

A RELATIVE PEACE:
ETHNIC LAND CONFLICT IN POST-WAR ITURI DISTRICT,
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

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ABSTRACT

MEGAN CAMM: *A Relative Peace: Ethnic Land Conflict in Post-War Ituri District, Democratic Republic of the Congo*
(Under the direction of Barbara Friedman)

Between 1999 and 2007, an ethnic civil war devastated Ituri District, Democratic Republic of the Congo, killing an estimated 60,000 people and displacing at least half a million more. Today, the war is over, but the source of conflict—competition over access to land in the context of confusing and contradictory land laws—has yet to be addressed. In fact, the widespread and long-term displacement of entire communities as a result of the war has additionally complicated land rights. *A Relative Peace* is a series of three immersive non-fiction articles that strive to illuminate the sources and ramifications of ethnic land conflicts by examining their impact on the lives of various individuals living in Ituri, DRC. See www.relativepeace.com.

To Ngona

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Countless people shared their stories with me over the past two years, but some accepted me unreservedly into their lives: De Dieu Ndjango B’ebbu, Axel and Jo Kitoga, Maurice Bavi-Nguna, Melchior Djodya, Anna Kamurate Nyalengi Djupanyarhonore, and Marie Estella Djupanyarhonore. Ngonza Gikwa Floribert

deserves special mention; he spent untold hours patiently recounting his most painful and intimate memories and sharing with me his meticulous records and notes. Ngona's quest for peace and justice was met with violence and injustice, and though he did not live to see *A Relative Peace*, it is my hope that sharing this story will in some small way contribute to positive change in the lives of his fellow Iturians. I would also like to thank Chief Dieudonné Tsedha-Didô and Chief Longbe Tschabi Linga for allowing me to operate so freely in their jurisdictions.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTERS

I.	LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHOD.....	1
	Introduction.....	1
	The Ituri Conflict: Background and Literature Review.....	5
	Justification.....	23
	Method.....	30
	Advocacy, Objectivity, and Social Change.....	37
	Limitations.....	39
II.	A FAMILY AFFAIR.....	42
III.	AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE.....	62
IV.	A RELATIVE PEACE.....	86
	AFTERWORD.....	158
	WORKS CITED.....	163

LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHOD

Introduction

There is only one way to enter or leave Sanduku: the nameless road that De Dieu and I walked along, kicking up dust as we went. Winding its way through Ituri's lush greenery, the dirt road was like a machete scar on otherwise unblemished skin.

I was the first to spot Ngona approaching. I recognized his faded red and black argyle sweater vest, but it was the cream-colored plastic boots—at \$6, an extravagance for this banana farmer in a remote corner of northeastern Congo—that stood out against the earth-toned surroundings.

De Dieu was distracted, bouncing his infant daughter L'Avenir on his shoulder and cooing in Kilendu. L'Avenir was ill, and De Dieu was worried enough to take a day off from working in the fields to walk her to the spartan health center some three kilometers outside of the village of Sanduku.

I waited in nervous anticipation to see how the two men would react to one another. Just a few days earlier, Ngona had warned me not to eat De Dieu's food. He was suspicious that De Dieu, a member of the rival Lendu ethnic group, might try to poison me. For his part, De Dieu had told me that the Hema people, including Ngona, did not belong in Sanduku and must leave immediately. He declined to elaborate on the consequences should the Hema refuse.

But if the two men felt any ill will toward each other, they hid it well. They clasped hands in greeting, and after a few moments of Kilendu small talk,¹ De Dieu listed L’Avenir’s symptoms in French: *la langueur, l’appétit réduit, les crises de larmes*—listlessness, diminished appetite, crying spells.

Placing his thumb on the soft skin under L’Avenir’s eye, Ngona inspected the pink flesh of her lower eyelid. He pressed her tiny fingernails and watched as the nail beds drained and then regained their color. Satisfied with his examination, he proclaimed that L’Avenir had “no-blood,” a catchall local diagnosis. “Have her drink the first blood that flows from a slaughtered guinea pig,” Ngona instructed, “and you can save yourself an expensive doctor’s visit.” De Dieu thanked him for the advice, and the men continued down the sun-baked road on their opposite paths.

Such a display of neighborly goodwill between a Hema and a Lendu would have been rare just a few years ago. As the Congo wars raged from the mid-1990s to the early 2000s, accumulating the highest death toll of any conflict since World War II,² the Lendu and Hema ethnic groups of Ituri district were locked in their own

¹ Attesting to the degree of cultural assimilation between the Hema and Lendu and the historic complexity of their interactions, the North Hema, or Gegere Hema, of Djugu (including Ngona) speak Kilendu rather than Kihema, the language of Hema in other territories of Ituri. See Johan Pottier, “Representations of Ethnicity in the Search for Peace: Ituri, Democratic Republic of the Congo,” *African Affairs* 109, no. 434 (2010): 37.

² This claim is based on data published by the International Rescue Committee, a humanitarian aid agency that has been active in documenting mortality in the Congo since 2000. The IRC suggests that between the start of the Second Congo War in August 1998 and April 2007, there were 5.4 million excess deaths due to war. The IRC reports that 0.4 per cent of excess deaths were due to direct violence; the rest were due to infectious diseases, malnutrition, and neonatal/pregnancy-related conditions that were

bloody conflict characterized by such atrocious ethnic violence that observers and participants alike labeled it “the war within the war.”³ Human Rights Watch in 2003 called the region “the bloodiest corner of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.”⁴ Known as the Ituri Conflict, it originated just a few kilometers down the road from Sanduku, not far from the health center where L’Avenir was treated for what turned out to be intestinal worms. The Ituri Conflict is thought to have begun in the *collectivité*, or county, of Walendu-Pitsi in June 1999, when Hema *concessionnaires* (landowners) began to evict their primarily Lendu tenants, perhaps illegally. The Lendu of Walendu-Pitsi retaliated by killing Hema living in the *localités*, or villages, of Walendu-Pitsi or chasing them away and burning their homes. The Hema responded by attacking the Lendu in their midst. Within days, decades worth of

caused by social and economic disturbances created by war – the disruption of health services, poor food security, deterioration of infrastructure and population displacement. See Benjamin Coghlan, et al., “Mortality in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: An Ongoing Crisis,” 2007, accessed September 20, 2010, http://www.theirc.org/sites/default/files/migrated/resources/2007/2006-7_congomortalitysurvey.pdf. This figure has recently been challenged by the Human Security Report 2009, which criticizes the methodology used by the IRC but does not provide a revised figure. See “The Death Toll in the Democratic Republic of the Congo,” in *Human Security Report 2009: The Shrinking Costs of War*, 2009, accessed September 20, 2010, <http://www.hsrgroup.org/human-security-reports/2009/text.aspx>. Roberto Beneduce et al. cite the figure of “more than 3 million deaths” between 1996 and 2006 in “Violence with a purpose: exploring the functions and meaning of violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo,” March 2006, accessed December 5, 2010, http://www.ceri-sciencespo.com/themes/re-imaginingpeace/va/country/congo_violence.pdf, 1.

³ See, for example, Onesphore Sematumba, *Ituri: The War within a War* (Goma: Pole Institute, March 2003), and United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and Integrated Regional Information Networks (Irin), “DRC: Special Report on Ituri District, Northeastern DRC,” December 18, 2002, accessed December 8, 2010, www.irinnews.org/webspecials/Ituri/default.asp.

⁴ Human Rights Watch, *Covered in Blood: Ethnically Targeted Violence in Northeastern DR Congo*, HRW vol. 15, no. 11 (A), July 2003, 8.

latent tensions over land between two of the most dominant ethnic groups in Ituri had been unleashed.⁵ Nearly a decade of death, displacement, and deprivation followed. An estimated 60,000 people were killed⁶ and an additional 500,000 displaced.⁷ An unknown but substantial number remain displaced today.

For the time being, a tenuous peace prevails.⁸ But as displaced communities return to the land they inhabited before the war only to find it occupied by their “enemies”⁹ and as chiefs of one ethnicity forbid pre-war residents of the other ethnicity from returning to their native *localités*, antagonism between the Hema and the Lendu over access to land is building anew.¹⁰

This thesis explores the current state of “relative peace” in Ituri by examining ethnic land conflict and the discourse surrounding it in two villages in the

⁵ Thierry Vircoulon, “The Ituri Paradox: When Armed Groups have a Land Policy and Peacemakers Do Not,” in *The Struggle over Land in Africa: Conflicts, Politics & Change*, ed. Ward Anseeuw and Chris Alden (Cape Town: HRSC Press, 2010), 209.

⁶ Johan Pottier, “Roadblock Ethnography: Negotiating Humanitarian Access in Ituri, Eastern DR Congo, 1994-2004,” *Africa* 76, no. 2 (2006): 150.

⁷ Vircoulon, “Ituri Paradox,” 209.

⁸ For example, Beneduce et al., refer to a situation of “neither-peace-nor-war” in “Violence with a Purpose,” 1-2.

⁹ Throughout July and August 2010 and May and August 2011, the Hema and Lendu of Sanduku referred to each other as *les ennemis* (“the enemies”) in their conversations with the author.

¹⁰ Interviews with members of the Hema and Lendu communities, Djugu territory, July and August 2010 and May and August 2011, and interviews with UN Habitat Bunia team members, July 2010 and August 2011. For a published discussion of emerging tensions, see, for example, Pottier, “Representations,” 24.

neighboring territories of Djugu and Mahagi in the eastern part of the district.¹¹ It aims to illuminate the sources of tension between conflicting parties and to explore the consequences of present land conflicts in the lives of those directly involved, as well as those in more distant places. The thesis comprises three immersive non-fiction articles with accompanying multimedia elements, housed on the website www.relativepeace.com.

The Ituri Conflict: Background and Literature Review

Ituri district is located in Orientale province in the northeastern corner of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, bordering Uganda to the east and South Sudan to the north.¹² Comprising five territories—Djugu, Mahagi, Irumu, Aru, and Mambasa—it has a population of between 3.5 and 6.5 million.¹³ Approximately ten

¹¹ In a local land conflict sensitization session (“*La prévention et la résolution des conflits fonciers dans Bahema sud et Bahema Banywagi*,” or “The prevention and resolution of land conflicts in Bahema South and Bahema Banywagi”) organized by UN Habitat, MONUC, RCN Justice & Démocratie, and UNHCR in Tchomia, Ituri, DRC, on July 7, 2010, the situation in Ituri was referred to as “*une paix relative*,” or a relative peace, from which this project takes its name.

¹² The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) will be referred to as “the Congo,” not to be confused with neighboring Republic of Congo, or Congo-Brazzaville. The eastern provinces of the Congo are usually considered to be North and South Kivu and the Ituri district of Oriental. See, for example, Séverine Autesserre, *The Trouble with the Congo: Local Violence and the Failure of International Peacebuilding* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), xiii. Congolese land is organized into the following administrative units, from national to local: there are 11 provinces, divided into *districtes*, made up of *territoires*, split into *collectivités*, composed of *groupements*, and containing a number of *localités*.

¹³ Vircoulon cites a population of 4 million in “Ituri Paradox,” 209. Gérard Prunier, a historian and political scientist specializing in the Great Lakes region of Africa, gives a figure of 3.5 million in his report to the International Criminal Court in the case against Thomas Lubanga Dyilo, ICC-01/04-01/06, document ICC-01-04-01-06-T-156-ENG ET

ethnic groups live in Ituri, although the Lendu and Hema dominate, making up a total of about 40 percent of the population, with the Lendu being significantly more numerous than the Hema at about three to one.¹⁴ Ituri is considered to be a part of the Great Lakes region of Africa, an area that spans some 300,000 square miles and includes Rwanda, Burundi, southwestern Uganda, and the eastern provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.¹⁵ While there is no “Great Lakes identity,” political scientist René Lemarchand suggests that the presence of national boundaries obscures the incestuous nature of interactions between inhabitants of the region:

Viewing [each nation’s] agonies in isolation from each other reveals only a fraction of the regional forces at work behind the surge of ethnic strife. . . Only through a regional lens can one bring into focus the violent patterns of interaction that form the essential backdrop to the spread of bloodshed within and across boundaries.¹⁶

The Rwandan genocide of 1994 is perhaps the most familiar twentieth-century manifestation of conflict dynamics in the region, but it is one of many in the history of the Great Lakes region and, surprisingly, not the deadliest. As Lemarchand notes,

WT 26-03-2009 1-97 NBT.doc, accessed November 20, 2001, <http://www.icc-cpi.int/iccdocs/doc/doc650921.pdf>, 17. A report titled “The Demographic Situation in Province Orientale,” provided to the court by the provincial government, states that there were just over 6.5 million residents in Ituri as of December 2007. See ICC-01-04-01-06-T-156-ENG ET WT 26-03-2009 1-97 NBT.doc, 18.

¹⁴ Vircoulon, 209-210.

¹⁵ René Lemarchand, *The Dynamics of Violence in Central Africa* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 3.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 3, x.

“public revulsion over the Rwandan genocide has all but overshadowed the far greater scale of the human losses suffered in eastern Congo.”¹⁷

Neither the Lendu nor the Hema originated in Ituri district. However, there is general agreement that Lendu agriculturalists arrived first, perhaps before the sixteenth century, from Sudan, while the Hema pastoralists began settling in the area in the late seventeenth century after having migrated from Uganda.¹⁸ The earliest Hema migrants, known as the Gegere Hema, settled in Djugu, intermarried with the Lendu, and adopted the Lendu language. Despite Lendu cultural influence, the Hema had a much more developed political structure, in contrast to the loose social units of the Lendu, and were able to organize the Lendu under their authority, at least to some degree, before the Belgians colonized the area. The resulting integration was marked by social stratification, which granted Hema political and economic dominance and the power to expand territorially. In pre-colonial times,

¹⁷ Ibid., ix.

¹⁸ The three scholars who have written most extensively on the Ituri conflict, Johan Pottier, Koen Vlassenroot, and Timothy Raeymaekers, offer similar historical contexts of the conflict. All information in this paragraph is drawn from the following pieces unless otherwise noted: Johan Pottier, “Displacement and Ethnic Reintegration in Ituri, DR Congo: Challenges Ahead,” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 36, no. 3 (2008): 431-432; Koen Vlassenroot and Tim Raeymaekers, “The Formation of New Political Complexes: Dynamics of Conflict in Ituri, Democratic Republic of Congo,” Occasional Paper, Center of African Studies, University of Copenhagen, October 2003, 5-6; Koen Vlassenroot and Timothy Raeymaekers, “The Politics of Rebellion and Intervention in Ituri: The Emergence of a New Political Complex?” *African Affairs* 103, no. 412 (2004): 388.

the Lendu did not actively resist dispossession because of the abundance of land and the favorable trading relationships between the two groups.¹⁹

Belgian colonial rule exacerbated and created tensions between the groups. In response to small clashes, the colonial administration attempted to segregate the groups into separate villages, or *localités*, each under its own chief.²⁰ Djugu thus “developed into a mosaic of ethnic villages that dovetail into each other.”²¹ Each ethnic *localité* was assigned to an ethnic *collectivité*, a territorial unit similar to a county, though *collectivités* were often non-contiguous. In addition, the Belgians saw the Hema as “a god-sent superior race, qualified to assist them in their ‘civilizing mission.’”²² As such, the Hema were granted undue access to educational and commercial opportunities and to mines and plantations, thereby consolidating their pre-colonial political, educational, and economic dominance over the Lendu.²³ The Lendu, on the other hand, avoided involvement with the colonial administration.²⁴

The imbalances of the colonial era were continued under the post-colonial administration.²⁵ Under the 1973 policy of Zairianization, the government seized

¹⁹ Ibid., and Vircoulon, “Ituri Paradox,” 210.

²⁰ Pottier, “Displacement,” 433; Vircoulon, “Ituri Paradox,” 210; and Vlassenroot and Raeymaekers, “Politics,” 389.

²¹ Pottier, “Displacement,” 433.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.; Vircoulon, “Ituri Paradox,” 210; and Vlassenroot and Raeymaekers, “Politics,” 388, 390.

²⁴ Vircoulon, “Ituri Paradox,” 210.

²⁵ Ibid., and Vlassenroot and Raeymaekers, “Politics,” 390.

foreign-owned agricultural enterprises.²⁶ The General Property Law of 1973 declared all land the property of the state²⁷ and allowed ancestral lands to be appropriated by the state for private sale,²⁸ despite constitutional provisions protecting property obtained under customary law that exist even today. Mobutu promised that a Presidential Act to regulate the usage of customary lands would follow, but it never did. The General Property Law “de facto abrogated community rights in land,” Pottier explained, but the population—particularly rural peasants—was poorly informed, so most people continued to live just as before.²⁹

The Hema, due to their education and favored position with the authorities, were disproportionately able to take advantage of new opportunities to purchase concessions, or the right to use land for commercial purposes.³⁰ Ownership of much of Ituri’s prime land was transferred to elite Hema.³¹ According to Vircoulon:

This unequal process in the Africanisation of landownership led to the emergence of a rural capitalism and the creation of a Hema farming elite. . . . the Lendus became tenants on Hema farms and land use between the pastoralists and agriculturalists sometimes became cause for conflict, with several inter-communal clashes occurring in post-colonial times (1969, 1971, 1981 and 1992). . . .During most of

²⁶ Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja, *The Congo from Leopold to Kabila: A People’s History* (London: Zed Books, 2002), 148.

²⁷ Koen Vlassenroot and Timothy Raeymaekers, *Conflict and Social Transformation in Eastern DR Congo* (Gent: Academia Press Scientific Publishers, 2004), 44.

²⁸ Pottier, “Representations,” 26. See also Vlassenroot and Raeymaekers, “Politics,” 390.

²⁹ Pottier, “Displacement,” 435.

³⁰ In 1969, President Mobutu appointed a Hema as Minister of Agriculture. See Vircoulon, “Ituri Paradox,” 210.

