of mutual advantages: the invited person obtains consensus and the possibility to expand his sphere of influence; the host may find an interesting deal and will increase his prestige in the local community.

From another stand point, the continuous economic crisis, the setting-up of a highly asymmetric resources re-distribution system, the institutionalisation of the *se-débrouiller*

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<sup>22</sup> The land law reforms called Bakajika (‘67, ’72), pauperization of farmers and a serious intergeneration crisis led to the emergence of youth without land, as a new social groups the so called *bagingi*.

<sup>23</sup> During the eighties, in a context of economic crisis and deregulation, was very common that peoples used their own cars to get a job in order to survive.

practice (fend for yourself), are all reasons that pushed the majority of the Congolese population to refer, in order to survive, to the informal sphere of the economy<sup>24</sup>.

“According to African Business (February 1998), if the informal sector is included, the size of DRC’s economy increases three-fold. Likewise, at least 10 million out of 28 million”<sup>25</sup>. This phenomenon finds its reflection in the salaried job market, making it totally vain. Even labour as such, has changed. It became more and more casual, up to the point that Mbembe has made the hypothesis that “in the first part of this century the African workforce, employed in regularly compensated activities, could vanish”<sup>26</sup>. On the same issue, Janet Mac Gaffey underscores that: “in the mid 1980s, on average, only 25% of a family income derive from the salaries of its members. 29% is generated by do-it-yourself activities, or from undeclared activities. 44% came from donations”<sup>27</sup>.

Salaried working roles, became increasingly less correlated to specific abilities, given the fact that the choice of the worker was always based on cooptation.

The intermediary in public institutions quite often was filling the space opened-up by inefficiency.

In the workings of the administration, therefore, one can see a sort of interstitial privatisation<sup>28</sup> of the public services where informal intermediaries play the role of secretaries or have goods controlling roles in local markets or in the custom service, cashing-in, at least partially, the due amounts.

In this regime of “interstitial privatisation” of the civil services, the presence of adjunct agents is recognised - even if outside official organisational charts - with the official deposit of 10 percent of the cashed-in pre-bends, given their role of intelligence/guides/facilitators. Behind these semi-formal actors, in every public office hall one can find a number of different non salaried intermediaries that can help in the fast resolution of bureaucratic procedures.

In contemporary society, the nature of Congolese intermediaries, be it economic, political, social or cultural, has been left by the regulatory authority without a clear definition. Quite often it became invisible, impossible to register. This characteristic is partially reflected by the general public perception, where the intermediary is considered an autonomous activity in a social context where salaried jobs are not sufficient; a role difficult to frame except in special cases like customs, ports, hospitals, bureaucracy.

Furthermore, as the history of Congo demonstrates, intermediaries started to play a role in the so called “real economy” (e.g. unregulated markets) at very different levels. When laws of liberalisation of the mining sector (1982 and 1983) were promulgated, many left their villages to enter a network of informal activities, exchanges and transactions (small businesses, gold miners, diamond traffickers).

In the same years, in Kivu, the missing “citizenship” issue pushed the Rwandese speaking populations towards more or less legal commercial circuits. The

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<sup>24</sup> “There is still no doubt that the increasingly divergine tariff, fiscal and monetary policies that emerged where huges numbers of African state began to experience severe financial difficulties in the aftermath of the oil shock in 1973 facilitated a swich to informal economies. (Bach, 1999).

<sup>25</sup> M., Boas, *Weak states, strong regimes: towards a Real political economy of African Regionalization*, In Grant, A., Söderbaum, F., (ed.), *The New Regionalism in Africa*, cit, p. 44.

<sup>26</sup> A. Mbembe, *Postcolonialismo*, Meltemi, Roma, 2005, p. 76.

<sup>27</sup> J. Mac Gaffey, *The real economy of Zaire. The contribution of smuggling and other unofficial activities to National Wealth*, cit., p. 14

<sup>28</sup> G. Blundo, J.P. Olivier de Sardan,, *La Corruption au quotidien*, Politique Africaine,n. 83, october 2001, p. 6-114.

