



Alex Veit

# INTERVENTION AS INDIRECT RULE

Civil War and Statebuilding  
in the Democratic Republic of Congo

campus

Intervention as Indirect Rule

Mikropolitik der Gewalt – Micropolitics of Violence

Volume 3

Edited by Klaus Schlichte and Peter Waldmann

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“The natives were friendly in their attitude, but in general nonetheless offered some passive and therefore invincible resistance towards us.”

*Franz Stuhlmann*



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*Berlin, July 2010*

# Introduction

The center of Bunia was firmly in international hands. The UN peace mission's multi-storey headquarters, situated along the main road, easily overlooked any other building in town. Its thick walls, machine gun nests, and security guards told of physical superiority. Huge satellite dishes, antennas, and a big blue UN flag on its roof reminded visitors and passersby of the larger and mightier external powers represented here. In Bunia's streets, white cars marked "UN" far outnumbered local vehicles. At major junctions and strategic spots, bored soldiers of the "United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo" (Monuc) stood guard, watching fellow Blue Helmets in tanks and trucks as well as Congolese troops and civilians passing on foot. Local institutions took shelter within the UN mission's protective zone, most visibly the district administration, which had its offices inside the fortified security perimeter of Monuc's town garrison.

Monuc's brash display of machines, buildings, and soldiers in Ituri's district capital in late 2005 could also be read as a sign of fragility and insecurity. Fearful of attacks, Monuc blocked vehicle and pedestrian traffic in front of its headquarters. From the safety of a distantly parked tank, Blue Helmets watched the bustling activity of shoppers and sellers in the main market's narrow corridors. During the brief equatorial sunsets, the local population and international personnel alike rapidly deserted the town center's streets. In the outlying residential areas, scattered Blue Helmet guard posts and motorized patrols upheld a frail and fragmentary form of control. At night, occasional gunshots resounded. In the mornings, helicopter gunships flew out to engage rebel groups in the countryside, indicating Monuc's merely insular authority.

Since 1999, the Ituri district in the northeastern corner of the Democratic Republic of Congo had endured a civil war fought, with foreign and

Congolese governments' support, by various non-state armed groups.<sup>1</sup> In 2003 the United Nations began a peace-enforcement project, which involved several thousand heavily armed troops. During my first research sojourn in late 2005, Monuc seemed to cautiously but steadily gain the upper hand. A majority of irregular fighters had disarmed, while many of their former leaders awaited trial. Militia remnants in the countryside were taken on with military violence and seemed to fight a losing battle. Especially the re-deployment of the Congolese government's army in ever greater numbers should assure their dissolution.

The shift in power, however, proceeded more slowly than expected in those days. In 2006, the militias regrouped and overran army posts throughout the district. Nearly two more years of fighting and negotiation were required to free Ituri from irregular warfare. When I undertook my last research sojourn in August 2008, previously fallow fields in the most heavily contested areas of Ituri were being cultivated, a sign of farmers' renewed confidence in political stability. Yet, two months later, Bunia's residents once again panicked as a previously unknown splinter rebel group overran nearby army installations and appeared to march on the town. While the rebels refrained from attacking the fortified district capital, their reappearance demonstrated their ongoing potential for disruption (Monuc 2008d; *Süddeutsche Zeitung* 2008; AFP 2008e).

Whether military stability would ultimately prevail in Ituri was not the sole unresolved question. Large peace missions such as Monuc are tasked not only with ending civil war violence, but also with an ambitious attempt to construct a new societal order. The character of the new order, however, remained just as opaque as the ultimate dissolution of the rebels groups uncertain. Besides Monuc, a considerable number of international agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) shared its ambition, commonly described as peace-and-statebuilding. Their support had allowed the national government to regain charge of the district administration and judicature and to hold national and provincial elections, but it also extended to local civil society organizations, customary chieftaincies, and churches. This wide array of organizations undertook far-ranging activities

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1 Ituri is a district in the Democratic Republic of Congo's "Province Orientale". Situated in the northeast of the country along the border to Uganda, it has a population of approximately four million inhabitants sharing an area of about 65,000km<sup>2</sup>. Ituri is thus about the size of Sri Lanka. A large part of its territory is covered by sparsely populated tropical forest, while the savannah areas bordering Uganda are densely occupied.

such as collecting custom duties and taxes, hunting criminals, rebuilding infrastructure, resettling refugees, advocating human rights, negotiating land usage and market access, as well as servicing schools, hospitals, and prisons. Together, they governed the population in manifold ways and often enjoyed local acknowledgement for their effort. The sheer number of different organizations, with their competing claims of authority, mutual distrust, and lack of hierarchical control, however, riddled the emerging order with contradictions. Ituri's population faced a system of government that appeared unaccountable, unpredictable, and sometimes dangerous.