³¹ Pottier, “Displacement,” 433. See also Vlassenroot and Raeymaekers, “Politics,” 390.

President Mobutu's 32-year reign, the government sided with the Hema elite, and this favouritism fuelled Lendu resentment.³²

The Lendu claimed that the Hema were colluding with their tribesman-administrators to buy land, while the Hema believed that the real problem was that "the numerically dominant Lendu were ignorant of the fine detail of land legislation."³³

In any event, although Hema pastoralists had been gradually displacing Lendu agriculturalists from ancestral lands since the 1973 General Property Law was passed, expropriations increased drastically in 1999 when Ugandan troops in Ituri began to accept payment from wealthy Hema entrepreneurs for evicting tenants.³⁴ The Hema were able to do away with the two-years' notice required by the General Property Law to be given to the occupants of purchased ancestral land.³⁵ Full-scale war might have been averted, but Pottier argues that "hope of a solution [to land conflicts between the Lendu and elite Hema] evaporated when Brigadier James Kazini, the commander of the Ugandan forces (UPDF) in Congo,

³² Vircoulon, "Ituri Paradox," 210. Mobutu Sese Seko was the president from 1965 to 1997 of the present Democratic Republic of the Congo (called Zaire for much of his reign). He assumed power through a bloodless military coup and oversaw an authoritarian regime propped up by the United States, among others. Mobutu is notorious for amassing vast personal wealth while completely neglecting the welfare and development of the country and its people.

³³ Pottier, "Representations," 26.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

appointed Gegere Hema businesswoman Adèle Lotsove as governor of Ituri and Haut-Uele.”³⁶ The Lendu were hopelessly disenfranchised.

The UPDF had first occupied Ituri during a 1996-1997 campaign to oust Congolese President Mobutu Sese Seko and install Laurent Kabila in his place.³⁷ During this time, Uganda began to illegally exploit diamond, gold, and other mineral deposits. Ugandan gold exports in 1996-1997 totaled US\$110 million, compared to \$35 million in 1995-1996.³⁸

UPDF reoccupied Ituri in 1998. Congolese political historian Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja argues that the Ugandans “had hoped to find in Laurent Kabila . . . a useful cover for their strategic interest in creating a buffer zone of economic and political security in eastern Congo. Since Kabila had not lived up to their expectations, Rwanda and Uganda were determined to find a new Congolese puppet.”³⁹ The war against Kabila that erupted on August 2, 1998, has often been cast as a civil war between Kabila and Congolese Tutsis; however, Nzongola-Ntalaja believes that “there is no truth to the widely held view that Uganda and Rwanda intervened in support of a rebellion by Congolese Tutsi and their allies.”⁴⁰ Rather,

³⁶ Johan Pottier, “Emergency in Ituri, DRC: Political Complexity, Land and Other Challenges in Restoring Food Security,” FAO International Workshop on Food Security in Complex Emergencies: Building Policy Frameworks to Address Longer-Term Programming Challenges, Tivoli, September 23-25, 2003, 4.

³⁷ Vlassenroot and Raeymakers, “Politics,” 403.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 403-404.

³⁹ Nzongola-Ntalaja, *Leopold to Kabila*, 227.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

Uganda and Rwanda “initiated the war” to depose Kabila.⁴¹ However, in Ituri, the UPDF concentrated on establishing a “regime of pillage” to exploit the “gold, diamonds, timber, coffee and tea of the northeast.”⁴² Vlassenroot and Raeymaekers confirm that UPDF officers “quickly developed into veritable ‘entrepreneurs of insecurity,’ i.e., individuals for whom the persistence of insecurity both within and outside national boundaries had become their primary source of enrichment.”⁴³ Thus, while the initial goal of the 1998 Ugandan occupation of Ituri was to oust Laurent Kabila, the agenda rapidly shifted to consolidating economic control of Ituri’s vast natural resources.⁴⁴

Fighting broke out in June 1999 when a group of Lendu reacted with violence to the land appropriations by Hema *cessionaires*, or landowners.⁴⁵ The situation escalated into what Pottier calls “tit-for-tat mass slaughter and mass displacements, always ethnic in nature.”⁴⁶ For example, massacres of Hema in Blukwa,⁴⁷ Dhendro (1999),⁴⁸ Nyakunde (2001 and 2002), and Bogoro and of Lendu in Songolo (2002), Lipri (2003), Banbu (2003), Kobu (2003) and Drodro (2003), among other places,

⁴¹ Ibid., 228.

⁴² Ibid., 237.

⁴³ Vlassenroot and Raeymaekers, “Politics,” 405.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ See, for example, Vlassenroot and Raeymaekers, “Politics,” 391; Vircoulon, “Ituri Paradox,” 209; Pottier, “Displacement,” 434-435.

⁴⁶ Pottier, “Representations,” 28.

⁴⁷ Pottier, “Displacement,” 435.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 436.

followed.⁴⁹ Seven local ethnic militias were formed, each with ties to “one or several of the regional powers”—Uganda, Rwanda, and armed groups such as MLC, RCD/ML, RCD-K/ML, among others.⁵⁰ The UPDF generally sided with elite Hema and Thomas Lubanga’s Union of Congolese Patriots (UPC, the most popular and powerful Hema militia group) in provoking war with Lendu farmers.⁵¹ The Lendu organized, most prominently, under the Front for National Integration (FNI) and the Front for the Patriotic Resistance in Ituri (FRPI).⁵²

Between March and June 2003, the conflict culminated in the Hema and Lendu militias fighting for control of Bunia, the capital of Ituri.⁵³ MONUC “proved increasingly incapable of protecting the inhabitants [of Bunia] against militia attacks.”⁵⁴ As a result, the UN Security Council authorized Operation Artemis under Chapter VII of the UN Charter.⁵⁵ Led by the French, Operation Artemis was able to secure Bunia between June and September 2003 but could not stem the violence

⁴⁹ Vircoulon, “Ituri Paradox,” 212.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 211. MLC is *Mouvement pour la Liberation du Congo*; according to Nzongola-Ntalaja, *Leopold to Kabila*, 231, it was created by Uganda in 1998. RCD-ML is *Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie – Mouvement de Liberation*; Nzongola-Ntalaja, 230, states that the group depended on Ugandan tutelage to such an extent that it could no longer be considered an autonomous group. RCD-K/ML is the branch based in the city of Kisangani, where Ugandan and Rwandan forces fought each other for control of the northeast’s resources. Nzongola-Ntalaja, 237.

⁵¹ Pottier, “Displacement,” 436. Lubanga was convicted at the International Criminal Court on March 14, 2012. See also, Pottier, “Representations,” 27.

⁵² Vircoulon, “Ituri Paradox,” 211, and Pottier, “Representations,” 27.

⁵³ Vircoulon, “Ituri Paradox,” 212.

⁵⁴ Vlassenroot and Raeymaekers, “Politics,” 400.

⁵⁵ Pottier, “Representations,” 29.

ravaging the rest of Ituri.⁵⁶ MONUC took over the mandate, but by 2004, it had “still proved incapable of controlling the Ituri countryside.”⁵⁷

On May 14, 2004, Ituri’s militias signed the Kinshasa Act of Commitment, a peace declaration that “had no future,” since “warlords had ‘entered the negotiations knowing that if their largely unreasonable demands for status, jobs, and immunity from prosecution were refused, they would continue their activities without fear of sanction.’”⁵⁸ The international community declared victory, but sure enough, fighting continued, and another 100,000 people were displaced in Djugu and Mahagi.⁵⁹

In 2005 and 2006, the number of displacements and the extent of the ethnic cleansing increased drastically.⁶⁰ For example, over the course of three months, about 100,000 Hema, or roughly the entire remaining Hema population of Djugu, was displaced, and some 70 Hema villages were burnt.⁶¹ However, by late 2006, the security situation in Djugu improved, and Hema internally displaced people (IDPs) began to return home.⁶² By August 2007, Ituri’s militias were largely disarmed, and the remaining 200,000 refugees began to leave IDP camps.⁶³

⁵⁶ Pottier, “Representations,” 29, and Vlassenroot and Raeymaekers, “Politics,” 400.

⁵⁷ Vlassenroot and Raeymaekers, “Politics,” 400.

⁵⁸ Pottier, “Displacement,” 438, citing International Crisis Group.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Pottier, “Displacement,” 439.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*, 440.

Yet, leaving the camps did not necessarily mean going home, and it did not guarantee peace. Tensions over access to land continue to simmer as displaced people, both Hema and Lendu, return home to find their land occupied.⁶⁴ Others, who before the war lived as ethnic minorities in their communities, are being blocked from returning to their *localités* because of their ethnicity, despite being recognized as legitimate landowners.⁶⁵ Mobutu's rule introduced "violence based on ethnic identity as a legitimate instrument for change,"⁶⁶ a legacy that continues to this day.

The Ituri Conflict, in sum, was an ethnic war sparked by land conflict that was then "manipulated by powerful neighbors"⁶⁷ in a "struggle between informal networks that link local warlords and rebel leaders with their external sponsors."⁶⁸ Yet, its essential cause was "a deeply rooted local political conflict for access to land, economic opportunity and political power."⁶⁹

The major cause of the Ituri Conflict, disputes over access to land, has not been addressed, and has in fact been complicated in the post-war period. Vircoulon

⁶³ Ibid., 427.

⁶⁴ Vircoulon, "Ituri Paradox," 213; Pottier, "Displacement," 447.

⁶⁵ Interviews conducted in Djugu, August 2011.

⁶⁶ Vlassenroot and Raeymaekers, "Politics," 391.

⁶⁷ Vircoulon, "Ituri Paradox," 209.

⁶⁸ Vlassenroot and Raeymaekers, "Politics," 387.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 385.

explains that “the ethnic war has resulted in significant land redistribution: the victorious tribe occupies the loser’s land or, in other cases, just prevents the losing tribe from returning to its land.”⁷⁰ Though there were not any clear “winners” or “losers” in the Ituri Conflict, it is true that the war led to massive land redistribution as entire communities were displaced. The post-war phase has been “dominated by the necessity [for each tribe] to consolidate their hold on conquered land,” Vircoulon adds, resulting in “illegal resettlements that create a breeding ground for resentment and future retaliation by newly dispossessed groups.”⁷¹ Returned IDPs, discovering the ethnic other on their land,⁷² find it impossible to make a living through agriculture⁷³ and want to take their land back.⁷⁴

Pottier also believes that “durable peace” has not yet been achieved; he writes that while IDPs may have returned to their pre-war communities, “this does not mean that the threat of future ethnic confrontations has ceased.”⁷⁵ The problem has been compounded by chiefs who delay in allocating land to returned minority *déplacés*.⁷⁶ As recently as 2009, he noted that communal land problems were a

⁷⁰ Vircoulon, “Ituri Paradox,” 213.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Autesserre, *Problem with the Congo*, 174.

⁷³ Vircoulon, “Ituri Paradox,” 213.

⁷⁴ Autesserre, *Problem with the Congo*, 174.

⁷⁵ Pottier, “Displacement,” 447.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 442. *Déplacés* are internally displaced people, or IDPs.

major impediment to a complete and lasting peace in the region.⁷⁷ As of March 2012, many chiefs were still refusing to grant permission for pre-war minority populations to return to their villages.⁷⁸

Non-governmental organizations and United Nations bodies have pointed to two major challenges facing Ituri during the post-war period. The first concerns the need for a strong state that can ensure security and provide basic services such as health care and rule of law.⁷⁹ The Congolese state is weak to non-existent, especially in the eastern part of the country.⁸⁰ Furthermore, district and even local authorities have little real power, either because they have lost legitimacy by not remaining neutral during the Ituri Conflict or because the war so completely disrupted all service provision.⁸¹ Without a strong state, there is a culture of impunity that encourages people to take justice into their own hands.⁸² There have been few or no state-run reconciliation programs between the ethnic groups involved in the Ituri

⁷⁷ Ibid., “Representations,” 23.

⁷⁸ Interviews, March 2012.

⁷⁹ See, for example, UNHCR, “Supplementary Appeal: Protection and assistance to IDPs in the Democratic Republic of the Congo,” February 2007, accessed December 9, 2010, <http://www.unhcr.org/45d1837d2.html>, 10.

⁸⁰ Chris Huggins et al., “Conflict in the Great Lakes Region – How is it Linked with Land and Migration?” *Natural Resource Perspectives*, no. 96 (2005): 2.

⁸¹ UNHCR “Supplementary Appeal,” 5, 10; Pax Christi, “Perspectives de Paix en Ituri: Recommandations Politiques aux Autorités Belges et les Institutions Europeéenes,” September 2003, 3, 9.

⁸² David Mugnier, “En Finir avec le Conflit de l’Ituri,” June 12, 2008, accessed September 18, 2010, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/africa/central-africa/dr-congo/mugnier-en-finir-avec-le-conflit-de-l-ituri.aspx>; International Crisis Group (ICG), “Congo: Four Priorities for Sustainable Peace,” *Africa Report* No. 140, May 13, 2008, *i*.

Conflict.⁸³ Alternate actors have assumed power, notably the Ugandan army, which, until recently, was accused of occupying Ituri and supporting various armed groups in order to access its vast mineral wealth.⁸⁴ Control of natural resources remains a contentious issue; reports suggest that the Congolese army, FARDC, has been profiting from illegal extraction.⁸⁵ Under these circumstances, armed groups and citizens alike have been reluctant to disarm.⁸⁶ As a result, security remains a serious concern, and individuals cannot claim rights or mediate land disputes lawfully; humanitarian actors are also unable to effectively implement conflict resolution or reconstruction programs.⁸⁷ The combination of these factors makes the resumption of ethnic violence more likely.⁸⁸

The second major challenge revolves around the urgent need to address land conflicts between *déplacés* (IDPs) and *retournés*⁸⁹ (former IDPs). Many of the structural causes of long-term land conflict have yet to be resolved.⁹⁰ UN reports, in

⁸³ ICG, “Four Priorities,” *i*.

⁸⁴ Mugnier, “En Finir”; ICG, “Four Priorities,” *i*; Pax Christi, “Perspectives de Paix,” 3; Huggins et al., “Conflict in the Great Lakes,” 2.

⁸⁵ See, for example, Mugnier, “En Finir,” and ICG, “Four Priorities,” *i, ii*.

⁸⁶ Mugnier, “En Finir”; ICG, “Four Priorities,” *i, ii, iii*.

⁸⁷ UNHCR, “Supplementary Appeal,” 10.

⁸⁸ ICG, “Four Priorities,” *i*.

⁸⁹ *Retournés* are IDPs who have returned to their pre-war residences but who may or may not still be considered IDPs depending on whether they find their old land occupied.

⁹⁰ UNHCR “Supplementary Appeal,” 3.

particular, stress that if unaddressed, land conflicts will undermine peace efforts.⁹¹ This means, that in addition to conducting mediations of conflicts as they arise and holding sensitization sessions to educate the population about land conflict,⁹² NGOs and the UN are pushing for land law reform and a clarification of the role of customary leaders.⁹³ There has been longstanding confusion in the country about the laws of ownership and state vs. customary jurisdiction.

In addition to the threat of violence or further displacement due to land disputes, the literature deals with other consequences of displacement or long-term land insecurity. The chief concerns include increased rates of infectious and water-borne disease, food insecurity and malnutrition, widespread sexual violence exacerbated by the presence of troops and the lack of secure housing, and the disruption of children's education.⁹⁴ These problems all contribute to the high rates

⁹¹ Mugnier, "En Finir"; UNHCR, "Supplementary Appeal," 5; OCHA Humanitarian Briefing, "Population Movements in Eastern DR Congo, July – September 2009," September 2009, 8.

⁹² Mugnier, "En Finir"; UNHCR, "Supplementary Appeal," 8-9.

⁹³ Marcelin Djoza, "Conflits Fonciers en Ituri: Les Limites de la Politique et de la Loi," accessed September 18, 2010, <http://www.rcn-ong.be/Conflits-fonciers-en-Ituri-Les?lang=fr>; Huggins et al., "Conflict in the Great Lakes," 1-4; Mugnier, "En Finir"; UNHCR, "Supplementary Appeal," 8-9; UN OCHA, "Humanitarian Action Plan 2010," accessed September 21, 2010, <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900SID/ASHU-7ZYSTV?OpenDocument>.

⁹⁴ UNHCR "Supplementary Appeal," 5; UNICEF, "UNICEF Humanitarian Action Update: Democratic Republic of the Congo: Urgent Support Required for over a Million Displaced Women and Children," June 1, 2010, accessed December 9, 2010, www.unicef.org/.../UNICEF_Humanitarian_Action_Update_-_DRC-_1_June_2010.pdf; OCHA, "Humanitarian Action Plan 2010"; Médecins Sans Frontiers, "Ituri: Civilians Still the First Victims: Permanence of Sexual Violence and Impact of Military Operations," October 2007, accessed December 9, 2010, <http://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/publications/article.cfm?id=2134>.

of excess death documented by the ICG and UNHCR and threaten to undermine long-term stability and development in the region.⁹⁵

The mainstream media has failed to report on post-war land conflict in Ituri, and coverage of post-war Ituri as a whole has been thin. A search of major world publications in English and French revealed no coverage of “post-conflict” land conflict or the challenges faced by *déplacés* or *retournés* in Ituri in the mainstream media.⁹⁶ However, Ituri has recently garnered headlines due to the International Criminal Court’s first conviction, that of Thomas Lubanga, a Hema from Ituri found guilty of recruiting, training, and deploying hundreds of child soldiers in the Ituri Conflict.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ UNHCR, “Supplementary Appeal,” 5.

⁹⁶ Using LexisNexis and Google News searches, my search terms used include: Ituri + land + conflict; Ituri + land; Ituri + conflict; Ituri + internally displaced; Ituri + returnees. The search was limited to articles published after June 1999 (in order to restrict results to articles potentially related to the Ituri Conflict and its aftermath) in the “All News” (including international) category of LexisNexis. It should be stressed that these searches did return results; however, they were almost entirely articles produced by the UN News Wire, the UN Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN), or NGOs operating in the area.