Banyarwanda<sup>29</sup>, exploiting their links with the country of origin, intensified all along the border the illegal exchange of heterogeneous goods all coming from Zaire: gold, protected animals - i.e. the gorilla of the Virunga park - and drugs.

Slowly, a multiplicity of income possibilities were allocated in the borders' proximity. This helped the definition of intermediation chains that could cross local markets, touch the regional ones and, going beyond the boundaries, assume a trans-border, trans-national and global dimension. Chains that reshaped the context and modified the spaces.

At the starting point, the intermediation chain offered few profit. The more one went up, the more possible revenues level increased. At the end of the chain, wealth accumulation was correlated with the ability to interact with the top ranking market players.

As mentioned above, the Coltan case, helps to understand the dynamic.

“A large number of workers crushes, washes, selects the raw metal. A small number of laboratories evaluate its purity and defines the value, therefore the price for the intermediaries at the previous levels. The coltan, shipped in barrels, was exported to the final markets of London, Bruxelles, Amsterdam. Sometimes, the coltan deals were closed over the Internet, ensuring higher gains to the high level intermediaries”<sup>30</sup>.

Being members of an ethnic group could, on one hand, facilitate the intermediation, but it could also make them more difficult. For example, in the years of the coltan boom (2000), intermediaries around Bukavu, member of the Bashi ethnic group, were considered by the Congolese, so much proxy, culturally and linguistically, to the Rwandese that the commercial exchanges were penalised. Local population felt that they were robbed and feared the Rwandese activities. On the contrary, the intermediation with trans-border Rwandese network was facilitated and simplified.

Being member of both worlds, was a positive factor for Violette<sup>31</sup>, because this high level intermediary, having a Rwandese mother and a Congolese father, had an easy access to both communities. Because of that she could guarantee the coltan air transportation from North Kivu (Walikale) to South Kivu (Bukavu). She was able to collect among parents and friends the capital to be invested in coltan, that she purchased on the Walikale market. It was the place where even the diggers went or, more frequently, other small local intermediaries. She then sold it on the Bukavu market, doing her best to obtain a significant profit”.

At the end of the coltan boom (around year 2000), she too had to cope with the prices defined by the Rwandese intermediaries who managed the Walikale *comptoirs*, and afterwards shipped it to Rwanda where it was piled up in warehouses of governmental property.

These Walikale operators did also control the whole informal coltan trade chain in Kivu and where the last element of the intermediary chain. After them, the trade of the

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<sup>29</sup> Reyntjens pointed out that the rediscovery of shared la riscoperta di matrici comuni smoothed out the differences between the more recent expatriate communities and borders with Rwanda even more permeable. At the point that, at the beginning of 90's, the *Rwandan Patriotic Front* military campaign against Habyarimana government, organized to support the return of expatriated tutsi, was financed by american and canadian diaspora, but also by the community settled in Kivu, with roughly 2,000 dollars. F., Reyntjens, *L'Afrique des Grand Lacs, Annuaire 1998-1999*, Centre d'étude de la région des Grands Lacs, Anvers, L'Harmattan, Paris, 1999.

<sup>30</sup> S. Jackson, *Making a killing: criminality & coping in the Kivu War Economy*, Review of African Political Economy, n. 93/94, 2002, p. 516-534.

<sup>31</sup> Jackson S., *Making a killing: criminality & coping in the Kivu War Economy*, Review of African Political Economy, n. 93/94, 2002, p. 524.

mineral was responsibility of SOMIGL (Mining Society of the Great Lakes) and was done in a formal economic sphere.

The two Wars (1996 and 1998) have changed the nature of borders and cross-border dynamics. As mentioned before, the unregulated market peculiarity was their increasing militarization.

The fact of the matter is that if at early stages, the Kivu resources were used only to feed the Congolese wars cost, afterwards they have changed the war objectives giving them a economic character. War induced profits were so high to feed continuously the conflict which, for the fighter, was a income opportunity. The conflicting parties used violence to ensure themselves the access to the ores or to grab opponents' stocks. At the same time, unexpected commercial alliances, always with a gain, were striken among opponents, even if, officially, they were fighting each other.