## Intermediary Rule and International Intervention

Civil wars are inherently complex figurations of power and domination. The political order hangs in limbo, as rule is constantly, openly, and violently contested. Into these unpredictable political spaces, intervention missions are added as new political actors. Uncertainty is thus a default characteristic of armed conflict and "humanitarian" military intervention.<sup>2</sup> While their implicit aim is to reduce uncertainty in these societies – not only as it relates to physical security, but also to the course of political processes, the trustworthiness of ruling institutions, the reliability of economic transactions, and the general course of everyday life – they often fall short of this pledge. Interventions do change local political structures, but rarely in the clear-cut ways foreseen. In this study, answers are sought to this puzzle. How the intervention into Ituri's civil war changed the local figuration of power and domination is this study's central question.

This study centrally argues that the consequences of intervention and statebuilding in Ituri were produced by the interplay between resilient, historically grown relationships of domination and the structure of intervention and statebuilding. Ituri's colonial and post-colonial experience has been characterized by the indirectness of power relationships. Both the colonial and the post-colonial state relied on intermediary power holders to influence the local political space. Rather than administering their subjects

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<sup>2</sup> "Humanitarian" has become a common adjective for many kinds of intervention, including paradoxical practices of waging war to impose peace. For convenient reading the term is used from here onwards without inverted commas. Also other ambiguous terms are labeled with inverted commas only at first mentioning.

directly, enclaves and instances of direct rule notwithstanding, intermediaries with a high degree of autonomy formed the pillars of their domination. Intermediary indirect rule is illiberal, as it creates subjects rather than citizens and is based on interpersonal connections rather than judicial rights. The liberal democratic state envisaged by interventionists would, if realized, replace indirect with direct relationships between the state and its population.

Intervening organizations, however, also rely on intermediaries. Thereby, they strengthen, reconstruct, or modify rather than transcend patterns of indirect rule. Their inclination to work through intermediaries is based on the assumption that before change can be implemented, local strategic groups have to consent and be involved. Those who already dispose of the means to impact on the local space are, accordingly, an almost natural choice. Intervening organizations modify chains of intermediary rule by inserting themselves and their comparatively large symbolic and material resources. Intermediaries try adapting to their expectations, while also appropriating these means for their own agendas. The subjects of intervention, those strata of society that would theoretically become empowered by liberal statehood, face a reduction rather than an increase of means to hold governing institutions to account. A major reason for this quandary is that the politics of interventionists are detached from local influences. The absence of hierarchy between intervening organizations, their external sources of legitimacy and finance, and an inclination to concentrate on stereotyped intervention technologies favors such detachment. Part of the argument, therefore, is that structures of “global governance” favor indirect rule in the Global South.

The notion of indirect rule through intermediaries relates back to the colonial experience.<sup>3</sup> The incorporation of native rulers into the administrative system allowed imperialist powers to rely on local forms of legitimacy. Customary chiefs, once recognized, could in turn demand that the colonial powers’ enforcement capacities ensure their common subjects’ obedience. This figuration puts intermediaries into an oscillating position of constantly mediating forces from within and from the outside. The intermediary is simultaneously dependent and autonomous. Dependent, because he or she receives and lends resources from and to both outsiders and local society; autonomous, because he or she can use those resources

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<sup>3</sup> Most prominently, the doctrine of colonial indirect rule is spelled out in Lugard (1922).

to strengthen his position and pursue a personal agenda. This is a game of ties and disjuncture, of linkage and spin-off, a position of power resting on the ability to balance, manage, and exploit contradictions and tensions.<sup>4</sup>

The difference between intermediary and other political actors is the dependence on two sides rather than only one. While a bureaucrat depends on the bureaucratic apparatus for legitimacy, funds, and orders (that is, from “above”), elected office-holders gain legitimacy and often taxes from the electorate, to which they are in turn accountable (that is, from “below”). Intermediaries, however, need to dispose of material and symbolic power resources from both “above” and “below”, from “domestic” and “external” sources.