⁹⁷ See, for example, Sheila Velez, “Lubanga Trial Highlights the Plight of Child Soldiers,” January 6, 2010, accessed December 9, 2010, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201001060050.html>; Daniel Howden, “Congolese ‘Warlords’ Deny Slaughtering Entire Villages; Second Trial at Permanent Court Hears Militia Leaders Raped and Killed Scores,” *The Independent* (London), November 25, 2009, accessed December 9, 2010, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/congolese-warlords-deny-slaughtering-entire-villages-1826939.html>; Max Delany, “Lubanga’s Neighbors Split over War Crimes Trial,” *Christian Science Monitor*, March 11, 2009, accessed December 9, 2010, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Africa/2009/0311/p06s01-woaf.html>; “Bringing Justice to the Warlords,” *Toronto Star*, February 1, 2009, pg. A14.

In January 2010, human rights and African affairs freelancer Jina Moore wrote a piece for the *Christian Science Monitor* on the role of land conflicts in provoking violent conflicts in Africa. The article suggests that “Africa’s most famous disasters [including, perhaps, the Rwandan genocide] . . . could have been prevented with changes in national land laws.”⁹⁸ It briefly mentions the conflicts between herders and cultivators in North Kivu, which borders Ituri District, and a related story published on the same day cites Ituri as an example of land conflict that degenerated into open combat.⁹⁹

Photojournalists have also done some work in Ituri. In 2008, Belgian photographer Cédric Gerbehaye published a project called *Congo in Limbo*, for which he was recognized with seven awards, including a World Press Photo award.¹⁰⁰ In 2010, *Congo in Limbo* was released as a book.¹⁰¹ While much of *Congo in Limbo* focused on the devastating aftermath of the Second Congo War in the North and South Kivu provinces, Gerbehaye also visited Ituri, where he documented the demobilization of child soldiers from the major militias involved in the Ituri Conflict.

⁹⁸ Jina Moore, “Africa’s Continental Divide: Land Disputes; African Land Reform, Plot by Plot, May be the Foundation for Solving So Much Else – From Famine to Poverty to Genocide,” *Christian Science Monitor*, January 30, 2010, accessed December 6, 2010, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Africa/2010/0130/Africa-s-continental-divide-land-disputes>.

⁹⁹ Ibid., and Jina Moore, “Land Disputes at the Root of African Wars: A Selection of the African Continent’s Fights over Land that Have Turned into Violent Conflict, or Threaten to,” *Christian Science Monitor*, January 30, 2010, accessed December 6, 2010, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Africa/2010/0130/Land-disputes-at-the-root-of-African-wars>.

¹⁰⁰ “Biography,” accessed April 9, 2012, www.congoinlimbo.com.

¹⁰¹ Cédric Gerbehaye et al., *Congo in Limbo* (Marseilles: Le bec en l’air, 2010).

Several images of Gerbehaye's work in Ituri were featured in a 2007 Time.com Photo Essay called "Congo's Child Soldiers."¹⁰² Prominent photographer James Nachtwey published a series of photos documenting eastern Congo's post-conflict problems in February 2009, including several taken in Ituri.¹⁰³ However, these images center on the mining industry in Mongbwalu and hospital care in Bunia and do not address land issues directly. In May 2006, Scott McKiernan published a photo story on IDPs in Ituri as a result of the Ituri Conflict.¹⁰⁴

Media effects scholar Shanto Iyengar describes a news duality that might explain why land conflict in Ituri and elsewhere in Africa has not been extensively covered in the media, despite its central role in African conflict. Iyengar distinguishes between two types of news coverage: episodic and thematic.¹⁰⁵ Episodic coverage is "event-oriented and depicts public issues in terms of concrete instances,"¹⁰⁶ for example, a story of a massacre or battle. Thematic frames, however, present issues "in some more general or abstract context and takes the form of a 'takeout,' or 'backgrounder,' report directed at general outcomes or

¹⁰² Cédric Gerbehaye, "Congo's Child Soldiers," *Time* Photo Essay, October 19, 2007, accessed April 9, 2012, <http://www.time.com/time/photogallery/0,29307,1673770,00.html>.

¹⁰³ James Nachtwey, "Can Change Come to Congo?" *Time* Photo Essay, February 11, 2009, accessed April 9, 2012, <http://www.time.com/time/photogallery/0,29307,1878837,00.html>.

¹⁰⁴ Scott McKiernan, "Congo: Election of Death," May 26, 2006, accessed April 9, 2012, <http://www.zreportage.com/zReportage.html?num=zrep111>.

¹⁰⁵ Shanto Iyengar, *Is Anyone Responsible? How Television Frames Political Issues* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 4.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

conditions.”¹⁰⁷ Reports on land conflict, which require extensive historical context and analysis of social, economic and political trends, fall into this latter category. The media are predisposed to episodic coverage because it is more efficient and requires fewer resources than thematic coverage.¹⁰⁸ As Moore notes in her article on land conflict, scholars have long tried, generally in vain, to spark interest in “something that sounds boring—land disputes—before it turns into something that is not—war.”¹⁰⁹

Justification

Why invest the considerable resources required to produce immersive journalism about people affected by a mostly non-violent conflict in a remote corner of a country in Central Africa? There are no immediate implications for American national interests or foreign policy, and the topic is not a straightforward humanitarian problem, like a flood or an earthquake, with obvious solutions. There are no piles of corpses to momentarily shock or provoke audiences into paying attention, as has been a fixture in coverage of other African conflicts.¹¹⁰ Nevertheless, the media have a responsibility to cover stories like this.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 15.

¹⁰⁹ Moore, “Africa’s Continental Divide.”

¹¹⁰ Scholars have shown that news coverage tends to follow US interests. For example, Livingston reports that coverage of events in Bosnia was relatively more extensive than other humanitarian crises occurring at the same time because of NATO’s interests in the area: “news coverage followed US involvement,” Steven Livingston, “Limited Vision: How Both the American Media and the Government Failed Rwanda,” in Allan

News coverage can influence the outcomes of events by affecting public opinion. As Lipstadt notes in her study of the American press during the Holocaust, the press is not a neutral narrator but rather an actor and a catalyst.¹¹¹ Although the press does not determine what people think—that is, the “direction or intensity of attitudes”¹¹²—it is “stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about.”¹¹³ The amount and positioning of coverage suggests to news consumers the relative importance they should place on issues, perhaps because they have little

Thompson, ed., *The Media and the Rwanda Genocide* (London: Pluto Press, 2007), 193. American media also tend to focus on “one-shot problems with specific solutions,” according to Susan D. Moeller, *Compassion Fatigue: How the Media Sell Disease, Famine, War and Death* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 8. For example, coverage of the “black hole” of the Rwandan genocide was sparse (Moeller, *Compassion Fatigue*, 225); during the peak months of the genocide, American broadcast networks “devoted relatively little attention to the systematic extermination of nearly a million people” (Livingston, “Limited Vision,” 194). Coverage of the crisis increased dramatically after the genocide of Tutsis stopped and Hutu began to flee into former Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo). Moeller writes that “once the slaughter ended and the refugees settled in camps at the borders, a potential military debacle turned into a doable humanitarian effort that the US forces were well-equipped to solve. So the Americans went in,” (Moeller, *Compassion Fatigue*, 225). Livingston confirms that “the vast majority of CNN news stories about Rwanda were not about the Hutu massacre of Tutsi and moderate Hutu; instead, they were about the Hutu refugees who fled Rwanda” (Livingston, “Limited Vision,” 195). In *Media and Morality: On the Rise of the Mediapolis*, the author argues that the media use shocking images to grab the attention of audiences and to invoke their pity, allowing them to feel engaged with “the other” in his moment of crisis. However, if the media present catastrophe using conventions that bring “tragedy and trauma onto the threshold it nevertheless also makes it easy to deposit them both outside the back door.” Roger Silverstone, *Media and Morality: On the Rise of the Mediapolis* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 130.

¹¹¹ Deborah E. Lipstadt, *Beyond Belief: The American Press and the Coming of the Holocaust 1933-1945* (New York: The Free Press, 1986), 3.

¹¹² Maxwell E. McCombs and Donald L. Shaw, “The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media,” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (1972): 177.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, citing Bernard C. Cohen, *The Press and Foreign Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 13.

personal experience of them.¹¹⁴ Since this is particularly true in the arena of international affairs, the agenda-setting power of the media is even stronger regarding coverage of international problems.¹¹⁵ By not reporting on certain conflicts, the media send the message that these conflicts and the people who suffer because of them are not deserving of our attention.¹¹⁶ Yet two examples from twentieth century history—the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide—suggest that the media could have prevented the loss of hundreds of thousands of lives by mobilizing public opinion to intervene in foreign conflicts.¹¹⁷ Therefore, coverage of foreign conflicts or sources of potential conflict is critical.

In *Beyond Belief*, Lipstadt demonstrates how the American press consistently downplayed or rationalized Germany's treatment of Jews from 1933—when anti-Semitic rhetoric began to circulate and small-scale abuses to occur—through 1945, by which time the conflict had taken the lives of millions. Of course, the press itself did not have the power to intervene; it was the isolationist American government that could have put pressure on the Nazi government when it began to abuse human rights, could have relaxed immigration policies to accept Jewish refugees, and could have intervened militarily when the scope of the human rights abuses became

¹¹⁴ McCombs and Shaw, "Agenda Setting," 176.

¹¹⁵ Wayne Wanta and Yu-Wei Hu, "The Agenda-Setting Effects of International News Coverage: An Examination of Differing News Frames," *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 5, no. 3 (1993): 253.

¹¹⁶ Lipstadt, 3.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.

clear.¹¹⁸ It is impossible to know with certainty whether increased American coverage would have roused the public enough to precipitate government action.¹¹⁹ However, Lipstadt argues, the press failed the American public by treating news of Nazi atrocities with equanimity, dispassion, skepticism and indifference, “making it virtually certain that there would be no public outcry and no ‘common activity’ to try to succor this suffering people.”¹²⁰ Cull, in *Selling War*, a study of British efforts to draw the United States into World War II, similarly notes the influence of the press. He wrote that the executive branch of the American government could only act inasmuch as “the Congress, the press, and public opinion would allow it to.”¹²¹

There are more recent examples of the press failing to act as a watchdog against conflict and flagrant human rights abuses in foreign lands. Political scientist René Lemarchand has remarked that “public revulsion over the Rwandan genocide has all but overshadowed the far greater scale of the human losses suffered in eastern Congo.”¹²² Despite the relative abundance of coverage of the Rwandan genocide compared to the crises in neighboring Congo, scholars and human rights advocates have criticized the international media for their slow and inadequate response as the genocide progressed. Journalism professor and reporter Thompson, editor of *The Media and the Rwanda Genocide*, has called international coverage of

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 277.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 278.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Nicholas John Cull, *Selling War: The British Propaganda Campaign Against American “Neutrality” in World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 3.

¹²² Lemarchand, *Dynamics of Violence*, ix.

the genocide “an abysmal media failure”¹²³ because “more informed and comprehensive coverage of the Rwanda genocide, particularly in those early days, might well have mitigated or even halted the killing by sparking an international outcry. The news media could have made a difference.”¹²⁴ Instead, an estimated 800,000 people were killed over a one hundred-day period. Thompson implicates the international media, as well. “Through their absence and a failure to adequately observe and record events, journalists contributed to the behaviour of the perpetrators of the genocide—who were encouraged by the world’s apathy and acted with impunity.”¹²⁵

If reporting on violent conflict has the potential to curb the killing of innocent civilians, then coverage of conflicts before they become violent must not be neglected. Although it is more costly, immersive journalism is particularly suited to playing this role because, not only does it provide journalists with the time and editorial space to understand and explain complex issues, but the narrative form, by forging a more personal connection with the reader, can make depressing or seemingly intractable topics more palatable to a general audience.¹²⁶

¹²³ Allan Thompson, “The Responsibility to Report: A New Journalistic Paradigm,” in *The Media and the Rwanda Genocide* ed. Allan Thompson (London: Pluto Press, 2007), 436. See also Livingston, “Limited Vision.”

¹²⁴ Allan Thompson, “Introduction,” in *The Media and the Rwanda Genocide* (London: Pluto Press, 2007), 3.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Katherine Boo, “Difficult Journalism That’s Slap-Up Fun,” in *Telling True Stories: A Nonfiction Writers’ Guide from the Nieman Foundation at Harvard University*, ed. Mark Kramer and Wendy Call (New York: Plume, 2007), 14.

In addition to its powerful ability to shape public opinion and, by extension, American policy, the media have an ethical obligation to illuminate the suffering of others. One of journalists' main roles is to give voice to vulnerable populations and monitor those in power: to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable, as the popular expression goes.¹²⁷ Injustices do not need to be crises to merit coverage; journalists should strive to “discover the hidden pockets of misunderstanding, the undetected human tensions that will burst into the headlines tomorrow, next week, or a month or year from now”—that is, to be “preventive rather than merely reactive.”¹²⁸

News media play a crucial role in shaping our understanding of the world. In the west, media depictions of people and places beyond our direct personal experience increasingly define our perceptions of the world, and “since it is the relationship we have with others which defines the nature of our own being, then such links as we might have with these mediated individuals are increasingly becoming the crucial ones for us, too.”¹²⁹ As Lippmann notes in his seminal work, *Public Opinion*, this is because our opinions inevitably encompass a greater range of

¹²⁷ Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel, *The Elements of Journalism: What Newspeople Should Know and the Public Should Expect* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2007), 141 and 143.

¹²⁸ John C. Merrill, *Journalism Ethics: Philosophical Foundations for News Media* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 4-5, citing Michael J. O'Neill, *The Roar of the Crowd: How Television and People Power Are Changing the World* (New York: Times Books, 1993), 193-194.

¹²⁹ Silverstone, 4.

places, times, and people than we can experience as individuals.¹³⁰ Our imaginations and the reportage we consume inevitably both mold and limit these opinions.¹³¹ Without press coverage, large parts of the globe vanish entirely from public consciousness. Historically, “certain parts of the globe have enjoyed lavish attention while the roving eye of foreign news-gathering has only glanced at others.”¹³² Yet as globalization brings Americans “increasingly into contact and conflict with other nations,” the need for good foreign news coverage is more important than ever before.¹³³

In explaining the decrease of international news coverage over the past decades, some scholars and media practitioners have argued that there simply is not enough demand from the American public; international coverage just does not make economic sense.¹³⁴ However, such excuses may be misleading, at least where recent coverage is concerned. The Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism’s *The State of the News Media 2010: An Annual Report on American Journalism* observed “a shift away from interest in local news toward more national and international topics

¹³⁰ Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1991), 79.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² John Maxwell Hamilton, *Journalism’s Roving Eye: A History of American Foreign Reporting* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009), 5.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹³⁴ For an influential example, see Claude Moisy, “The Foreign News Flow in the Information Age,” Discussion Paper D-23, The Joan Shorenstein Center, Harvard University John F. Kennedy School of Government, Cambridge, MA, November 1996.

as people have more access to such information.”¹³⁵ According to Alisa Miller, CEO of Public Radio International, the number of Americans who report closely following global news most of the time increased from 37 percent in 2002 to 52 percent in 2004.¹³⁶ The number of Americans who report following international news very closely increased from 14 percent in 2000 to 24 percent in 2004.¹³⁷ Thus, it seems that contrary to received wisdom, there is a market for international reporting.

Method

The primary research for this project was undertaken in June, July and August 2010 and May and August 2011. What began as a multimedia project evolved into a work of immersive journalism with multimedia elements.

Immersive journalism is a form of narrative non-fiction or literary journalism. It draws its material from the experiences of “private people whose lives represent a larger significance.”¹³⁸ By “getting to know real-life characters through research, trust, and building relationships,”¹³⁹ the journalist strives to use these characters’ personal stories to “convey vividly and potently the greater failings of

¹³⁵ The Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism, “Overview—Major Trends,” in *The State of the News Media 2010: An Annual Report on American Journalism*, accessed December 7, 2010, http://www.stateofthemediamedia.org/2010/overview_major_trends.php.

¹³⁶ Alisa Miller, “Alisa Miller Shares the News about the News,” TED.com, March 2008, accessed December 7, 2010, http://www.ted.com/index.php/talks/alisa_miller_shares_the_news_about_the_news.html

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Gay Talese, “Delving into Private Lives,” in *Telling True Stories*, 7.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

government and industry, inequities of class, and fractures in the infrastructure of opportunities.”¹⁴⁰ The individuals that immersive journalists write about “allow themselves to be representatives of something larger in our society.”¹⁴¹ The genre recounts factual news in “dramatic or emotive ways”¹⁴² that use specific detail about individuals to express abstract meaning.¹⁴³

I arrived in Goma, North Kivu, DRC, in June 2010 with plans to work on a project on sexual violence. However, in the months leading up to my trip, much was published in the American and international media about this problem, and I realized that I wanted to focus on a topic that was similarly pressing but had received less international attention. With limited time and resources in the Congo, I decided that the most effective way to identify a significant under-reported issue would be to consult with local agencies and people intimately familiar with the region’s challenges.

Over the course of three weeks, I spoke with high-ranking staff of local and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs including Human Rights Watch and Aide et Action pour la Paix) and United Nations (UN) organizations

¹⁴⁰ Boo, 14.

¹⁴¹ Isabel Wilkerson, “Interviewing: Accelerated Intimacy,” in *Telling True Stories*, 33.

¹⁴² John S. Bak, “Introduction,” in *Literary Journalism across the Globe: Journalistic Traditions and Transnational Influences*, ed. John S. Bak and Bill Reynolds (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2011), 2.

¹⁴³ Roy Peter Clark, “The Ladder of Abstraction,” in *Telling True Stories*, 70.