Both Kivu regions experienced braking-up and reconfiguration dynamics because of the actions of the conflicting parties and of the warlords. State borders became more and more fluid towards Rwanda, in the South and towards Uganda, in the North as a function of both the various trans-border networks, and the sphere of interest of the different conflicting parties.

It is true that the incredible diffusion of low intensity conflicts is in essence a way of trying to re-define the relationship with the State. But it is rather rare that this re-definition has induced an institutional redesign of the colonial borders, of the territorial frameworks, of the trans-border relations topology and the regulation of the access to existing resources.

Wars and changed cross-border dynamics re-shaped the two Kivu regions, fragmenting them into areas that behaved as micro-regions. They contributed to the definition of a new informal regionalization. Congo adopted progressively an archipelago configuration<sup>32</sup>. Regions became islands without any link among each other. The State concentrated only on the "utility" areas, by definition those which, because of the evaporation of the regular custom and financial mechanisms, could still ensure some income flow. Archipelago Congo, where borders do no longer follow the physical form, but do proliferate both among regions, and in individual areas. Borders more and more invisible even to its population. Subjected to the changes enforced by those who can invent wealth accumulation strategies and, at the same time, have power. In this archipelago, war and a culture of violence, with frequent military presidia were defined. Not only did they control the territory. They started to impose taxes. Allocating to themselves the fiscal authority and accumulating wealth, they took the true shape of warehouses, of "*garrison-entrepôt*": "spaces where every activity, every process has a practical military and commercial sense"<sup>34</sup>. The *garrison-entrepôt* is a place where wealth is created and regulated by militaries (and not by public officials) through accumulation and re-distribution mechanisms; a place where violence is the norm, where new and exceptional social behaviours are put in place, substituting previous ones. These spaces supplied, in some instances, a pretext to govern. In these places, even if not exclusively, a structure was found.

Therefore, the plurality of the state prerogatives, and even more the privatisation of sovereign rights, "when they were not deliberately "confiscated" by the Warlords, did

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<sup>32</sup> In other african countries a such territorial fragmentation produced different configuration. In West Africa, for example, an extremely exploiting policy of trans-border resources led to the emergence of the so called, (État-entrepôt), while in Angola, after the deterritorialization of the sources of accumulation, to that of the *offshore* state. Cfr. D. Bach (sous la direction de), *Régionalisation, mondialisation et fragmentation en Afrique subsaharienne*, cit., p. 17.

consolidate the activities of unknown notables outside the institutional frame of reference,”<sup>33</sup>. The State territorial and governance legality crisis and its, even if somehow imposed, acceptance of major compromises with private subjects who exercised national sovereign rights increasingly more fragmented, allow, at this point in time, to stress the link between inactivity and inefficiency of the inter-governmental regional integration agencies and the development, on the national territory, of private, interconnected networks, able to reshape and reconfigure the physical and economic space. Private or personal networks were the only vectors of a *de facto* regionalisation “which, far away from promoting an adaptation of the State because of the globalisation constraints, became the expression of micro- that end up using the globalisation resources against the very State”<sup>35</sup>.

This informal regionalisation, in a context where the institutions did not involve themselves in the elaboration of more sound regional policies, was established because of commercial exchange stabilisation dynamics and because of the investments made by private players. “The synergies on which this networked based regionalisation is built on, sometimes known as *de facto* regionalism, in contrast of the *de jure* one, contributed to the emergence of a hybrid configuration”<sup>34</sup>.

The relationship between citizen and State has been, in particular on these islands, “transformed by some increasingly frequent wealth creation practices (seizure), by other way to legitimate the appropriation (booty), and by the exercise of power on this wealth (regulatory authority)”<sup>35</sup>. It is no more, and not only, the citizenship right, by the way more and more undetermined, which rules the relationship with the population of these areas. Armed groups began to compete with the State to acquire the financial power. Even more so when the networks that they controlled became vital for the unearned income production, and for the enrichment of traders, some political classes, and eventually the intermediaries.