Bureaucratic statehood, especially its liberal democratic form, is in an awkward position regarding intermediary rule. Acting in accordance with procedures according to routine rules is confronted with the arbitrariness of the intermediary. The intermediary constantly thwarts bureaucratic principles, placing emphasis on the importance of local social context and history, the type and form of the conflicts encountered, and the strength of an individual personality. Intermediary rule, thus, has incalculable effects for both subjects and the bureaucratic state (von Trotha 1994b, 277–279, 378–379, 444–449).

Humanitarian intervention and colonial occupation are not the same. Today’s projects of intervention and statebuilding do not share the motivations of colonial powers. Indirect rule has vanished as a doctrine of domination, and customary rulers are accompanied or replaced by governments, civil society organizations, and other local institutions. Instead, the similarities and continuities stem from an unchanged structural circumstance. The spatial, cultural, and social distance between political forces from the outside and local societies, as well as the high cost of direct administration, necessitate institutions that broker and mediate the relationship. Imperialist thinkers theorized indirect rule as even-handed, as it supposedly allowed the preservation of local cultures. Today, the notion of self-governance provides legitimacy for the urge to install new governments almost immediately after, or even during, civil wars. Yet, these governments remain dependent on outside resources, most obviously in economic terms. Interventionists, meanwhile, see an obligation for prolonged external interference in societies unable to govern themselves.

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4 Cf. von Trotha (1994b, esp. 219–334) for a detailed discussion of colonial intermediary rule.

The argument posits intermediated relationships of power and domination, rather than intermediary actors, at the center of analysis. While the personal character or professional capacity of post-conflict power holders is of importance, it is nonetheless a secondary aspect. Whether statebuilding agencies support one group or the other is less decisive than the chains of interdependencies in which these intermediaries are entangled. Power differentials entailed in these interdependencies – of intermediaries between external intervention and local society – explain which means and perspectives these actors display and dispose of and can use to extend and preserve their relative autonomy. They also allow an understanding of the particular constraints, such as accountability, placed on their behavior. The figuration of interdependent relationships, with intermediaries at their center, embodies the structure of power and domination in the post-conflict political space.

## Armed Groups and Liberal Statebuilding

To enquire how civil war and intervention in Ituri changed the local political space, the analysis concentrates on relationships. It examines how important actor groups are bound to their contemporary antagonists and partners. During the civil war, non-state armed groups have become central powerful actors in Ituri. Their relationship to other actors thus provides a major question of enquiry. Intervention organizations, most importantly the UN peace mission Monuc, have inserted themselves as another set of actors. Thirdly, state and state-related organizations, such as the Congo's central government, territorial administration, chiefs, but also local NGOs and other "private" actors, sustained or regained a governing role in the local political space. Relationships and power differentials between these actor groups provide the focus of this study. The relational analysis is guided by questions concerning the most basic aspects of societal order and ordering, namely violence control, economic reproduction, and the legitimacy of authority.

Humanitarian military intervention and statebuilding since the end of the Cold War developed into a major type of engagement in international relations. Through these practices, the relationship between the "Internationa-

tional Community”<sup>5</sup>, nation states faced with internal armed resistance, and their societies has profoundly changed. The International Community now encounters non-state actors with whom no previous relationship existed. Most centrally, non-state armed groups have gained enormous prominence in international relations.

Concerning the relationship between the International Community and armed groups, this study builds on the premise that to the international system these groups are an anomaly. As actors wielding military power, armed groups are not conforming to the international system constructed around the notion of states’ monopoly on violence. Intervention missions, who represent the community of states, regularly request that armed groups cease their existence as non-state military organizations. This predisposition may result in violent encounters, as has happened in Ituri. However, an exchange of give and take between intervening organizations and armed groups may also arise, as the relationship is characterized by mutual dependencies. Also these processes could be observed in Ituri, but less pronounced than in other Congolese regions.

Intervening organizations are apt to change the local figuration, and armed groups ability to organize violence is a major obstacle to this task. Providing incentives may be considered as a more convenient means of dealing with armed groups than violently fighting them. Armed groups are thus often offered opportunities either to transform into political parties, and take part in electoral processes or to join a recognized government and army. Many armed groups, in turn, are not principally opposed to interventionists’ endeavors, as long they are offered a favorable stake in the evolving figuration. When they become part of a government, intensive partnership between the former and statebuilding agencies becomes an obligation. Both sanctions and incentives were patterns of dealing with armed groups in Ituri, specifically, and in the Congo in general. The circuitous paths of these interactions have resulted in various contradictions and quandaries outlined in this study.