(MONUC, UNHCR, UN Habitat).¹⁴⁴ I consulted with the Pole Institute, a respected social sciences think tank focusing on peace and conflict in the Great Lakes region; with local journalists and scholarly researchers; and with the president and secretary of the Civil Society of North Kivu. I also met with the customary leaders, or *mwamis*, of Masisi and Walikale, two territories in North Kivu. The overwhelming consensus was that while sexual violence was a scourge on the region, land conflict in the Kivus and Ituri was producing worrisome tensions that threatened to erupt in renewed violence, and had thus far been overlooked by the popular press.¹⁴⁵ In fact, members of the *Société Civile Nord Kivu* raised the concern that land insecurity contributed to the prevalence of sexual violence; for example, displaced women sleeping outdoors are more vulnerable to rape, as are women and girls who travel

¹⁴⁴ MONUC is Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies en République Démocratique du Congo, or the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. On July 1, 2010, it was renamed MONUSCO, *Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies pour la stabilisation en République démocratique du Congo*, or the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. See <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/monusco/>, accessed September 20, 2010. UNHCR is the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. UN Habitat is the United Nations Human Settlements Programme. It is mandated by the UN General Assembly to “promote socially and environmentally sustainable towns and cities with the goal of providing adequate shelter for all.” See <http://www.unhabitat.org/categories.asp?catid=1>, accessed September 20, 2010. In the eastern Congo, UN Habitat’s programs are part of the UN Security and Stability Strategic Plan and focus on establishing housing, land, and property mediation mechanisms in North Kivu and Ituri. The press release announcing the opening of the Goma office in May 2009—the Bunia, Ituri office was opened in July 2009—states, “land problems are at the heart of much of the violence in the two provinces of North and South Kivu. Immediately after conflict, access to land is the main obstacle to the return of refugees and internally displaced persons.” See “A New UN Habitat Office in Eastern Congo,” May 25, 2009, accessed December 9, 2010, <http://www.unhabitat.org/content.asp?cid=6740&catid=190&typeid=6&subMenuId=0>.

¹⁴⁵ Other issues raised included rumors of undocumented Rwandans infiltrating North Kivu and the control of mineral exploitation in the region.

long distances to farm or to collect water or firewood. Although it would be reductionist to say that land conflict is the root of the Congo's problems, access to land and resources has played a central role in Congolese conflicts, to be sure.

I traveled to the UN Habitat office in Bunia, the capital of Ituri, in July 2010. With the staff's guidance, I developed a plan to gather information and still images for four multimedia stories addressing different aspects of ethnic land conflict in the territories of Djugu and Mahagi, where UN Habitat had decided to concentrate their efforts due to the prevalence and virulence of existing land conflict.

Under the banner of "UN personnel," I traveled with the UN Habitat team of land mediators¹⁴⁶ in the UN Habitat vehicle. Under this arrangement, I had logistical support (transportation, access to safe housing, translation from Swahili to French) that would have been difficult, expensive and time-consuming to arrange for myself. Because the mediators had already developed relationships with community leaders in the villages in which I worked, they were able to help me identify sources and facilitate our introduction. They also informed me of local customs and took measures to ensure my safety while I was alone in the field.¹⁴⁷

There were also some drawbacks to this arrangement. I had to abide by UN regulations, some of which were detrimental to my research method. Most restrictive was the stipulation that I stay in UN-approved accommodation and limit

¹⁴⁶ There are three land conflict mediators based in Bunia: Axel Wakilongo Kitoga, Patrick Kyanza, and Grévy Jacob Kavene. All three are lawyers by training. With very few exceptions, the team travels together at all time for security reasons. José Mokbondó, the bureau chief, remains in Bunia while the team is in the field.

¹⁴⁷ For example, together we visited the chiefs in both Sanduku and Djupanyalengi to inform them of my presence and to ask their formal guarantees of protection while I was in their domains.

my fieldwork to approved daylight hours—during that time of year, about 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Ideally, I would have been able to spend time with my story subjects outside of these limited hours. At times, I was granted exceptions to these rules,¹⁴⁸ but security concerns and UN liability meant that I adhered to most of them, though I often began work at dawn, when many of my story subjects were most active.

I based my method on my reporting and multimedia journalism coursework.¹⁴⁹ As much as was possible, I immersed myself in my sources' daily lives. In 2010, I spent between five days and two weeks observing and visually documenting the day-to-day activities of my subjects—everything from eating, to working, to leisure. At this time, my primary subjects were Axel Kitoga, Anna Kamurate Nyalengi Djupanyarhonore, Ngona Gikwa Floribert, and De Dieu Ndjango B'ebbu. To the extent that they were comfortable and that security concerns would allow, I was present for everything. For the most part, I instructed my subjects to try to ignore me as much as possible and to refrain from changing their behavior due to my presence. During allocated interview times, which I filmed, I asked them to discuss the conflict in which they found themselves—its origin, its impact on their lives, its potential for escalation, and its possible resolution.

In total, I conducted fieldwork for approximately six weeks in 2010. Even before returning to the US in August 2010, I knew that I wanted to go back to Ituri

¹⁴⁸ For example, I usually left to go to the field at dawn, around 5:30 am. I spent one night with a Hema family in Sanduku and one night with the Djupanyarhonore. I had to write and sign a waiver absolving UN Habitat of all responsibility should anything have happened to me.

¹⁴⁹ JOMC 753 News Writing and Reporting; JOMC 180 Introduction to Photojournalism; JOMC 782 Multimedia Storytelling; and JOMC 584 Carolina Photojournalism Workshop, a one-week experiential course I completed in May 2010.

before submitting my thesis. I had developed good relationships with sources and had begun to understand a complex issue, but I wanted to observe how the situation in Ituri changed over time. Due to other commitments in June and July, I decided to visit Ituri for two weeks in May and four weeks in late July and August 2011. In May, I met with my sources in Sanduku and researched the developments of the previous nine months. I also shot video interviews and supplemental footage (“b-roll”) and recorded some audio interviews.

During this time, I experienced a number of challenges. Perhaps because I had given prints of the photos I had taken the previous summer to the inhabitants of Sanduku, or perhaps because they were now more comfortable with me, I found it difficult to work in the documentary style. Large crowds of people gathered to watch me work, which prevented me from gathering clean, natural assets. I also found that the stories I had worked on in 2010 had increased in complexity and indeed were intertwined. This reflected in part my deeper knowledge of the subject, but also rendered the non-narrated multimedia format less suitable for my project.

When I returned to Ituri in late July 2011, I decided to shift the focal point to a series of immersive articles and use my multimedia assets in a secondary role. A primarily text-based project would give me more freedom to explore land conflict at greater depth and to provide context, while multimedia sidebars would function as supplementary tools to tell different aspects of the stories and engage the audience in a different way. The underlying approach—that of using intimate, individual stories to illuminate a complex national issue—remained unchanged.

In order to gather the information required to write the immersive articles, I interviewed each of my subjects again at length several times over the course of almost four weeks. I added Melchior Djodya and Maurice Bavi-Nguna as important subjects in the Sanduku story, and Marie Estella as a major subject in the story of her family, the Djupanyarhonore. I obtained a full history of all my subjects' experiences before and during the Ituri Conflict and asked them to open up to me about their hopes and fears, as well as "the facts." I wanted to present as intimate a portrait as possible. I also interviewed additional secondary subjects—such as friends, neighbors, family members, and witnesses of and participants in important conversations and events—to triangulate, whenever possible, what my main subjects said during their interviews, as I had no primary written sources, such as newspapers or letters, to rely on. I strove to discover not only the facts on the surface, but also the motivations, reactions and thought processes of those involved. Additionally, I observed events related to the stories, such as court proceedings and mediation sessions, firsthand and took extensive notes. I recorded audio and shot photos to provide detail and to act as a backup to my handwritten notes.

I left Ituri in late August 2011, but I continued to remain abreast of developments through the assistance of my translator, Olivier Ngumba. Olivier knew and understood my objectives and methods extremely well and was also thoroughly familiar with my story subjects and their personal histories. He followed up with my main story subjects at my request and with a list of interview questions I provided him several times between August 2011 and March 2012. I feel confident that he understood my purpose and my reporting methods, and, given the distances

involved and my subjects' lack of access to phones or email, his contributions were very valuable.

Advocacy, Objectivity, and Social Change

This project's method of engaging in an intimate way with a limited number of subjects who are asked to talk about their personal experiences raises questions regarding journalistic objectivity and the overall purpose of this work.

Objectivity has been “the supreme deity” and “the central tenet of American journalism for much of [the 20th] century.”¹⁵⁰ While there is no consensus on the precise meaning of the term, it is often used to mean truth, balance and detachment—a reliance on “facts.”¹⁵¹ Objectivity assumes a marketplace of ideas where reporters are passive observers and audiences construct their own conclusions.¹⁵² It is often viewed in opposition to advocacy journalism, conceived of as “[assigning] journalists the role of active interpreters and participants who ‘speak on behalf’ of certain groups, typically those groups who are denied ‘powerful spokesmen’ in the media. Journalists are representatives for specific interests.”¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ David T. Z. Mindich, *Just the Facts: How “Objectivity” Came to Define American Journalism* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 1.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 7, and Robert Miraldi, *Muckraking and Objectivity: Journalism's Colliding Traditions* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), 6, and Philip Meyer, “Public Journalism and the Problem of Objectivity,” accessed February 15, 2011, <http://www.unc.edu/~pmeyer/ire95pj.htm>.

¹⁵³ Silvio Waisbord, “Advocacy Journalism in a Global Context,” in *The Handbook of Journalism Studies*, ed. Karin Wahl-Jorgensen and Thomas Hanitzsch (New York: Routledge, 2009), 371.

This project is neither “advocacy” journalism, nor traditional “objective” journalism. It may best be defined as journalism for social change—essentially, a combination of concerned journalism and public journalism.¹⁵⁴ Concerned journalism and public journalism both stem from the belief that journalism is a tool whose purpose is to achieve a more just world.¹⁵⁵ Practitioners of the form reject the notion of standing removed from the community so that “you see all viewpoints as equally distant and important—or unimportant.”¹⁵⁶ When done well, this type of journalism does not, as critics of advocacy journalism have tried to argue, distort facts or promote a specific person, organization, policy, or course of action. Rather, it offers a middle ground in which the journalist displays an “objectivity of method”; the journalist’s personal investment in the issue may be apparent from the way the story is told, but his or her method is equally clear.¹⁵⁷ The journalist takes time to “stay with a problem or issue” until the “structural explanations” become discernable.¹⁵⁸ Thus, my approach to this project rejects the notion of complete detachment in favor of telling intimate, deep stories with a social purpose. Its goal is to raise awareness among the American public and to encourage UN personnel, NGO

¹⁵⁴ Wendy Watriss, “Steps Learned Along the Way: Redefining Photojournalism’s Power,” *Nieman Reports*, Spring 2010, accessed February 7, 2011, <http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reports/article/102074/Steps-Learned-Along-the-Way-Redefining-Photojournalisms-Power.aspx>.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, and Meyer, “Public Journalism.”

¹⁵⁶ Meyer, “Public Journalism.”

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

workers and local, national and international policy makers to take steps toward resolving land conflict in Ituri by presenting its impact on individuals.

Limitations

I must acknowledge a number of limitations to this project. First, many interviews were conducted in French, which is neither my native language nor the native language of the stories' subjects—yet it was the language we had in common, and, in fact, many of my subjects spoke it fluently. Many of the secondary subjects that I interviewed spoke only Kilendu or Alur, so those interviews were conducted with the help of an interpreter, who translated the conversations into French. I am responsible for all translations from French to English. Likely, some nuances were sacrificed with each translation, the effect being most dramatic in interviews conducted in a local language, translated into French, and then translated into English. My French comprehension is fluent, but I do not pretend to have a native's grasp of the subtleties of the language. Having an English translator on hand would have been ideal, but unfortunately, I could not locate any speakers of Kilendu or Alur who also spoke English. The language barriers around which we had to work may have been compounded by most of my subjects' lack of formal education and their unfamiliarity with the conventions of narrative non-fiction. Simply put, some interview subjects may have struggled to visualize the end product of our interviews.

The multilingual nature of the project resulted in an additional limitation. Although I immersed myself in my sources' daily lives, I was unable to understand

conversations my story subjects had among themselves in Swahili, Kilendu, or Alur. As such, the richness of my understanding of my sources and how they interacted with those around them was limited. I had to rely on translations given to me by my sources or translator after the fact if I wanted to know what a particular conversation had been about, though I had no way to verify the information.

The languages barriers I faced created an unintended emphasis on male voices in the Sanduku story. Few women spoke French, so I relied most often on interviews with men. Many women also seemed to be reluctant to discuss land conflict, deferring instead to their husbands. This cultural sensibility contributed to the dominance of male voices in that particular article.

Due to the location of the project, I was also limited in my ability to personally gather additional information as I prepared the articles and multimedia components. I could not easily return to Ituri, nor could I telephone or e-mail my subjects, as they do not have access to these technologies. My local translator, Olivier Ngumba, had a firm grasp of my methodology and how I hoped to use the interviews to write personal narratives, and he had been working with me for two years, so he knew the interview subjects and their stories well. I trusted him to do follow-up interviews in Sanduku and Mahagi between September 2011 and March 2012, and to fact check details for me. However, ideally, I would have been able to continue working with my subjects face-to-face or directly through other means of communication.

The remote location of the project, funding and time constraints, and the lack of communications infrastructure limited the amount of time I was able to spend on

site. In a project of this nature, the more time the reporter can spend with the subject, the better. Ideally, I would have been able to stay longer in Sanduku and Djupanyarhonore in order to witness the resolution of the conflicts covered in my thesis. However, this would have been impractical, as such conflicts often take years or even generations to reach their conclusions.

In addition, when it came to documenting the stories visually, part of the time I spent with each interview subject involved habituating him or her to my presence. I wanted candid documentation, but it was difficult for my subjects to ignore me and continue with their daily lives as if I weren't there, as my presence was extraordinary to them. As well, most had never been photographed before, so the subjects often didn't know how to react to being photographed. Especially at the beginning, most were stiff and posed for the camera, or the frames were filled with excited children who clamored to be in every shot.

Lighting was also a major challenge for the visual documentation of the stories. During the day, there was little shade, meaning that highlights, or the lighter parts of the image, were frequently overexposed in pictures properly exposed for my subjects' faces. In the evenings, on the other hand, it was very difficult to expose the pictures enough while avoiding motion blur, because there was usually no light source other than a small cooking fire. As a result, I was forced to use ISO 6400 for a large number of shots, which resulted in more grain that would normally be considered desirable. Even during the day, indoor pictures were problematic, as most of the village huts had no windows or indoor lighting.

A FAMILY AFFAIR

Plink. Plink. Plink plink plink. The first few beans that Anna Kamurate Nyalengi Djupanyarhonore drops into the chipped enamel pot next to her hip resonate crisply in the mountain air. The beans—*ng'or* in Alur, Anna's native language—slip through her calloused fingers like the yellow plastic beads of her rosary, with which she prays daily but otherwise wears around her neck as her only ornament. It is one of Anna's few remaining possessions and certainly her most cherished. As the *ng'or* fill the pot, their tone becomes flat and muted, rather like the atmosphere that day in Anna's village, Djupanyarhonore, a place simply named after its 644 inhabitants, so small and inconsequential to the outside world that it does not appear on any available maps. But it is the center of Anna's world, and its boundaries are the subject of a fiercely fought, decades-long family feud. Yesterday, in less than an hour, Anna's enemies obliterated the fruits of her 66 years.

Usually, Anna makes quick work of this daily chore, separating the bad beans from the good. After all, she has prepared *ng'or*, a staple food of the Alurs of northeastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, almost every day for as long as she can remember. Whether of the vibrant, jewel-toned varieties—neon green, mustard yellow, marigold orange, royal purple—or of the drab white, gray, black, or speckled

sort, the *ng'or* that are fit to eat feel smooth, cool, and firm but for a gentle give when pinched between the thumb and forefinger. Usually, Anna would not hesitate to toss pitted, wrinkled, tough, or soft specimens onto the packed dirt courtyard outside her hut, where she prefers to sit, legs stretched out and crossed at the ankle, to perform her daily *ng'or* sorting. But today, in the grim aftermath of the attack, Anna must lower her standards. She works slowly, sitting with a group of other women in a neighbor's yard, visually inspecting each bean in her cupped palm before transferring it to the pot. Most are charred carbon black, their texture crumbly from lack of moisture. They are destined for the refuse heap, along with *ng'or* irretrievably embedded in pieces of melted plastic, the misshapen remnants of containers that had been used to store the recent harvest. But some *ng'or* are only a little discolored, and a few appear undamaged, though Anna expects they will taste bitter and smoky. She and the other women of Djupanyarhonore, however, are in no position to be choosy. "Like snakes, we crawl now on our bellies, unable to stand tall, unable to hold our heads high," Anna laments. "Our God has forsaken us. We have been made vile, cursed."

It is 9 a.m. on Tuesday, July 20, 2010. Typically, the village would be humming with activity—children on school break playing with homemade toys or sprinting between clusters of *paille* (thatched) homes in raucous games of tag; women exchanging gossip between the thuds of their tree-trunk mallets as they pound manioc or sorghum into flour in large wooden mortars called *pany*; men and women tending vegetables on steep, terraced hills, calling out greetings to passers-

by; older men and women laughing under the warm influence of their first cup of locally distilled *nguli* as they roll homegrown tobacco and dried corn husks into fragrant cigarettes. But today Djupanyarhonore is like a ghost town. There are precious few buildings remaining for children to dart behind, just the cold, heaped skeletons of wood, clay, and ash where homes used to be. Gray with fine soot, the children sit and idly kick the powdery particles of *paille* ash into tiny cyclones that twist in the mountain breeze. No one is working in the fields today. Most of the villagers' tools have been burnt or looted, yes—but what mostly keeps them in the village is fear. Older men sit in the shade, silently contemplating the devastation and ready to call out warnings at any sign of danger, while young men rummage through rubble, excavating the remains of their huts' wooden supports. These will fuel the evening cooking fire and protect the oldest, youngest, and weakest members of the community from plummeting night temperatures. The rainy season is coming, and at an altitude of more than 5,500 feet, passing the night without shelter is hazardous. In the meantime, the women patiently salvage what they can of the *ng'or*, the village's main source of sustenance.