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<sup>33</sup> D. Bach, *Régionalisme et mondialisation en Afrique subsaharienne : le retournement d'un paradigme*, in, D. Bach, (sous la direction de), *Régionalisation, mondialisation et fragmentation en Afrique subsaharienne*, cit., p 17.

<sup>34</sup> Ibidem, p. 14.

<sup>35</sup> J. Roitman, *The Garrison-Entrepôt*, cit., p. 297

## Conclusion

Intermediaries live the border experience, straddling between norms and spaces. Maintaining an ambiguous relationship with the national authority as well as with the local society. On one hand, acquiring the control of bits and pieces of the territory through the interaction with militarised network, they become antagonist to the State. On the other hand, however, they exploit already defined alliances among trans-national elites in order to contract the access to higher market strata.

In some cases, thus, intermediation chains at high levels and “trans-national trade networks have acted as vectors of dispossession of the weaker to the benefit of the stronger, of the poorer to that of the richer and of internal actors to the benefit of international networks”. Their expansion across borderlands have, thus, reflected the ability of these powerful hi-level intermediaries to exert control over fluctuating identities of the borderlands dwellers, to exploit poverty and social disintegration, created by wars. In this perspective, intermediaries seems to reflect the anatomy of trans-national elite; in other word, they seems to re-create the same patterns of patron-client relations.

Nevertheless, during the nineties, in Kivu, intermediaries proved to be able - despite or rather trough wars - to regulate or interact with the circuits of exchanges and sometimes to create advantageous interconnections between subjects and places.

In Congo, different from Western Africa, these networks are not organised in a permanent way and they end to disappear or to hide after the completion of the economic or social transactions.<sup>36</sup> This depends, perhaps, also from the choice of the intermediary to run away and to hide in his intermediary, interstitial space, being available only for those who know him/her and know how to find him/her.

They have also increasingly invested in spatial niches and in some sense they are producing, to say with Appadurai<sup>37</sup>, new forms of neighbourhood, escaping from the territorial logic of classification and census of the formal institutions. These neighbourhood, almost always are not spaces but relations, social structures. They never become hospitals, prisons, refugee camps because they always stay “in between”, “a second before”.

What would happen if the intermediaries would choose to become visible? What if they would acquire an interconnecting function between players, among communities? What if, being intermediaries, they open-up the interstitial spaces defining a new Middle Class? What if they would be the new agent of development able in these interstitial spaces evolving into a middle space, to address those who, not because of his/her own choice, have been trapped into them, but they have been quiet, speechless. What if they would be able to modify the feeling of being foreigner, able to transform the not understandable, the mixed blood into a Rwandese, into a new form of neighbourhood.

They have been able on an individual basis to transform their uncertainty in opportunity, casual work in abilities. This transformation affected other lives, other daily relationships. Sometime it has been able to reduce the distance between people and elite. From this perspective one of the possible hypothesis is that these new actors may, in future, fulfil the function of interconnection between citizens and communities, instead of living at the margins of the law, around interstitial and hidden spaces,

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<sup>36</sup> Cfr., J. MacGaffrey et Bazenguissa R., *Réseaux personnels et commerce transfrontalier: les migrants Zairois et Congolais*, in D. Bach, (sous la direction de), *Régionalisation, mondialisation et fragmentation en Afrique subsaharienne*, cit, p. 258.

<sup>37</sup> Appadurai A., *Modernità in polvere*, Meltemi, Roma, 2001, pp. 247-249.

available only for those who may have the capacity of interacting with international and trans-national trade networks.

All these questions, to be elaborated should be able to cross-bordering, to approach the personal networks, avoiding generalisation and moral prejudices. It would be important to understand the deep sense through which these chains get rooted in the territory. It would be important to understand if and how, instead of reinforcing the exclusion boundaries de-personalising citizen and migrants, neighbourhoods may be defined. To understand if and how, instead of becoming territorialisation maps, they evolve into new frontiers.



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