Armed groups differ from each other. The reasons underlying their foundation, their aims, agendas, ideologies, and internal structures, are as diverse as the contexts in which they exist. Their behavior, accordingly, is not easily predictable, as will be shown in this study. Yet, some preliminary points may be made. While armed groups’ agendas differ strongly, their

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<sup>5</sup> The ill-defined denominator “International Community” is discussed in detail in Chapter I and V.

principal means to pursue these is based on a sustained influence on the societal figuration. Armed groups that need to deal with interventions, therefore, must define ways in which the intervention may strengthen or impede this influence. There are two ideal-typical paths that armed groups' approaches towards interventions may take – approval or resistance. Yet, as with all ideal types, these are rarely encountered empirically. More likely to be found are approaches that may be termed *bricolage*, a crooked, contradictory, and situational tactic of embracing some offerings of interventions while opposing others. Such approaches of appropriation constitute a qualified, tactical acceptance of intervention demands and resources, coupled with actions contradicting the intervention agenda. And in some cases, as in Ituri, these actions amount to armed resistance.

Resistance is the theoretical opposite of acceptance. Ignoring interventions, a form of passive resistance, may be possible as long as external actors' impact on the local figuration remains very limited. Violent attacks on intervention organizations seem the most radical choice. Armed groups may opt for resistance when intervention goals differ extremely from their own, when a prolonged existence as irregular military force seems more favorable than inclusion into the interventionists' envisaged formula of statehood, when interventionists or other local actors deny armed groups such inclusion, or when armed groups see a chance to favorably alter the course of war and intervention by violent means.

Acceptance, appropriation, and resistance are often difficult to distinguish. Armed groups' inferiority favors seemingly contradictory types of behavior. These aspects can be better understood by employing the notion of extraversion, a mode of action in uneven and asymmetric relationships. Jean-François Bayart developed this idea regarding the unequal relations between Africans and Europeans accentuated during the process of colonization. Extraversion compensates for the difficulties of weaker actors in relations to strong outside forces. The concept places a focus on triangular relationships between outside forces, local rulers, and society. By mobilizing resources out of the unequal relationships with external forces, new power chances may be accumulated in internal social struggles. Extraversion allows the enhancing of internal political autonomy and bolsters superiority over dependants (Bayart 2000). Extraversion thus brings connections with external forces to bear in internal conflicts. The "strategy of extraversion" has at its heart "the creation and the capture of a rent gener-

ated by dependency” and “functions as a historical matrix of inequality, political centralization and social struggle” (Bayart 2000, 222).

Analogous to armed groups, the notion of extraversion also elucidates the patterns of acceptance, appropriation and resistance employed by state actors and other agents of governance (the leadership of armed groups, as implicated above, actually often transforms into official members of a government during the course of intervention). Initial failures of humanitarian military intervention in the late 20th century gave rise to the assumption that a mere reduction of violence in civil war spaces was inadequate to achieve sustainable peace. International discourse discovered failing and failed states as a central phenomenon responsible for the outbreak of civil wars. Accordingly, in the Congo and elsewhere, contemporary interventions aim at the creation of liberal democratic state-based orders capable of mediating a peaceful resolution of societal conflicts. Such interventions are “deep”, as they aim to profoundly alter the behavior of local actors, the relationships between these actors, and between societal actors, such as armed groups, and their state. Another, less intended, effect is that such endeavors also modify relationships between the International Community, states, and societies.

The quest of statebuilding, in particular the alteration of local actors’ behavior, has become a profound challenge to international missions. For intervening international organizations, the state apparatus constitutes the most important interlocutor, yet governmental officials are notoriously paradoxical counterparts. Governments are identified as the problem and the solution, both the enemy and the partner. The same paradox applies, notwithstanding graduations and variances, to other partners of intervention. Statebuilding projects provide governing actors with resources. These may be employed in designated ways, but may also be used to strengthen illegitimate rule. In societies with a history of violent conflict and arbitrary, authoritarian rule, the line between creating a protective *leviathan* or a monstrous *bebeemoth* is rather thin. For governments and locally governing actors, external statebuilding projects constitute an enormous resource pool helpful in bolstering their rule. Yet they also face an unstable local figuration, in which neither local legitimacy nor their protection from armed contenders is a given. The intermediary figuration of international donors, local governing actors, and local society, allows and demands controversial behavior.