Monday, July 19, 2010, started like any other day for Marie Estella Djupanyarhonore and her husband Baudouin, Anna's cousin and neighbor in Djupanyarhonore. The couple rose around 4 a.m. While Baudouin lit a small fire in the main house—the family also had a small cooking hut separate from their sleeping quarters—Marie Estella rinsed their mugs and filled a pot with spring water to be boiled for drinking. After the fire had come to life, she put the pot on the

heat, added a few teabags, and placed plump ears of husked corn in the glowing embers at the edge of the fire. While the corn roasted, Marie Estella swept the packed dirt yard in front of the house. She noticed that the sky was just beginning to turn gray at the eastern edge of the horizon. Shortly, there would be enough light to guide her and Baudouin along the winding footpath to their fields on the hill called Atele, a twenty-minute walk from Djupanyarhonore.

At 6 a.m., Marie Estella woke her four children, three boys and a girl, ranging in age from five to ten years old. After seeing that they had enough corn and tea to satisfy themselves until their parents returned at lunchtime, Marie Estella and Baudouin took their tools and set out for Atele.

The terrain around Djupanyarhonore is craggy and the mountain-air thin, but Marie Estella and Baudouin were accustomed to the hike, and though the morning was cold enough to stiffen their fingers, it promised to be a pleasant day once the sun burned off the mist. There was a brisk breeze, which would be welcome by mid-morning. As usual, Marie Estella and Baudouin chatted about the workday ahead as they walked single file along the narrow footpaths crisscrossing the hills.

"Podo meni tin wafure du. We will be able to cultivate all day," commented Marie Estella.

"Pyny ubedo ber, taku wadare. Since it is nice weather, I think we will finish the field today," Baudouin agreed. *"Imaku kani? Where shall we start?"*

"Amaku kai, mak tere. I'll start there, at the bottom," said Marie Estella.

For about an hour and a half, the couple weeded a field of manioc and began to prepare a field for planting beans. They had recently harvested the last crop, and the climate of Djupanyarhonore, which is excellent for agriculture, allowed for continuous planting. They worked in companionable silence, broken occasionally by Marie Estella's banter. Despite the cleft palate that slurs her speech, Marie Estella is quite vocal. Alur culture still encourages men to be the dominant partner in a marriage, but Baudouin prefers to let his wife do most of the talking.

Marie Estella looked up from her task to see a large group of people descending the opposite hill from the direction of Djuparigi. Although the Djuparigi and the Djupanyarhonore were related, the two clans had a tense relationship. In fact, the Djuparigi had previously claimed as theirs the land Marie Estella and Baudouin were cultivating that morning, Atele; and in 2009, after ordering students and teachers to evacuate, a group of Djuparigi had burnt down the school the Djupanyarhonore had built on the land, where Marie Estella taught third grade.

The conflict over Atele was not the only one to pit members of related clans in the area against one another. Land rights were as complicated as the family tree that bound them all together. Most of the clans in the *collectivité* of Djukoth, where Djupanyarhonore is located, trace their descent from a polygamous ancestral chief called Abi, who likely lived in the 19th century, based on the number of generations produced since then. He had, among other children, three sons: Lengi, Kidikpa, and Rigi. Before his death, Abi divided his territory between them. They gave rise to three separate lines from which today's clans are descended. The oldest clan is Djuparigi. "Djupa" means "sons of" in Alur, so the Djuparigi are simply the

descendants of Rigi. But when a clan becomes too large or there is a conflict between its leaders, it splits. Kidikpa's descendants formed, among others, the Djupamula: the clan of the sons of Amula Djalsinda, who was one of Kidikpa's sons. Lengi's descendants, too, were numerous. They gave rise to several clans, including the Djupanyalengi. The Djupanyarhonore are the most recent addition. The clan did not exist until 2006, when a large extended family within the Djupanyalengi clan was, in its members' telling, disenfranchised and disinherited by other branches of the family—specifically the Djupamula and the Djuparigi—by being named the Djupanyarhonore: the clan of the sons of Honoré, who was one of Lengi's grandsons. The creation of this new clan, the Djupanyarhonore believe, was an attempt by the other clans to mark them as “foreigners” with less valid and direct claims to Abi's land. In recent years, the Djuparigi had claimed Atele, which was farmed by the Djupanyarhonore, and the Djupamula had declared rights over Singa and Yuu, two other prime *collines*, or agricultural hills, occupied by the Djupanyarhonore.

So although the people who approached from Djuparigi the morning of July 19, 2010, were her husband's distant relatives, Marie Estella was not entirely surprised when she heard them fire shots—just seconds after Baudouin noticed another crowd coming from Ndama, the nearby commercial center occupied by the Djupamula. “*Mange ke nen i kor Ndama!* They're coming down from Ndama, too!” Baudouin shouted. The Djupamula and their allies, the Djuparigi, had come to attack, escalating the conflict over Singa and Yuu.

Simultaneously, other Djupanyarhonore working in nearby terraced fields across the steep *colline* of Atele became aware of the danger. All at once, it seemed to Marie Estella, everyone was running “pell-mell.” Marie Estella thought of her four children back in the village. She began to run as quickly as she could through the fields back to her home. Fortunately, the land was dry; it had been several days since the last downpour. Even so, Marie Estella tripped eight, nine, ten, maybe more times as she cut through fields, the excess cloth of her long *pagne* wrap interrupting her stride. When she arrived in the village, Marie Estella noticed police from Ndama, maybe 40 in total, and wondered vaguely how they had arrived so quickly to protect the village. Only then did it occur to her that these men were not there to help the Djupanyarhonore. “They directed the whole thing. They didn’t try to calm people. They stopped people on paths and tried to block those who were fleeing. They arrested many Djupanyarhonore and took them to prison in Ndama ‘for their own safety,’ they said. They entered and looted our houses and then turned a blind eye as the Djupamula and Djuparigi burned our houses. They were *têtu*—those who are not respectful, not polite.”

Marie Estella found her youngest child, five-year-old Heritier, near their house, but the other three children were gone. She assumed they must have fled with the other Djupanyarhonore who were in the village when the police and the attackers first arrived. Under an avalanche of verbal abuse and threats, Marie Estella ran through an opening between the police and the Djupamula, who were threatening some people with clubs, and continued in the direction of Awilo, a town about 2.5 miles away.

On the morning of the attack, Anna was walking along a footpath to Yanga, the small settlement where her church choir practiced. Anna was a dedicated chorister, and she looked forward to singing devotional songs at mass at the big church in the town of Logo every Sunday. She was humming a hymn to herself when “noises and insults and injuries” disrupted the tune. She saw men from the clans of Djupamula and Djuparigi on the path a few yards away and understood immediately that “we were under attack.” The men did not seem interested in physically hurting her, though they brandished clubs and shouted insults too vile to be repeated. Still, Anna feared for her life. She dashed into the bush and ran down to the valley below, where a stream called Jombia gurgled through tall papyrus fronds. She found a shallow pit in the middle of a papyrus stand and lay down to hide. On the hill above, she could hear the village of her birth being destroyed. Unlike most of the adult women in Djupanyarhonore, who were not born into the clan but came as wives, Anna had grown up there. She, too, had once gone to be a wife in a distant village, Nyarambe. She went in 1965 to marry Ukwong’ Genombe, with whom she had eight children. Anna found their married life satisfactory, but when Ukwong’ moved to Bunia to pursue higher education, he met and married another woman with whom he still lives today. Abandoned by her husband in a foreign village, she returned in 1984 to her extended family in Djupanyarhonore. Ukwong’ visited several times—their two youngest children were born in Djupanyarhonore—but Anna vowed never again to leave her home and her extended family. Yet as she lay in the ditch next to Jombia, it occurred to Anna that everything she had worked for

as a single mother, everything she had built for herself and her children, was in the process of being destroyed. She reached for the yellow beads around her neck and prayed.

In the village, the police were busy stripping over 90 homes of everything of value—a common practice in the Congo, where police are poorly and irregularly paid—then left the Djupamula and Djuparigi to do as they wished. The attackers set the *paille* roofs of the Djupanyarhonore's homes on fire. The thick brown grass, made more flammable by the recent hot, dry weather, caught quickly, and the breeze Marie Estella had been grateful for that morning helped to finish what the Djupamula and the Djuparigi had started. Sparks jumped from one house to another, and nearly 90 homes were efficiently reduced to rubble.

Once she had traveled what she deemed to be a safe distance from Djupanyarhonore, Marie Estella began to cry out the names of her other three children. Although she was beginning to panic, Marie Estella checked herself. What if by shouting out her children's names she attracted nearby enemies to her and her youngest son, Heritier?

Fortunately, Marie Estella's three older children were together, hiding not far from Djupanyarhonore. The eldest was just ten, and they were frightened to go too far from home without their parents. They heard their mother's voice and ran to her. Relieved to have her children by her side, Marie Estella's thoughts turned again to Baudouin. She had not seen him since they had noticed the enemies on Atele. But

Marie Estella did not want to upset her children further, so she put on a calm and brave face in response to their questions.

The children were not convinced. They noticed how every time their mother heard a twig snap or a bush rustle, she ordered them to hide in a field or the forest, sometimes for up to two hours, until she was sure there was no danger. For this reason, Marie Estella and her children did not reach Awilo until 6 p.m., when the sky was dusky, although the village was normally less than an hour's walk from Djupanyarhonore. When they arrived, they found nearly the entire population of Djupanyarhonore gathered there, some resting in friends' homes, others on whatever patch of grass they could find. Marie Estella began to search for Baudouin.

As the shouts and threats receded in the distance and a preternatural calm settled over Djupanyarhonore and the valley below, Anna ventured from her hiding place. She walked cautiously in the direction of Djupanyalengi, the village of her clan's closest relatives and allies. In fact, Anna still considered herself a member of that clan, preferring not to recognize Djupanyarhonore as a separate entity. When she arrived, she found a sympathetic reception and several close relatives, who had fled there directly earlier in the day. Djupanyalengi was on the opposite side of the valley from Djupanyarhonore and afforded a clear view; from the safety of Djupanyalengi, Anna's family had gathered to watch their homes burn. They could see now that the attackers had left and it was safe to return. Anna's younger brother Uvona had a house with a corrugated metal roof, and although it had been looted,

the dwelling was habitable. Anna and the others passed the night of July 19 on Uvona's dirt floor.

Baudouin had also made his way to Awilo. Late on the evening of the attack, he and Marie Estella found each other at the home of a friend. They spent an uncomfortable night at the friend's house with their four children—and as many other displaced Djupanyarhonore as could fit. They lay on their sides on the hard floor, pressed close against their neighbors, whose body heat provided the only source of warmth that night.

The next morning, on July 20, 2010, Marie Estella, Baudouin, the children, and several other family members set out early to survey the damage. Stiff and unrested, they trudged back to Djupanyarhonore only to find the village all but obliterated. The few houses with corrugated metal roofs, like Uvona's, were still standing, as well as a few more secluded *paille* homes, but they had all been pillaged and damaged. The two buildings of Marie Estella's and Baudouin's home were in ruins. "We searched to see if there was anything left, but there was nothing, just burnt beans and plastic," Marie Estella explained. "We lost everything. Everything."

That morning, the day after the attack, the women sorted *ng'or* and swept the courtyards as best they could, but for the most part, the Djupanyarhonore waited. They could not farm, as the Djupamula and Djuparigi had threatened to return, this time with dire consequences, if the Djupanyarhonore attempted to cultivate. They could not rebuild their burnt homes, as they lacked the tools, materials, and funds to

do so. They hoped—but did not anticipate—that the chief of their *collectivité* would personally come to inspect the damage, as would be expected of a leader after an attack of this magnitude. But Chief Alipacu Losani Atinda was a Djupamula, the grandson of Amula Djalsinda, so the Djupanyarhonore did not expect him to help them obtain justice when his clansmen and their allies had been the perpetrators. They believed he was not the neutral leader of the *collectivité*, as he should have been, but rather an instigator of the attack against them. In fact, Chief Alipacu had broken his leg in a motorcycle accident a few days earlier and was unable to travel—but he could have sent a deputy in his place.

Instead, three land-conflict mediators from UN Habitat, the United Nations organization tasked with managing land conflicts in eastern Congo, came. When the land-conflict mediators—Axel Kitoga Wakilongo, Patrick Kyanza, and Grévy Kavene—arrived in Djukoth, they went to Chief Alipacu’s office, where they found his deputy assistant chief. His account differed from that of the Djupanyarhonore only when it came to the role played by Ndama’s police force. “They were deployed after the arson had already occurred,” he said, “to maintain peace and order and to protect the Djupanyarhonore.” He also explained the origins of the conflict, noting that the Djupamula had submitted a memo some months before requesting that the state intervene to mediate the conflict between the Djupamula and the Djupanyarhonore, and that Chief Alipacu had forwarded it to his superiors, but the government had never intervened. He said that rogue elements within the Djupamula and Djuparigi clans had acted out of frustration without the direction or approval of either clan’s leadership.

According to Oscar Vuca, head of the Ituri Land Commission (CFI, *Commission Foncière d'Ituri*) in Ndama, who is affiliated with neither clan but openly sides with the Djupamula, the dispute dates back to measures put in place by Belgian territorial administrators in the early and mid-twentieth century. When the Belgians arrived, they found “warring clans that often invaded each other’s territory and appropriated land by force.” In an attempt to impose order, they drew boundaries to create *collectivités* for each chief. But in the Belgian administrators’ opinion, the capitals of two *collectivités*, Djukoth and its neighbor Pandoro, were too close at less than four miles apart. In addition, Djukoth’s capital, Gira, was not centrally located in the *collectivité*, which made it inconvenient for subjects in distant eastern areas to communicate with the chief, Amula Djalsinda. The Alurs also used a system of drums to signal the start and end of the workday, approaching threats, and important events. That the capital of Pandoro and Gira were so close was creating confusion, as populations sometimes found it difficult to distinguish which chief was sounding the drums. But most importantly, the concentration of traditional Alur power threatened the Belgians. One of the biggest goals of the creation of *collectivités* had been to disperse and disable any potential native resistance. The Belgians saw an easy solution to all three issues: they would simply relocate the chieftaincy of Djukoth from Gira to Ndama. Ndama was almost directly in the middle of the *collectivité*, so subjects from the entire *collectivité* could more easily visit the chief, and it was far from the chieftaincies of other *collectivités*, diffusing the threat to Belgian supremacy. Unfortunately, however, the land was already occupied by the Djupanyalengi, including those who would later become the Djupanyarhonore.

Specifically, Ndama and the *collines* of Singa and Yuu belonged to a wealthy landowner named Djalumua, a member of the Djupanyalengi clan. As a sign of goodwill, he welcomed his cousin Chief Amula Djalsinda to Ndama. Chief Amula Djalsinda subsequently established a household for himself and his retinue at Ndama sometime in perhaps the early 1950s.

The Djupanyarhonore say that the landowner Djalumua lent ten *collines* to Chief Amula. However, the Djupamula maintain that Djalumua permanently ceded the land to Amula in return for ten equivalent *collines* near Gira. Specifically, the Djupamula refuse to recognize the Djupanyarhonore's claim to the *collines* of Singa and Yuu. Oscar Vuca, the head of the CFI (Ituri Land Commission) in Ndama, says that the Djupanyarhonore were fairly compensated for Singa and Yuu and the *collines* were officially reclassified as collective pasturage for the Djupamula. "Despite conventional compensation, the Djupanyarhonore claim ownership of Singa and Yuu, pasturage areas, which they exploit in part for agriculture."

The Djupanyarhonore and the Djupamula shared the *collines* of Singa and Yuu for the next 30 years or so. Low population densities meant that there was plentiful land for the needs of both clans. However, around 1980, the Djupanyarhonore experienced a population boom, and they began to demand that the Djupamula vacate Singa and Yuu. The Djupamula refused.

Since then, the Djupamula have kept cows on the hills, while the Djupanyarhonore have cultivated terraced fields there. Sometimes, the cows trample or eat crops, or crops are burned or stolen in the night. Occasionally, cows are injured, killed, or abducted. Each side accuses the other of wronging them and of

staging crimes to try to falsely incriminate them. In 1972, the Djupamula and Djuparigi invited BPI (*Bureau de Projets en Ituri*, or the Office of Development in Ituri) to establish limits between their clans and those Djupanyalengi who would later become the Djupanyarhonore. In the telling of Charles Ucibire Uyer, a leader of the Djupamula, the Djupanyarhonore “revolted against BPI and brutally chased BPI from the lands in conflict.” In 1996, the Djupanyarhonore “invaded our pastures,” he added. The Djupanyarhonore accuse the Djupamula of having attacked their village that same year. They say that 13 houses were burnt and three men were hurt and hospitalized. The Djupamula say several members of their clan were unfairly jailed and tortured in connection with these allegations. In 2008, several Djupanyarhonore men made a complaint at the Tribunal in Mahagi that their fields were being destroyed by the Djupamula’s cows. “Unfortunately, the scene turned against us,” said Sengi Kuby, one of the complainants. “We were accused by the Djupamula of injuring and killing their cows, and we were arrested—13 of us in total.” One of the 13 arrested was Baudouin, Marie Estella’s husband. The prisoners were released after paying a \$250 fine, but Sengi could not come up with the cash, so he stayed in custody until 2009. In June 2009, the Djupamula burnt the Djupanyarhonore’s school (after evacuating students and teachers) and 21 houses because they were located on the disputed *colline* of Atele. At no point did the authorities address the source of these ongoing conflicts—confusion over rights to Singa, Yuu, and Atele. It seemed that with the arrival of the UN Habitat land-conflict mediators, outsiders were finally taking notice of the problems in Djukoth. Perhaps

the family feud could be settled. Both the Djupamula and the Djupanyarhonore welcomed the mediators with hope in their hearts.