## Conflict and Intervention in a Local Space: The Case of Ituri

Civil war and civil peace do not take place in conference rooms or presidential offices alone, but in concrete social encounters. While high politics impact on local interactions and relationships, the study of these phenomena is most fruitful in a context in which international, national, and local arenas intertwine. Ituri constitutes such a political space and thus provides manifold hints and insights into the politics of civil war, intervention, and statebuilding. Ituri's conflict presents many particular and specific conundrums. Its distinct value as a case study derives both from the many characteristics it shares with other regions and armed conflicts in the Global South, thus the similarities it posits, and from its exceptional significance as a laboratory of intervention in an African civil war. This single-case study can not cover the entire spectrum of humanitarian military interventions. But the findings on both these specific aspects and similarities with other cases allow some further reaching conclusions on the relationships between armed groups and international interventions, as well as on externally steered statebuilding projects after civil war.

The war in Ituri was a prototypical armed conflict in a so-called failed state. It connected local political conflict to wider processes of political reconfiguration in the Congo and geo-strategic warfare between states in the Great Lakes region. Besides these political aspects, the warring parties were regularly suspected of pursuing purely economic agendas. The Ituri conflict developed in the shadow of the Congo Wars, during the occupation of the district by the Ugandan army from 1998 to 2003.<sup>6</sup> Together with their then Rwandan allies, the neighboring country supported the formation of Congolese armed groups employed in conflicts against the Congolese government and to administer the occupied territories. Out of these major rebellions, most of Ituri's smaller militias defected. About a dozen local armed groups have since fought in Ituri, some of whom were defined along ethnic lines. Given the extreme forms of violence used, especially against civilians, external observers expressed fears, at times, regarding genocidal discourses and practices. Most of these armed formations, however, did not exist in a congruent form for more than a few years, had mostly weak internal hierarchies, and failed to control the dis-

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<sup>6</sup> The expression "Congo Wars" refers to the various armed conflicts involving multiple states, Congolese governments, and foreign and local armed groups in the DRC since 1996 (cf. Turner 2007).

strict in a sustained manner for longer periods. The reasons for their formation, besides Ugandan instigation, were several local and national disputes reaching back over decades, but radicalized during the Congo Wars, and the proliferation of political violence. Conflicts over land use and ownership, social and political exclusion, and struggles over business stakes, among other issues, played a role.

Despite the massive violence, for a considerable time Ituri remained on the margins of international attention. It was only after a peace accord formally ended the Congo Wars in 2003 that the district experienced intense interference by the International Community.<sup>7</sup> Monuc, the United Nations Mission in the Congo, had existed since 1999, but made its first serious appearance in Ituri only four years thereafter. Too weak to halt escalating fighting between militias at that time, the European Union sent troops to violently pacify the district's capital Bunia from June to September 2003. Following this episode, a reinforced Monuc force took over again. Thereafter, the UN's Ituri Brigade numbered several thousand troops and was mandated to enforce peace under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. Since then, Monuc struggled to impose itself on the armed groups in Ituri, frequently resorting to violent means. Many other international agencies and NGOs followed Monuc's lead and turned Ituri into a region of intense intervention.

Confronted with massive intervention and a new transitional government in Congo's capital Kinshasa, the politics of Ituri's armed groups changed. New alliances were created, and older enmities were put to rest. Iturians themselves divided the conflicts in their region, accordingly, into two phases – the “ethnic war” that began in 1999 and the “political war” from after the arrival of Monuc's military forces. Monuc and its national and international partners offered Ituri's militias the option to become part of the new national army, to form political parties, or to integrate into civilian society. Some components of the armed groups accepted, while others founded new fighting formations. The Congolese central state, which for years had played a minor role in local affairs, reappeared most visibly through the deployment of several thousand combat troops. Monuc undertook extensive joint military operations with this reconstructed national army, whose arbitrary use of violence, however, strongly impeded the mission's aim of installing a peaceful order. A cycle of violence and

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7 Major Congolese armed groups and other political organizations signed the “Global and All Inclusive Agreement”, which marked the beginning of a transitional period, in April 2003.

negotiation set in between rebel groups on one side and the state and international agencies on the other.

Humanitarian military intervention in Ituri was, in comparison, particularly massive in the African and Congolese context. Agencies of the International Community employed violence to an extent bordering on outright warfare, invested early on and massively in the demobilization of armed groups' combatants, fostered the deployment of the Congolese army much more decisively than elsewhere, and strongly supported political and judiciary institutions in the district. The International Criminal Court chose some of Ituri's militia leaders as its first defendants, while other warlords achieved inclusion into the Congolese state apparatus.

Despite these efforts and democratic elections, the reconstructed state demonstrated many characteristics of its colonial and post-colonial predecessors. The use of arbitrary violence by its law enforcement agencies, its weak hierarchies, and its neo-patrimonial and extraverted uses of state offices were aspects of rule that strongly hindered the emergence of a liberal democratic state in Ituri. Meanwhile, customary chiefs, churches, local civil society groups, and international organizations and NGOs administer many sectors of society more or less independently of state directives. Statebuilding has not yet produced conclusive results. Most conflicts that initially instigated political violence – land disputes most prominently – have remained largely unresolved and even deepened by enforced migration of parts of the population.

The aspects of arbitrary state rule and ongoing armed conflict were equally observable in other parts of the Democratic Republic of Congo, where international efforts of intervention and statebuilding were much less pronounced. This allows certain insights on the limits of interventionists' influence on political developments in the country, the resilience of historically grown patterns of domination, and the generalizations that can be drawn from this case study. Unfortunately, although the Democratic Republic of Congo, given its size and wealth of resources, is generally considered key to many problems of peace and development in Africa, the country and international intervention into its conflicts, nevertheless remains under-researched.

The UN mission Monuc has thus far been scrutinized by only one detailed study. Séverine Autesserre argues that Monuc neglected local violence in Ituri's adjoining provinces of North and South Kivu and instead concentrated on the national arena. The International Community's obses-

sion with the holding of elections, she argues, had a detrimental impact on the peace process, both in the provinces as well as in the country at large (Autesserre 2006a, 2006b, 2009). Her analysis provides a highly useful counterpart to this study, as Monuc's long apathy on the Kivus was almost antithetic to intense intervention in Ituri. The few other analyses of military intervention in the Congo tend to concentrate on the peace mission itself and provide few details on their impact on local power relations (Miskel and Norton 2003; Vircoulon 2005).

The Congo Wars at large are the subject of a number of academic works, most of which either refer to aspects of geopolitics, state-failure, or the role of mineral resources, but for the most part have little to say on either changes and continuities in local power figurations or the impact of intervention thereon (Prunier 1999; 2009; Reyntjens 1999; 2009; Shearer 1999; Clark ed. 2002; Trefon et al. eds. 2002; Johnson 2003; Pourtier 2003; Nest et al. 2006; Lemarchand 2009).<sup>8</sup> Virtually the only analysis integrating international, national, and local dynamics of warfare and intervention, (but without detailed reference to Ituri), is provided by Thomas Turner. His book, however, lacks a stringent theoretical approach that weaves these manifold aspects together beyond an insightful narrative (Turner 2007). These desiderata of academic production notwithstanding, a number of highly valuable regional case studies on the Congo Wars have been produced. Specifically, on the civil war and domination in the Kivu provinces, and in lesser quantity on other regions, a number of analyses exist (Vlassenroot 2002; Tull 2003, 2005; Vlassenroot and Raeymaekers eds. 2004; Vlassenroot and Huggins 2005; Rackley 2006; Raeymaekers 2007). On Ituri, beyond NGOs' and international organizations' policy-related productions, few academic studies have been published. Koen Vlassenroot, Timothy Raeymaekers, and Alphonse Maindo Monga Ngonga produced insightful articles that deal with the origins and dynamics of the civil war until the arrival of Monuc. While I do not confirm every argument about the novelty of patterns of domination they put forward, my study is heavily indebted to their work (Maindo Monga Ngonga 2003; Vlassenroot and Raeymaekers 2004). Johan Pottier covers aspects of humanitarian aid, refugee resettlement, and the role of rumor in the district's civil war (Pottier 2006; 2007; 2008). Despite these works, Ituri is even more under-re-

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. also various contributions to the "Great Lakes yearbooks", edited by Reyntjens and Marysse.

searched than other Congolese regions, a gap which this study seeks to fill in many respects.

## An Approach of Figurational Sociology

The central theoretical framework employed in this study is figurational sociology.<sup>9</sup> Norbert Elias defines figurations as “patterns which interdependent human beings, as groups or as individuals, form with each other” (Elias 1987b, 85; cf. Elias 1978). Central to the concept of figuration are relationships, as opposed to a perspective privileging an actor-centered or structural perspective. By looking at relationships, figurational sociology allows explaining not only how their environment, but also their ability to preserve autonomy and agency shape actors. It locates individuals, actor groups, or organizations in a web of ties in which they are enabled to act or reason, but which also confines them. Like a football player, an actor can impress by individual abilities. Yet, this agency is not independent, but rather influenced by rules, social conventions, and relationships with partners, antagonists, and observers. Such interweaving of multiple actors tends to result in a loss of oversight and control. No single player can alone determine the unfolding course of the game. Even those who possess superior means are bound to allies and opponents. The structure of a process is dependent on “unintentional human interdependencies [that] lie at the root of every intentional interaction”. A pattern emerges which is formed by the participants, ordered by their beliefs and actions, but that no one “has planned, determined or anticipated” (Elias 1978, 94–95, cf. 147–148; Elias and Dunning 1986, 51–52).