UN Habitat had been to Ndama before. On June 11, 2010, they conducted a public education seminar attended by members of the Djupamula, Djuparigi, Djupanyalengi, and Djupanyarhonore clans. The session was meant to explain land laws and the ways in which UN Habitat could help mediate disputes, and to stress the importance of not taking extra-legal measures that could escalate a given conflict. UN Habitat had considered the meeting a success.

After being briefed on the events of July 19 by the assistant deputy chief, the UN Habitat land-conflict mediators gathered in the same large room where they had held the education seminar the month before, this time with only the Djupamula and Djuparigi. Axel, one of the land-conflict mediators, led the session, during which Charles Ucibire and other leaders of the two clans described their grievances and the lack of response from “any competent state authorities.” They insisted that the attack was perpetrated by uncontrolled members of the two tribes, youths who had not acted under the direction of clan leaders, and the UN Habitat mediators did not ask them to name names. They were not there to render justice; they were there to facilitate the resolution of the conflict that opposed the two parties, to find a mutually satisfactory compromise that would prevent future acts of violence such as the arson of the day before. The leaders of the Djupamula and the Djuparigi blamed the attack specifically on the lack of state response to the memo Charles Ucibire had written and the other clan leaders had signed, which in his recollection stated that

the “Djupanyarhonore must liberate our land, because this is illegal and abusive occupation.” Anna’s brother, a Djupanyarhonore who says he had a copy of the memo before it was burned during the attack of July 19, 2010, adds that the memo also said something to the effect of, “If the Djupanyarhonore do not leave and liberate the *collines* of Singa and Yuu by May 27, 2010, we will chase them away with force.”

Next, the UN Habitat team visited the Djupanyarhonore to assess the damage and hear their side of the story. Accompanied by leaders from the Djupanyarhonore and the Djupanyalengi clans and trailed by dozens of children and other interested parties, they toured the blackened remains of the village.

UN Habitat observed and documented the devastation, which included the loss of clothing, medication, the village’s bean harvest valued at about \$4,800, household goods, tools, and lifetimes’ worth of cash savings (there are no banks in the area), and interviewed the Djupanyarhonore, giving them a chance to air their concerns. Marie Estella stressed that they were “destitute. We lack shelter, clothes, money, food. After the corn runs out in a few weeks, we will starve.” The mediators promised to arrange some kind of humanitarian aid and to return shortly to begin negotiating a compromise. In the meantime, they entreated the Djupanyarhonore not to take retaliatory action. The Djupanyarhonore agreed; they had already independently decided that a counter-attack would not be wise.

While the UN mediators toured the village, Anna sat amidst the rubble of her home, mourning the loss of her every earthly possession save the clothes on her back and the rosary she always carried. “The God of the Alurs has abandoned us,”

she wailed again and again, lifting her hands to the sky. “Whose God will save us now? Perhaps the God of the international community?” It seemed possible. Surely the UN Habitat mediators would fulfill their promises of arranging humanitarian aid and brokering a fair and permanent compromise.

A month later, the situation had not improved. The rainy season had come, and with it, torrential downpours every afternoon. All that remained of the houses were mounds of sodden clay, the wooden supports salvaged for firewood. Burnt beans still carpeted what used to be the floors of huts, but some had begun to sprout. These young *ng’or* plants were the only sign of renewal. No houses had been rebuilt; UN Habitat had not returned to mediate the conflict; the NGOs had done nothing; there had been no humanitarian assistance; and the chief of Djukoth, a Djupamula, had neither visited the site nor sent a representative in his place. The Djupanyarhonore interpret this as an admission of complicity. They say that Chief Alipacu organized the arson to chase them from his *collectivité* and to ensure that his herds had ample grazing ground on Singa and Yuu.

Marie Estella and Baudouin have moved into the house of Baudouin’s nephew, Ucir. Although the house was seriously damaged, it was habitable even immediately after the attack, and the family began to sleep there starting July 20, 2010. In return, Baudouin and Marie Estella have repaired the house: the *paille* roof, which had been cut down with a machete; damaged walls; signs of forced entry on the door. It took more than a month. During that time, “rain and cold entered. We had no covers, but we had nowhere else to sleep,” said Marie Estella.

A few people still lived outside under temporary shelters, just frames of sticks covered with wide banana leaves to keep out the rain.

“UN Habitat did a simple observation, but other than that, there was no reaction. After UN Habitat came, we waited and waited for results, but they never came back. UN Habitat did nothing to help us,” said Marie Estella. “And neither did anyone else.” The abandonment by UN Habitat stung the most. The Djupanyarhonore and the Djupamula had placed great faith in the organization. Once again, both clans realized that they were alone. The UN did not care, nor did the clans’ own government.

It is one year later, August 21, 2011. Djupanyarhonore has risen from its ashes of its own accord. Laughing children scamper between tidy mud huts while women roast juicy ears of corn in the embers of outdoor cooking fires. It is the rainy season again, and ominous clouds suggest that a torrential downpour is imminent. But for now, the air is pleasantly cool, and a moist breeze rustles through the freshly dried *paille*.

But scratch the surface and one sees that scars remain. Since the attack, 194 villagers have left, some crossing into neighboring Uganda, others traveling to the nearby homes of relatives. Unable to shelter or feed their families, many men have been abandoned by their wives and children, who have gone to live in the wives’ paternal villages. Chantal and Wani Djupanyarhonore, who were both pregnant at the time of the attack, were among those who left. When the Djupamula and Djuparigi attacked, they couldn’t run as quickly as the others. They say they were

beaten; both later miscarried. Others, like Litiwu and Kwonga Djupanyarhonore, were also beaten with sticks, and Litiwu's wife was hospitalized for a week after she started vomiting blood due to an alleged beating. No one has been arrested in connection with the attack, and there has been no substantive investigation by the police, the local government, the United Nations, or any of the non-governmental organizations operating in the region. Like most of the land disputes in Ituri, the conflicts over Singa, Yuu, and Atele remain unresolved.

Although life seems to have returned to normal, for the Djupanyarhonore, normalcy has become a constant state of insecurity and uncertainty over the single basic element of life that matters most: land. Perhaps because all these clans are family, the descendants of the one they call "grandfather" Abi, there seems to be a tacit agreement not to escalate the conflict to the point of killing, at least for now. The Djupamula and Djuparigi may attack the Djupanyarhonore again—this the Djupanyarhonore know—but there is nothing to be done but to pick up and start over again as best they can. What other choice do they have?

AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE

It is a sad fact of life that the climes that call for the most frequent bathing tend to have the least agreeable facilities. Consider Fataki, District of Ituri, Democratic Republic of the Congo. During the rainy season, both running water and mud are abundant, and, consequently, many people bathe twice a day. But the running water, free of the restraints of modern plumbing, careens along unpaved streets, rehydrating clods of chewed sugarcane, inflating plastic-bag jellyfish, and buoying discarded passion fruit-skin boats. No matter. The women, as always, will fetch river water to last the day—one or two yellow recycled 10-gallon kerosene jugs usually suffice for the average family. Incidentally, there is at least one shower head in Fataki, in the bathroom of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) office; but it no longer functions. It's the legacy of a French boss remembered by his Congolese colleagues more for calling his mother daily to complain and for walking through the office in his underwear each morning en route to his ablutions than for his undoubtedly meaningful and lasting contributions to local development. Even with the best Fataki had to offer, the self-sacrificing humanitarian didn't last long.

Though he, too, does “not appreciate” life in Fataki, Axel Kitoga Wakilongo, a land-conflict mediator for the United Nations Human Settlement Programme (UN Habitat), is made of sterner stuff; Axel has endured worse. Like nearly every resident of eastern Congo (formerly Zaire) during the last two decades, Axel has been affected by the overlapping conflicts that finally culminated in the Second Congo War. Some scholars even prefer the term “the African World War” because, though fought on Congolese soil, the hostilities involved the armies of eight African states and many additional rebel groups and led to the deaths of an estimated 5.4 million people, more than in any other conflict since World War II. It was his experiences growing up in Zaire during this turbulent time, in fact, that eventually led Axel to Fataki.

Axel was born into a privileged family on May 25, 1979, in Bunia, the capital of Ituri. His mother was a former schoolteacher, and his father, a staff inspector at SOMINKI, the now-defunct mining conglomerate formed in 1976 to monopolize eastern Zaire’s extensive gold, cassiterite, and coltan reserves. Axel, sandwiched between seven siblings, remembers a happy childhood and “a very balanced life, lots of money, food, leisure, and travel.” Except for his older sister Alice, who died of an untreated sinus infection, all the Kitoga children attended university—quite remarkable, considering just one percent of Axel’s generation enrolled in any post-secondary education.

But Axel learned at an early age that a university education was no bulletproof vest in dictator Mobutu Sese Seko’s Zaire. On the night of May 11, 1990,

Mobutu's security forces descended upon dissident students at the University of Lubumbashi near the Zambian border in the south. They were targeted by authorities after three suspected pro-Mobutu student spies were beaten up on campus. Witnesses described security forces disemboweling and garroting students into the early hours of May 12; at least 50 were killed. Though he was just 10 years old, the massacre changed Axel's life, and not just because the brother of one of his closest friends was "deceased on that occasion, which caused much pain" for him. "Above all, what revolted me was this determination to massacre students, the elite of tomorrow and the future of the country, because of President Mobutu's desire to maintain power. It's at that moment that I decided to become a human rights defender," Axel says. His maternal uncle, Dieudonné Kasololo Mwenebatende, a former judge who worked for the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), served as Axel's role model and later as his inspiration for attending law school at Lubumbashi. Consequently, Axel has "always had a love for UNHCR and a dream to work there."

In the mid-1990s, Uncle Dieudonné had his hands full at UNHCR when up to 2 million Rwandan Hutu refugees and *génocidaires* (perpetrators of the Rwandan genocide against the Tutsi) flooded into the eastern Zairian provinces of North and South Kivu, just south of Ituri. After all but ignoring the genocide, the international community fell over itself to provide for the refugees. Unfortunately, the operation was badly mismanaged, and *génocidaires* were able to divert resources intended for innocent refugees to regroup and launch attacks on Tutsis in both Rwanda and Zaire

from the major refugee camps around Goma in North Kivu and Bukavu in South Kivu. Eventually, the new Rwandan government mounted a counter-attack. In October 1996, senior Rwandan government officials organized a nominally Zairian rebellion led by Laurent Kabila, a weak, little-known, and ideologically fossilized rebel, who then crossed into eastern Zaire with his own child soldiers (the *kadogo*, meaning “tiny ones”), Rwandan troops, and Rwandan-trained Zairian Tutsis. He planned to march across the country to Kinshasa to depose Mobutu—but not without accomplishing an impressive array of mass atrocities against civilians along the way. The border city of Bukavu, where Axel’s family then lived, was on Kabila’s itinerary.

Citizens of Bukavu knew “the troops were advancing, but radio reports were contradictory and we didn’t know where exactly the troops were. It was really a war of the media, but we didn’t really know what was going on,” Axel remembers. Most residents simply went on with daily life. On October 29, 1996, Axel was watching a basketball game at a local university when Kabila’s rebels shot their way into the city. “When the rebels entered the city, all of a sudden, the entire population fled in a panic. There had been rumors circulating that Kabila was recruiting young people by force to join his rebellion, so I left the game to run from Bukavu in the fleeing crowd.” Axel’s little sister Marie-France, on her way home from school, also joined the throng—tens of thousands of Zairian nationals and hundreds of thousands of Rwandan refugees fled Bukavu that day, many heading for the city of Kisangani 400 miles away. On the other side of town, Axel’s parents and other siblings abandoned the house with just the few francs they had on hand. There was no time to look for

Axel or Marie-France; “Rumors of the massacres already perpetrated by these troops obligated them to flee. I was able to join my family en route,” Axel adds, “but Marie-France made the journey on her own with a huge crowd of *déplacés*.” (Fortunately, in Kisangani, she found Uncle Dieudonné, who delivered her safely to Kinshasa).

The trek was unpleasant for everyone, “but we had no choice.” Axel remembers suffering terrible blisters, bone-rattling cold (he had only the clothes he had worn to the basketball game), growling hunger, crying babies, and “the terror and sadness in peoples’ eyes.” For fourteen days, “we walked sometimes through the brush for hours on end, as the route wasn’t paved; sometimes we even walked hours with our feet in water because marching in the rivers was the only means of advancing. We often passed long hours in silence; fear gripped everyone . . . the silence was a means of meditating.” But at least they were alive. The UN later estimated that 450 fleeing civilians, including women and children, had been shot by members of the “liberating” army in the streets of Bukavu as they ran, many at point-blank range. “At every moment possible,” Axel and the other *déplacés* kept up with the developing news by listening to a small, battery-operated radio that one of the refugees carried, “but the news was so very sad. We heard of massacres in Bukavu, the assassination of whole populations in their neighborhoods and villages, rapes . . . and the shocking—more than shocking—murder of [Archbishop of Bukavu] Monseigneur Munzehirwa in the street.” Though he couldn’t have imagined the bloodshed that would follow, Axel, a devout Catholic and a choir boy, sensed the execution’s significance: he knew that, at its heart, this would be “a cruel war of

crimes against civilians.” At 17, Axel once more felt the “blood of a defender” stirring in his veins.

Though they spent a short time in a refugee camp in Kisangani and even longer in cramped shared housing, where they used “dirty toilets and kitchens and ate on the floor,” Axel’s family, more affluent than the 80 percent of Congolese who live on \$2 a day or less, weathered the conflict better than many. When he was 19, Axel began university in Bukavu, and after a year, he transferred to his dream school, the prestigious University of Lubumbashi. The Second Congo War prevented him from contacting his family from 1999 to 2003, so Axel, unable to obtain financial assistance from his parents, “did menial jobs, such as gardening for a family in town, washing dishes, and walking children to and from school to ensure their security in the streets,” to pay for his law degree. After sending dozens of unanswered letters to various family members through private aviation companies, at last he got in touch with Uncle Dieudonné, who paid his final year’s law school tuition. Axel returned to Bukavu with his university degrees in 2004; in celebration, he and his father “danced all night.”

While Axel had been preoccupied worrying about his family, working menial jobs, and managing his schoolwork, he barely registered the “war within a war” being waged 1,400 miles to the north. It was devastating his birthplace, Ituri, a vast and productive expanse of 25,350 square miles hemmed into the northeast by Uganda and South Sudan. Despite the carnage Kabila’s rebels left in their wake all over eastern Congo, Human Rights Watch called Ituri “the bloodiest corner of the

Democratic Republic of the Congo.” In reality, though, the Ituri Conflict stood out less for its death count—still substantial at 60,000 people—than for the fervor with which victims of both sides of the ethnic civil war were butchered. Ituri’s fighters, even less organized than Kabila’s ragtag crew, were armed almost exclusively with *armes blanches*: machetes, hoes, clubs, bows and arrows, and the like.

At its base, the Ituri Conflict was a disagreement between a few wealthy, land-grabbing members of the Hema ethnic group and everyone else; but since the Lendu ethnic group forms the majority in Ituri and thus made up the bulk of those dispossessed by the speculating Hema, the hostilities soon assumed an ethnic character. Violence broke out in Djugu (the territory containing Fataki) in June 1999 and spread across eastern Ituri within a matter of days. In addition to those who were killed, half a million people were displaced. In 2003, after a mildly successful joint UN-European Union operation secured Bunia, the war was officially declared over, but massacres of both Hema and Lendu in rural areas continued late into 2007, when 25,000 militants were disarmed. And though *déplacés* began to return home starting in 2008, residents of rural Ituri say the region is locked in a cold war. The ambiguous land laws and poor management of customary lands that led to the land-grabbing and sparked the war have not been addressed, and a decade’s worth of displacement has complicated more than ever questions of ownership.

Axel would become intimately familiar with all this a few years later. In the meantime, he fell in love and married his wife, Jo, although his pickup line, “You should go home and tell your parents you have found a man that is beginning to

prepare a marriage,” was poorly received at first. He also began working as a teaching assistant at Simon Kimbangu University in Bukavu in 2004. In 2005, Axel got his foot in the door at a Belgian NGO, but he wasn’t making the professional progress he hoped for. In February 2007, the couple moved north to Bunia, the city of his birth and the capital of Ituri, so Axel could take a job with another Belgian NGO, RCN Justice et Démocratie. Its main concern in Ituri was land conflict.

Axel had always imagined he would work toward grand ideals like gender equality, poverty reduction, and democracy. Land conflict didn’t sound very impressive. “It’s true that it’s noble,” he says. “It’s a job in the service of the community, but I have always dreamed of becoming more than that, of finding myself in a job where I defend human rights in general.” Axel wondered if he was limiting himself and perhaps abandoning his lifelong ambitions. It’s a feeling that lingers, and Axel still hopes to “go beyond” land conflict, yet the city boy knew even in 2007 that “land is essential to the social life of Africa.” About 70 percent of the Congolese population is rural, and to them, land is one of the most important things, second, perhaps, only to children. If the population is consumed by uncertainty and tension over access to and ownership of land, not only will the country never find peace, but it will never achieve prosperity. After all, “Land in conflict is not in a position to produce,” Axel explains. “Ituri used to be the breadbasket of Zaire, back when the country was called Zaire.” Agricultural production is still far below what it was before the war, and “not only the local communities, but the entire country, myself included, suffers the consequences.”

So when UN Habitat, the UN organ tasked with mediating land conflicts in eastern Congo, announced it was opening an office in Bunia in July 2009, Axel applied for a position. He and two other trained lawyers, Grévy Kavene and Patrick Kyanza, were hired as *médiateurs fonciers*—land-conflict mediators.

The Kitogas' financial situation had been improving steadily, and Axel's employment with the UN, which earns him at least 40 times more than the amount 80 percent of the population lives on, guarantees material comforts unknown to the vast majority of Congolese. Axel rents a four-room house supplied with about 15 hours of electricity each day to power his two TVs, DVD and VHS players, stereo system, and satellite dish. As a backup, he keeps a car battery in the house so that he can watch American political debates and speeches—Obama is his other role model, in addition to Uncle Dieudonné—even during power outages. Moreover, Axel is able to help his extended family by paying his older brother's medical school tuition, his younger sister's university fees, his niece's and nephew's educational and healthcare expenses, and his mother's medical treatment in Johannesburg, South Africa. A Japanese-imported black 2002 Chevy Blazer, the same make and color as the car used in the popular American television series "24"—"I saw this model on Jack Bauer"—sits in his driveway. It offers him as much freedom of movement as he can expect, given the appalling condition of the district capital's unpaved roads and the 10 p.m. curfew imposed on UN employees in this still volatile region in Congo's northeast. The curfew is extended to midnight on weekends, and although Axel tries to respect it, he occasionally returns home "a little late" when he goes out with friends to drink his favorite beer, Mützig, and dance the Congolese rumba, one of his

greatest joys in life, at Dallas Night Club. But it's also true that there are some things money can't buy. In 2009, after four years of marriage, Axel and Jo still had no children. Fertility problems can create stress in any culture, but in places where "people say happiness is children," the inability to conceive is particularly painful. Axel sent Jo to see specialists in Goma, North Kivu, and Kigali, Rwanda, where a doctor found some mild irregularities. After a six-month course of medication, he declared Jo's problem solved. But still there were no children. Axel has never visited a specialist, though he sometimes considers it. It would mean breaking a serious taboo. Jo explains, "Even if it is the man, we do not say that. We just say it is the woman's problem. I told him it's just me."

But it isn't just Jo's problem. On her side, her family "congratulates" Axel, declaring that he must truly love her, otherwise he would certainly divorce her. Jo says her family "wouldn't have blamed Axel if he had left me even after just a year of marriage"—and certainly no one could condemn him if he chose to "look for children elsewhere." As for her in-laws, Jo is hurt by their cruel comments that she has "only come to eat." Yet she is luckier than many women in similar positions: Axel stands up for her. He has not given up hope that they will have a child, and he is adamant that he will neither divorce Jo nor take a second wife—an increasingly uncommon practice, but one that is still legal and often considered a viable option when a woman fails to have children. Axel is currently trying to save enough money for the two of them to visit a fertility specialist in Kampala, Uganda.

After Axel took the UN job and Jo completed her prescribed treatment, their childlessness may have simply been reduced to a problem of opportunity. When

Axel applied for the UN job, the location was listed as Bunia. That was misleading. Between the summer of 2009 and the summer of 2011, Axel regularly spent at least three full weeks—and 28 days straight was not uncommon—each month traveling to various communities in Ituri to conduct educational sessions on land conflict or to mediate specific cases. The travel made sense—“it’s a general principle of our work”: the vast majority of land conflicts in Ituri are in rural areas often accessed only with significant difficulty, so the mediators had to leave the comfort and security of the office in Bunia “to live and work in the local communities”—but it also made for some unhappy employees.

Not only was Axel away from his family for weeks at a time, with just a few days to recover in Bunia before heading out again; these were not lavish all-expenses-paid business trips. Axel, Grévy, and Patrick were expected to pay their own food and lodging costs every time they traveled. And because UN Habitat had some significant payroll issues, monthly salaries were regularly delayed by 15 days or more, leaving the mediators in financial straits. However, on the night of July 6, 2010, Axel did get free accommodation courtesy of the UN. When the team, this time with their boss and some important visitors from Bunia, arrived in the lakeside town of Kasenyi, they found that there were not enough beds at the simple guesthouse. Axel and his boss, José, had to sleep in the UN Habitat Land Cruiser. It didn’t help that dozens of insects Axel couldn’t identify were trapped in the vehicle with the two men. The insects had emerged from the shore as tiny gnats at dusk; within minutes, millions of them formed such a thick cloud that it was impossible to breathe without covering one’s face—or to enter the Land Cruiser without inviting

the gnats in. The bugs grew and grew and buzzed and beat until they were too heavy to fly, and then they died; by morning, their wormy bodies littered the inside of the vehicle and crunched underfoot as Axel, looking drawn, walked across the courtyard to bathe with a bucket of cold water behind a screen of reeds.

Fortunately, two days later, Axel was back home in Bunia. He had been away for 28 days in June and for much of the first week of July, and he felt completely run down. Instead of socializing with his friends or spending quality time with his wife, he passed the evenings in his pajamas on the couch, lacking even the energy to chat with Jo over dinner, which she served to him in front of the TV. After dinner, he drifted off to sleep on the couch until Jo woke him to move into the bedroom. This pattern continued for days. Delays in UN Habitat's accounting meant that the organization had no funds to purchase gasoline for their next business trip. Each day, Axel and his colleagues went into work knowing that they might be called upon to leave on a one-month trip if the gas money was released; each day, they returned home unable to give their families any definite answers. Finally, word came, and on July 16, 2010, Axel once again said goodbye to Jo. As he loaded his small black rolling suitcase, which held everything he would need for nearly a month of travel (since he kept clothes and toiletries in Fataki), into the UN Habitat Land Cruiser, Jo refused to look at the vehicle. As he stood on the ground looking up at her on the porch, she barely glanced at him and did not smile as he said his goodbyes. But the team was waiting, and Axel had to go.

Over the following three weeks, the team crisscrossed the territories of Djugu and Mahagi, traveling from Bunia to Drodro, Largu, and Blukwa; to Mahagi,

Ndama, Djupanyarhonore, and Logo; to Fataki and Sanduku, with side trips in each location, the short distances on the map giving a false impression of the time and physical fortitude required for these journeys on badly maintained dirt roads during the rainy season. In Blukwa, Axel led a mediation between the Hema and Lendu communities, first meeting with the local chief and stationed national soldiers, then consulting with the community representatives who had requested UN Habitat's intervention. Over the course of two days, Axel and the other mediators went back and forth between the parties in conflict, involving and consulting with local authorities, inspecting evidence (such as a twisted bicycle stored in a corner of the one-room police station, said to have been destroyed in order to intimidate its owner), and calming tempers with their confident assurances that they would find a solution agreeable to all parties. Before this could happen, the team was called away on urgent business to a remote village in the territory of Mahagi, where on July 19, 2010, a neighboring clan had burnt 80 to 90 houses in the village of Djupanyarhonore. Axel assured the residents of Blukwa that the team would return at the end of the week to continue discussions. The belligerents were appeased and agreed not to aggravate the conflict in the interim. In Mahagi, Axel, Patrick, and Grévy again met with local chiefs, the alleged perpetrators of the arson in Djupanyarhonore, and the now-homeless victims. Axel led a session with the Djupamula, who admitted that rogue members of the clan had orchestrated the attack but refused to give up individuals to the authorities, in order to understand their grievances and to urge them not to take further violent action until a compromise could be reached. He and the other mediators then toured the burned

village of Djupanyarhonore and listened to the testimony of the residents. Although unable to mediate a resolution before having to return to Blukwa en route to Fataki and Sanduku, Axel did impress upon the parties the urgency of not escalating the situation. Axel's work is not easy, and he and the other mediators are stretched thin. But Axel is calm, and that quality, paired with a confident manner and ability to move freely between both sides of a conflict without appearing to favor any one side, earn him a great deal of respect from the parties involved. Importantly, he has so far been able to soothe inflamed tempers enough to prevent the kind of escalation that resulted in the Ituri Conflict.

Axel is a naturally joyful person. His ebullient laugh is much heartier than one would expect from a 5 foot 4 inch, 143-pound man, and it punctuates his conversations liberally, even when he is less than delighted with the current situation. Axel genuinely cares about people and wants to make a difference in the lives of his fellow citizens. But he sometimes questions the lasting impact of his work, pointing out the absence of enforcement mechanisms and the need for those in conflict to truly desire a non-violent solution. Axel struggles to justify the "enormous personal sacrifices" that result from tending some relationships to the detriment of others.

We abandon our daily life for the benefit of the community. We abandon ourselves. We abandon our families, our friends, those we are close to, to live with the communities where they are, so that our presence on the ground might lead to some kind of compromise between the parties.

It's difficult to be on the one hand, a land mediator, and on the other hand, the head of a family, a member of society who has social needs,

the need for friendships. I have no friends. Friendship is about being together. When I always have to live far from my friends, and I come back to spend just one or two days with them, I ask myself, don't my friends wonder what's going on with me? And if they don't ask themselves that, I ask myself anyways, is that enough for a friendship, or instead am I not in the process of completely destroying the friendships I had in the past, of shattering them by force?

And regarding the ties of my marriage, is this permanent distance I am putting between me and my family going to one day lead to consequences I can't repair? It's a fear I have every day, and I hope it doesn't happen, because if it does, it would be a catastrophe, both for my personal life and even for my professional life, because I need the support of my family to do the work I'm doing now.

So why does he continue with this work? Money is one motivation. Axel's lifestyle in Bunia is not inexpensive (the car, the clothes, the night clubs, the restaurants), and he has numerous other financial obligations (educational and medical expenses for the extended family). Another motivation is his hope that he can improve the Congo's future. The problem is in finding the balance between his own needs and wants as a person and his desire—obligation, even—to give back to his broken country. It's not easy, and sometimes one consideration exerts a stronger pull than the other. But in the end, Axel says, "I try to bring the best of myself to help populations resolve their problems. I can't wave around my personal problems before managing the conflicts that oppose communities."

So Axel, grudgingly, at times, continues his work as a mediator. With travel so difficult and Djugu the nexus of more conflicts than the mediators can hope to individually address, they decided for efficiency's sake they might as well base themselves in Fataki during their regular periods of travel. It's a backcountry town sprung up around three converging roads. Only 54 miles from the main office in

Bunia, Fataki would be an easy commute if Ituri had an infrastructure to speak of. But the potholes, mud pits, and hairpin turns that characterize the unpaved major artery of Ituri guarantee the journey will take at least four and a half hours—if not days. Even weekend trips home to Bunia are impractical. So Axel and his colleagues are forced to maintain a modest household in Fataki at their own expense.

Until recently, the three mediators stayed in a dark, damp, and dusty house known as “*chez* Papa Simon” (at Papa Simon’s) near the *rond-point*, the area where the three roads converge, marked by a concrete pyramid painted with arrows showing the directions and distances to other towns. At night, a few bare bulbs patched from the line that supplies generator power to the two nearby bars syphoned off what few watts they could; some nights, the little house was moderately bright, others, it remained dim and candlelight was required. There was an outhouse built of sticks and mud with a hole in the floorboards to squat over. *Chez* Papa Simon also boasted what was likely Fataki’s second-best bathing facility. It was a cloakroom, entry hall, and a bathroom all-in-one. The base of the deep poured-cement tub had become pitted from years of use, and it had no taps, just a small pipe that drained bathwater into a ditch outside. Bathers washed by whatever natural light passed through the punched-out top two panels of the house’s side door. There was a sink that might once have had running water but was now used as a recycling bin to store dozens of dusty, empty 1.5-liter plastic Rwenzori water bottles.

Bathers had to measure out river water from the yellow plastic 10-gallon jugs women carried up from the river for about 15 cents each. Tilting the jug just so,

to keep the vegetal gray sediment in the jug and out of the bathwater basin, was a valued skill. If Antoine, the stuttering Lendu that Axel, Patrick, and Grévy employed to cook and clean for them, had prepared water on the little three-leg charcoal *jiko*, the men could fill their buckets of bathwater with a scoop of boiling water to take the chill off the frigid 5 a.m. airs of Fataki. And they were able to afford the special Dettol soap that killed the rash-causing microbes in the river water. All things considered, the mediators got by just fine *chez* Papa Simon.

But when Papa Simon considered these luxuries—the light bulbs, the houseboy, the anti-bacterial soap—he realized that his UN-employed tenants could surely afford to pay more rent. Residents of Fataki knew Papa Simon as someone who “loves money too much,” and in the disagreement that ensued, Grévy relocated to one of Papa Simon’s no-frills (no access to the bathtub, and therefore cheaper) row-house rooms, while Axel and Patrick chose to move in with a UNDP colleague who rented a room in a former restaurant on the outskirts of town—that is to say, no more than a half-mile from the little *rond-point*. There were several empty rooms in the former Safari Restaurant available at bargain prices, for Safari lacks even the modest charms of *chez* Papa Simon. A semi-gutted transport truck propped on cinder blocks in the front yard comprises the focal point of the building’s exterior, but the pigeons who alight from it tend to draw the eye to Safari’s roof, where they nest. It’s the UNDP roommate’s husbandry project; the meat is said to be quite tender if you get the pigeon young. Consequently, everything at Safari is covered in the birds’ droppings.

Inside, the view is similarly drab. What comprised the dining area before the war killed off the restaurant business is now a decrepit and cavernous hall that echoes with the coos and scuttles of the ceiling's occupants, who don't all sound to be pigeons. The room is sparsely furnished with a simple plank table, a wood bench or two, and some white plastic lawn chairs, and the windows, long devoid of glass, are boarded up. Even on a sunny day, the structure is eerie and foreboding. At night, the effect worsens as the house is plunged into complete darkness. Later, as the distant revelry in Fataki's bars dies down, there is the kind of silence so silent that it makes a noise.

Each night, by the light of a single kerosene lamp, Axel, Grévy, Patrick, and Fiston (the UN Habitat driver) sit around the table and wash their hands in the trickle of water Antoine dispenses for each, a bucket held below to catch anything that runs off. Then, they remove the lids from the metal casserole pots to reveal the evening meal: some combination of corn and cassava *pâtes* (the African staple of stiff porridge also known as *foufou*, *ugali*, *sadza*, *nsima*, or *shima*, depending where you go); white rice; peeled potatoes or white sweet potatoes; goat or beef on the bone in a bright orange palm oil sauce; smoked fish; and maybe some salty cabbage or palm-oiled dark green *sombé*, the stewed leaves of the cassava plant. For dessert, there might be a plate of sliced pineapple or mango.

Axel, Patrick, Grévy, and Fiston watch their portions, as the cold leftovers will serve as breakfast, a meal that will last until next evening's dishes appear. After dinner, the men tell stories and jokes in Swahili, their mother tongue, until the cold gets to them; more often than not, they end up huddled under their scratchy wool

blankets by 9 or 10 p.m. But Axel finds it hard to sleep in Fataki. He broods over having to be there of all places, far from Jo and his friends; he worries about his financial obligations and the extra expense of maintaining this wretched house. Sometimes Axel—a huge movie buff—powers up his Toshiba work laptop to distract himself with bootleg action flicks or “24” dubbed in French, or with the ballads of his favorite singers, Jordin Sparks and Celine Dion. If his phone is getting reception, he calls Jo in Bunia. Feeling her childlessness more keenly with Axel away, Jo is equally unable to sleep and appreciates hearing his voice.

But when there is a soccer game on TV, or if Axel just wants to have a little fun, he, Patrick, Grévy (though Grévy doesn’t drink), and the UNDP roommate head to Victoria Hotel, the biggest, loudest bar in town. There Axel orders a Mützig, or, if he’s feeling flush, an imported Guinness, or just a local favorite, Uganda’s Nile Special. Bored waitresses in faux-fur sweaters mill about and occasionally perch on the arm of Axel’s plastic lawn chair to respond to his banter. Although Axel does not have any girlfriends in Fataki—“I’m not in that skin here”—he may occasionally be more in that skin elsewhere, but Congolese culture does not consider this a major offense, though wives may beg to differ. Nonetheless, Jo says that she trusts Axel, while noting that when a man works far from his family, people will always whisper, “Your husband is sleeping with so-and-so and so-and-so and so-and-so.” She adds that men “do that, because they have the characters of little children, unlike women, who are only for their husbands.”

Jo would like Axel to be only for her, but she grudgingly shares him with the communities in conflict that need his help. Yet in Ituri, where the conflicts have a

definite ethnic element, people are suspicious of anyone's motives for getting involved—even if they have no affiliation with either the Hema or the Lendu. “We aren't always seen as people who come in good faith to resolve conflict,” Axel explains. “My wife says, ‘My husband is sacrificing himself to transform the conflict in Ituri, but his intervention is not appreciated by the parties in conflict.’ She says it would be better to abandon this work.” Indeed, it is not unusual for the mediators to be chased from a village by angry residents. On May 25, 2011, the UN Habitat team, excluding Axel, was sitting outside the home of the Hema representative of Sanduku, Ngona Gikwa Floribert, discussing recent events in the village when two Lendu *vieux sages* (wise elders) arrived yelling that UN Habitat had “come to do *politique*”—to conspire with the Hema to take Lendu land. The land-conflict mediators got into the UN Habitat Land Cruiser and drove off as quickly as they could. Now, the team refuses to meet publicly with the Hema lest they be seen as Hema collaborators. If the Hema want to register a conflict, they must travel 3.5 miles by foot to Fataki in order to speak to the team in the privacy of the UNDP office. “It's discouraging when they turn against us when we are only trying to help,” Grévy explains. “And, we get scared when they threaten us. The population here has an ease of killing.”

Axel has come to realize that he has no real power as a mediator: “It's the parties who decide to resolve their problems or not to resolve them. What we try to do is to facilitate dialogue between the parties in conflict, to lead them to find a compromise. When I joined the UN Habitat team as a land mediator, I had the idea that when we intervened, we would give a solution to the problem. But once I was in the field and became aware of the conflicts, I realized that we don't have the

obligation of results, we have the obligation of means. You are in a position to counsel the parties to come to a solution, but solutions to problems don't depend on us, they depend on the parties in conflict. But even if the solution is adopted, it might not be sustainable, and mediation is not effective in finding sustainable solutions." In an observation that doesn't bode well for peace in Ituri, Axel adds, "The majority of parties in a conflict prefer to resolve their conflict with violence."