Figurational sociology's key premise is that interdependencies generate stability and prevent the disintegration of social settings, as they guarantee sustained orientation of actors towards each other. Interdependencies also explain the process of figurational change, as through them any act of one side is interwoven with the past and future acts of others. Any change of position of one actor is thus a relational change for all actors, and any modification of one relationship impacts on the relationships between others. Interdependencies are thus the focus of figurational analysis. To

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<sup>9</sup> The following is to a large extent based on debates in the “Micropolitics of Armed Groups”-project at Humboldt University Berlin, 2004–2008.

analyze complex figurations, Elias recommends looking at chains of interdependencies. The more functionally differentiated a figuration, the longer these chains become. An increase in functional differentiation results in highly reciprocal relationships. When interdependencies vanish, reverse developments emerge, actors lose interest in each other, and figurations disintegrate (Elias 1978, 130–147).

All societies negotiate what Elias termed elementary or survival functions – the control of violence, material reproduction, and symbolic orientation (Elias 1987a, 226–231). The management of violence is the most obvious issue at stake in civil war and intervention. International missions aim at excluding the application of physical violence from the relationships between societal actors, and limiting the violence control to the state they simultaneously rebuild. This endeavor entails many risks, especially for those who are expected to become dependent on this state's ability to protect them. Armed groups often resist demands to relinquish their ability to wield organized violence, not only because they seek to employ force to pursue their own agenda but also because the process of monopolization entails unpredictable risks. They lose considerable autonomy, but eventual security gains are only a pledge.

Material reproduction has come under renewed scrutiny in recent studies of civil wars, most obviously in the literature on “new” wars (Kaldor 1999; Münkler 2002; Collier and Hoeffler 2004). While these studies tend to over-emphasize economic rationality, it is obvious that the causes, course, and resolution of armed conflicts also depend on material interdependencies. In the context of this study, aspects of economic relationships include armed groups' ability to reproduce materially. Even more important is the question of how economic relationships in Ituri changed during civil war and intervention. In processes of statebuilding, the reconfiguration of material relationships – from economies of war to economies of peace – is an underlying issue.

The symbolic side of figurations, that allows human beings to orientate and communicate, refers to the historical and social embeddedness of actors' behavior. Symbolic interdependencies are the most opaque aspects of figurations, as the effects of ideas are much less obvious and immediate than those of physical violence or economic exchange. Moreover, symbolic interdependencies are a wider, less defined field of analysis. They touch on the perceived legitimacy of domination and resistance as well as key aspects of civil war and intervention. More generally, symbolic interdependencies

determine how knowledge is discursively produced. On the individual level, they encompass the internalization of societal norms (Elias 1997). Key to an analysis of symbolic interdependencies is a look at how the means of orientation are distributed between societal actors (Elias 1987a, 230).

Figurations are social relationships between multiple actors, whose basic patterns can be observed in interdependencies between those actors. Figurations are dynamic, and thus the analysis can only provide snapshots of particular moments in space and time to be understood as part of longer processes. And figurations both form and constrain the space in which people wield violence, reproduce materially, and generally act and reason.

### Power and Domination

While figurational sociology provides the methodical tools to analyze the political process, this study's central question concerns changes of power and domination in Ituri. Still based very much on Elias' thoughts, these terms are also defined referring to concepts of Max Weber, Michel Foucault, and Antonio Gramsci. This theoretical patchwork allows analyzing power and domination from several perspectives, in its different forms, and as contingent processes.

Elias understands power as the "particularly great societal chance to influence other peoples' self-steering, and to participate in the determination of other peoples' destiny".<sup>10</sup> To understand power as a mere possibility refers to Weber's concept, which defines power equally as a "probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance." (Weber 1978, 53) Contingency means that power is always in a balance, a balance negotiated inside social relationships. To understand power as balanced does not mean that relationships are on an equal footing. On the contrary, most social relationships are unequal, as the means or resources needed to wield power are unevenly distributed. Yet, the balance exists as actors are interdependent. There are hardly any relationships in which the weaker side has no power chances at

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10 "Die besonders große gesellschaftliche Chance, die Selbststeuerung anderer Menschen zu beeinflussen und das Schicksal anderer Menschen mitzuentcheiden." Elias (1988, 80), my translation.

all. Elias calls the differences in power chances “power differentials” (Elias 1991, 77).

There are also differences between Weber and Elias. Weber places considerable emphasis on aspects of command and obedience. This definition of power is of particular relevance in civil war situations, as violence, the principal means of warfare, constitutes the most basic form of enforcing one's will against resistance (Popitz 1992, 43–47). Elias, on the other hand, asks how power may be wielded more indirectly, how power affects the figurative space in which people act and reason. His concept has many similarities with Michel Foucault's definition of power, which highlights the productive rather than the limiting aspects of power. What Elias calls a figuration, for Foucault constitutes a field of possibilities. Wielding power, or “to govern, in this sense, is to structure the possible field of action of others.” (Foucault 1982, 790) The principal means to influence others' options is to act upon their actions, to conduct their conduct. By modifying the field, this form of power “incites, it induces, it seduces, it makes easier or more difficult; in the extreme it constrains or forbids absolutely.” (Foucault 1982, 789) The state can be a power field, and those who wield power are able to change its structure in order to impact on the behavior of others. In this study, Weber's model of command/obedience and Foucault's notion of actions upon actions are both employed and understood as complementary.

Weber differentiated situational from institutionalized power, terming the latter domination (Weber 1978, 53). The central requirement of “genuine domination” is a “belief in the legitimacy” of a given order by the ruled, which guarantees its stability (Weber 1978, 212–213). The kind of legitimacy claimed in a system of rule defines the order itself. Weber differentiates three ideal types: charismatic, patrimonial, and legal-rational rule (Weber 1978, 212–254). While in this study elements of all three types are observed in different contexts, the emphasis is less on their established form. Civil war and intervention are situations in which domination is extremely uncertain, fragile, and contingent, and these circumstances demand a focus on the emergence and fragmentation of rule. Weber's exclusive condition of legitimacy leaves little leeway to analyze the latter. His definition excludes crises of legitimacy and merely opportunistic obedience without genuine belief on the part of those who, as often in violent political conflict, have to choose between two equally undesirable options (Lemke 2001).

In order to include these phenomena in an analysis of emerging (and fragmenting) domination, Weber's definition of legitimate rule is supplemented with Gramsci's concept of hegemony. Both legitimacy and hegemony posit similar arguments. Like Weber, Gramsci assumes the affirmation of rule by the subordinated, as domination would otherwise be unsustainable.<sup>11</sup> Yet, Gramsci is more interested in the mechanisms that lead to stable rule (Buci-Glucksmann 1981, 63–65). Hegemony as a form of consensus, or at least a pragmatic acceptance of the social order by the subordinated, remains the foreground. It comes into being through institutions which legitimate, practice, and teach affirmation and obedience. Rather than an externality, domination becomes accepted in the often contradictory consciousness of subordinates (Glassman 1991, 281–312). Gramsci's concept is hereby related to Foucault's theory of subjectivation and Elias' elaborations on the internalization of external constraints (Elias 1997; Bayart 2004, 198–204; Lemke 2001). While the present study does not deal with class conflict, such as Gramsci, his definition of hegemony is nonetheless useful as it comprises violent enforcement as a latent possibility. Hegemony, in his dictum, is armored with coercion. Equally, resistance to and appropriation of existing power relationships do not necessarily imply a crisis of legitimacy (Cox 1993, 50–52; Buci-Glucksmann 1981, 30; Femia 1975). Weber's definition of domination as institutionalized power based on belief in its legitimacy is thus upheld. But rather than treating legitimacy as a stable condition, the contingency of processes of legitimization and de-legitimization is emphasized.

Figurational sociology and the relational power definitions described so far outline the theoretical perspective employed in this study. Any analysis seeking to answer questions concerning relationships and interdependencies faces problems of epistemic, methodical, and ethical nature. The study of war and intervention raises these issues in a particularly intense way.

### The Invisible Cow and Other Problems in the Field: A Note on Method

The absence of cattle in Ituri escaped my perception for a considerable time. Before my field research in 2005, I had learned that the civil war in Ituri began as a conflict over land claimed by both cattle-breeders and

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<sup>11</sup> Gramsci understood the term "domination" as state coercion (Femia 1975, 30). In this study, Weber's definition is used.