So Axel is ultimately powerless to solve the land conflicts at work and powerless to fulfill his role as head of the household at home. "My wife calls me to express a need, and I am 100 miles from home. I can't give her the necessary assistance. My wife's affection for me is no longer the same when I come back after a whole month, or three weeks." Burnt out and often ill from the rigors of the road, Axel can often do no more than sit on the couch in front of the TV when he gets home. But his fatigue is dwarfed by the mental strain he feels: "My mental state is not tranquil. I'm not exercising my role as father of the family. It torments me. If today my wife decided to leave me, she would be completely justified, because her husband has been absent all these days. I sense in her behavior the knowledge that I've just come for a minute, then I'll leave again. I'm like a bird who swoops in to take its prey, then leaves immediately. I just hope Jo can understand that the work I'm doing is a work of sacrificing the self in favor of others."

For a time, the work-life balance improved. There was the sense in Djugu that tensions were decreasing and land conflicts were being managed more effectively at the local level. The UN Habitat team set up a system of local mediators who would document conflicts and send a report to Bunia at the end of every month. For five or

six months, Axel and the others rarely spent time in Fataki—and when they did, it was for much shorter stints. Axel and Jo welcomed the change, but some people in Djugu worried that the progress UN Habitat had made would be lost.

Despite his improved work schedule and home life, not to mention personal happiness, Axel had already taken steps to find another job. He met with the human resources staff of both UNHCR and MONUSCO (the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Congo). He submitted applications to UNHCR, MONUSCO, UN OCHA (Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs), and UNICEF. At the end of October, 2011, Axel received an offer from UNHCR, but it was a lower grade than he was classed at UN Habitat, and the pay was at least \$500 less per month. He declined to sign the contract. Finally able to enjoy the comfort and status his UN job afforded him back in Bunia (now that he didn't have to spend several weeks each month in Fataki), Axel signed on for another year with UN Habitat in November 2011.

But on January 30, 2012, the head of UN Habitat in the Congo and a representative of UN Habitat East Africa came for a meeting with the local populations around Fataki in order to, in a sense, show off UN Habitat's successes. The residents' feedback was both a testament to UN Habitat's value and a warning that the team had stepped back too early. Both Hema and Lendu representatives begged for the mediators to return to Fataki, claiming their presence was still crucial. "Even though the situation is calm, in peoples' hearts there are still conflicts to be resolved, and that could take years," one spectator summarized. So Axel, Patrick, and Grévy would again be spending a great deal of time in Fataki.

The conflicts in peoples' hearts began to find their way into the open once again. In mid-March, 2012, violent conflict reemerged in Fataki and surrounding areas. The house of a Hema man in Sanduku—the village where Patrick and Grévy were confronted by the angry Lendu *vieux sages* in May 2011—was burnt, and a Hema businessman was murdered in another nearby village. On March 28, Ngoni Gikwa Floribert, the representative of the Hema in Sanduku at whose home the Lendu *vieux sages* verbally attacked Patrick and Grévy, was beaten to death by a group of Lendu men from a neighboring village. It was decided that Fataki and the surrounding areas were now too dangerous for UN Habitat mediators to visit, so for the foreseeable future, Axel will not be returning to his grim room at the former Safari Restaurant. “UN Habitat would like to be involved in finding a solution to this conflict, but that will not be possible now. The situation is too dangerous. We must wait to see if things calm down,” Axel explained. The progress UN Habitat had made in Fataki was lost, and the safety of the mediators should they return to the area was questionable, but Axel had no choice but to continue his work the best he could, where he could.

“It’s paradoxical that I continue to live in this permanent stress but also continue to work this job, it’s completely paradoxical,” Axel says. “But I have always wanted to work on behalf of vulnerable populations. I have always wanted to work for the reestablishment of peace and the transformation of conflict. For the moment, whatever the problems this work produces, I tell myself that it is important to help populations who live in distress, to bring them hope to survive,

it's always important to bring them assistance that will permit them to believe in a better future. It's that that keeps me in this job. I say to myself, if today I abandon this work because of personal and family problems, well, abandoning my job will create many more victims at the level of the local communities than at the level of my family. My family, it's true that it is just small, it might sometime get bigger, but the local community who have found hope in my work, if I have to abandon them, that means dooming them to an uncertain future."

But Axel is also a dreamer, and he refuses to give up his other aspirations: pursuing a doctorate in human rights, visiting America, and even working abroad. But in the meantime, he says, "I just want it to be known that this work requires a particular sacrifice, it's a job that can't be done without a deep commitment from the heart, but it's also a work that finds its base in the feeling that each one can bring something to the resolution of conflict. So I am torn between my choices, but only the future will tell."

A RELATIVE PEACE

It was mid-morning on August 3, 2010. Since dawn, Jean De Dieu Ndjango B'ebbu and dozens of other *retournés* had been tilling a large, grassy field on the hillside known as Hû. The combination of the blistering sun and the intense fires used to eliminate unwanted vegetation had finally forced the laborers to lay down their hoes after long hours of relentless synchronized soil-turning. While most of the *retournés*, their handmade tools balanced casually on their shoulders, straggled back home to Sanduku in small groups of twos and threes, De Dieu and a few others dropped their hoes by the edge of the field and set off purposefully in another direction—across the road and into the uncleared bush toward a hill called Djô. De Dieu strode through the waist-high grass, separating its blades with the flat of his machete like Moses parting the Red Sea—only God never gave De Dieu special powers to save his people. When he came to the overgrown clearing, it took him a moment to locate the simple memorial that he and the other *retournés* had erected just a year before when they had returned to live in Sanduku after ten years of displacement caused by violent ethnic conflict. The simple 10-foot cross made of two joined logs had fallen into a tall, vine-covered shrub. One of De Dieu's companions helped to right it and attempted to steady its base in the loamy black

earth before giving up and propping it against the bush. Meanwhile, something had caught De Dieu's one good eye: a weathered-gray shard of human skull nestled in the grass.

"We were on Hû tending Tamba's herd of more than 50 cows. It was early afternoon when we heard the shots. I ran into the bush with just the clothes on my body, but they shot at us and chased us, and some were captured as prisoners. The enemies took the prisoners—including Tamba's family and seven other people from Sanduku—to a *paille* (thatch) house on Djô that existed where I now stand, barricaded them inside, and burned it. If we hadn't fled, we would have lost our lives, too," De Dieu said, as if needing to justify his survival. "I found out later that my grandfather, Ndr'kpa, and my uncle, Mandro, were killed. The enemies burned them."

De Dieu is a member of the Lendu ethnic group; the attackers were Hema. Every year since their return, De Dieu and the other survivors of the fall of Sanduku on June 19, 1999, have gathered at Djô on that date to pray for their lost loved ones.

A year later, on August 6, 2011, Ngoni Gikwa Floribert stood next to the abandoned remains of an orange brick building in a different clearing a few miles from the hill called Djô, this one overrun by mangy stalks of corn. Greedy vines wrapped their tendrils around the arches of the structure's former windows and doors; debris carpeted its roofless chambers. Beyond the corn, beyond the ruins, the view stretched across a valley to a ridge. Further still was the distant *localité* of Mola, the village where the bodies of Ngoni's wife, Yemima, and three-month-old

daughter, Emanuela, had been found two days after they were killed in March 2000, abducted from the orange brick building which, in its former state, had offered a sense of security. This place was Tsuba: a timber and coffee concession located between Sanduku and Tsupu-kidogo, the *localité* just three miles from Sanduku where Ngonu was born and raised. On this August morning in 2011, Tsuba was tranquil, muted gray by the overcast sky peeking through the eucalyptus canopy high above. The air smelled of damp soil, cedar, and brewed green tea leaves. Nearby, birds called out, while from afar came the faint but steady sound of men sawing planks by hand from trunks four feet or more in diameter. But back in March 2000, the rainy season had not yet come, and the air was acrid; the sun was hot, the light was sharp, and the land around Tsuba was dry and brown.

“The enemies who approached from the opposite ridge stood out so clearly,” said Ngonu, looking out to the spot where he had detected the armed men 11 years before.

Yet Tsuba’s perennial verdure had successfully concealed those who had hidden in a tight ring around the clearing, where Ngonu and some 50 other Hema and Lendu workers on the Hema-owned plantation lived in the orange brick building. “I must have walked right past them on my way to the coffee field that morning. When I saw the enemies on the ridge, I screamed, ‘Run! The enemies are coming!’ Then the others, who had already surrounded us, came forth with their weapons. I thought Yemima was right behind me, but I didn’t know she had brought Emanuela with her and put her inside the house. By the time I realized Yemima had gone to get Emanuela, I could not save them, so I continued to run.” He was silent for

a long moment, eight counts of the distant handsaws. “But God has given me many things: at least Yemima had left our other children at home with a neighbor that day. Often whole families were slaughtered during that war.”

Ngoni is Hema, and these enemies were Lendu.

This is not a story of primordial African tribal hatreds. The Hema and the Lendu hadn’t traditionally been enemies. In fact, for centuries, they had lived fairly peacefully in mixed communities, ever since the Hema migrated from neighboring Uganda into present-day Ituri District, Democratic Republic of the Congo, in the seventeenth century. While the distinction between them never disappeared, the Hema and Lendu identities evolved as assimilation occurred in both directions. Historically, the Hema were herders and the Lendu, cultivators. Over time, the Hema became politically dominant and began to control more than their fair share of land. The Lendu rarely resisted these encroachments because population density had not yet become a problem and trade relationships were mutually beneficial. Besides, the Lendu prevailed culturally. The Hema grew into two distinct groups: the Gegere, or Northern Hema, such as Ngoni, and the Southern Hema. The Gegere trace their origin to an ancestral Lendu mother. They speak Kilendu rather than the Kihema of the Southern Hema, because, as Ngoni observes, “a child must know the language of the mother;” and the majority cultivate beans, corn, sweet potatoes, cassava, and bananas like the Lendu. For their part, the Lendu also began to keep livestock, further reducing the distinction between the two. Though clashes between the Hema and the Lendu did sometimes arise through the centuries, mostly in response

to disagreements about land use between herders and farmers, they were contained and resolved at the local level.

By the early 1900s, the Belgian colonial administration had finally penetrated Ituri, though Belgium had already been claiming the area as its own on maps for two decades. In order to consolidate their control, Belgian administrators found it expedient to impose new political, social, and economic structures in Ituri based on the concept of tribal identities and contrived ancestral lands. They segregated the previously mixed populations into a checkerboard of ethnic villages, or *localités*, grouped into *collectivités* across Ituri, often despite significant resistance. This disrupted old relationships of patronage and power—boundaries frequently disregarded previous demographic patterns and established land-tenure practices—and allowed the Belgians to assert their influence. *Collectivités* generally bore the name of the ethnic group to which they now belonged: Walendu-Pitsi and Walendu-Djatsi were for the Lendu, while Bahema-Nord and Bahema-Banywagi were for the Hema. When it proved impossible to completely segregate the Hema and the Lendu into separate geographic regions using forced relocation, the administration compromised by creating non-contiguous minority ethnic villages, which they assigned to the nearest ethnically appropriate *collectivité*. In tandem with these changes, the colonial authorities also developed and promoted a durable narrative in which the Hema were viewed as intellectually and culturally superior, if also exploitative and land-hungry, while the Lendu were characterized as innately unintelligent, lazy, cruel, and victimized by the Hema. The administration thereby crystallized ethnicity as the critical social identifier.

This arbitrary ethnicized system remains in place today and forms much of the basis of modern claims to land rights in Ituri. Every Hema and every Lendu is consigned to a *localité d'origine* at birth—a designation that has nothing to do with where the individual was born and raised or even where his ancient ancestors lived and died, but rather with the *localité* in which his paternal ancestor found himself in the early twentieth century reshuffling. (For example, although Ngona was born in the village of Tsupu-kidogo in Walendu-Pitsi, his legal *localité d'origine* is Ndogbe, Bahema-Nord, a village in which he has never set foot). Of course, both the Hema and Lendu strayed from these artificial ethnic *localités* over time, ironically often at the request of Belgian plantation owners, who required extensive labor pools to make their concessions productive.

In 1960, the Congo attained independence, and in 1971, Dictator Mobutu Sese Seko changed its name to Zaire. The year that De Dieu was born, Mobutu enacted the 1973 General Property Law, decreeing all land the property of the state and nationalizing foreign-owned enterprises, including the concessions of Walendu-Pitsi, where both Sanduku and Tsupu-kidogo are located. Most of Walendu-Pitsi's concessions were taken over by elite Hema families, often the former managers of the concessions, who had gained political, economic, and educational advantage under the Belgian colonial system and had consolidated their positions post-independence with the help of a Hema national Minister of Agriculture. After promulgating the 1973 General Property Law, Mobutu promised that a presidential act would follow in order to regulate the usage of customary lands, such as the majority of Ituri's land, but such legislation never materialized. Instead, the

Congolese constitution still recognizes property obtained under customary law. Though the 1973 law is considered to take precedence, its application has been inconsistent and confusing, especially in places like Ituri, where the state has been virtually absent since the late 1990s. Most residents of Ituri remained ignorant of the 1973 law long after it was passed and continued to live exactly as before.

De Dieu and Ngona grew up together. From 1984 to 1989, they were classmates, first at the primary school in the *localité* of Dr'dza, then at the high school in Libi, the capital of the *collectivité* of Walendu-Pitsi—even though Ngona was three years older than De Dieu and they were from different *localités*. When De Dieu was 11 and Ngona was 14, they were “bench colleagues,” meaning they shared a single desk. Ngona remembers De Dieu as a calm and conciliatory boy about whom “one could not have noticed any bad things.” De Dieu reminisces that “Ngona was very intelligent, a very good student, but he couldn’t play soccer and, actually, he was bad at all sports.” They weren’t particularly close friends, and each was aware that the other was of a different ethnic group, but both boys’ childhood friendships and alliances were based on the universal metrics of athletic and scholastic aptitudes and interests, not on their classmates’ ethnic origins.

That is, at least on the surface. Ngona remembers well the day he learned that “Hema” and “Lendu” were more than simple adjectives to describe unimportant differences, like “tall” and “short,” or “talkative” and “quiet.” Lonu was a Lendu boy who teased Ngona relentlessly, calling him names, pushing him around during recess, and even trying to get him in trouble in class. Lonu often smacked Ngona on

the head, an insult Ngona normally endured without response. But one day, 8-year-old Ngona had had enough. When Lonu slapped his head, Ngona punched the boy in the nose. Lonu began to bleed, and Ngona found himself surrounded by Lonu's Lendu supporters. They beat him badly. The Hema students began to fight in Ngona's defense, and soon the entire schoolyard devolved into conflict. After that day, the Hema students and the Lendu students were wary of each other. The difference was subtle; there were still many friendships that bridged the divide, but Ngona began to perceive a rift where before he had not.

De Dieu was still too young to be at the primary school in Dr'dza when this fight took place, but he remembers his parents making efforts to point out to him those neighbors who were Lendu, like them, and those who were Hema. De Dieu didn't know why this distinction was important, but he understood from his parents that it must be so. Thus, the two young men internalized the differences, both real and constructed, between the Hema and the Lendu. There are the superficial markers: Hema girls beautify themselves by pulling out their two lower front teeth to create a gap, while Lendu girls prefer to file the inner edges of their top front teeth in order to create a triangular cutout. The Hema are said to be taller and leaner with straight pointed noses, while the Lendu are typecast as shorter and stockier with broad flat noses. The Gegere Hema and the Lendu both speak the same language, but the Kilendu of the Hema is less forcefully trilling and explosively consonantal than that of the Lendu. Hema women tend to marry in their early to mid-twenties, while Lendu girls often marry in their late teens; and as far as mixed marriages go, before the war, a Hema man with a Lendu woman was about five

times more common than the reverse pairing (such mixed unions are now extremely rare). De Dieu and Ngona agree, “The habits of Hema men are more appealing to women.” The Lendu have a reputation for drinking heavily, wasting money on stylish clothes, and fighting with their spouses. Stereotypically, the Hema work hard, invest well, and plan for the future—but they are also manipulative opportunists.

The response of certain Hema elites to Mobutu’s 1973 General Property Law fit neatly into this latter description and fanned the ethnic tensions of which young Ngona and De Dieu were slowly becoming aware. Rich Hema used their political savvy to buy up concessions after Mobutu nationalized the land and revoked Belgian *concessionaires’* deeds. They also created new concessions under their personal ownership, even—perhaps especially—in Lendu *collectivités*. This led to localized conflicts between the new Hema *concessionaires* and the established populations, primarily Lendu, who lived on the concession’s land, though peasants of every ethnicity were negatively affected. At the time, national or customary judicial systems handled the fallout and generally prevented such cases from turning violent. Then, the Second Congo War broke out in August 1998. Rwandan armies invaded eastern Congo to the south, and Uganda, not to be left out of this opportunity to plunder a much larger and richer but also much weaker neighbor, occupied the Congo from its border with Ituri. The Congolese state by then had effectively disappeared.

“Hema *concessionaires* used the opportunity to illegally increase the limits of their concessions,” De Dieu explains, and to lay claim to new concessions they had

either bought or pretended to have bought. Normally, residents on land sold to *cessionnaires* were entitled to a two-year period in which they could contest the sale on the grounds of prior occupation, but the chaos of the Second Congo War did away with that right. Oral history held that the Hema of Ituri were distantly related to the Hima of western Uganda, and the Ugandan army openly supported the Hema—especially the rich ones, who paid the Ugandan soldiers to conduct mass evictions of (mostly Lendu) farmers before the two-year period was up and to guard their concessions against squatters or petty thieves. De Dieu notes, “There was no government in 1999. The administration had lost its power, and those with the power were against the Lendu.” At its root, the problem was a land conflict between a few wealthy Hema and everyone else in the *collectivités* of eastern Ituri. However, the war that it gave rise to, the Ituri Conflict of 1999-2007, had a pronounced ethnic character, perhaps because the offending Hema were part of a minority (the Hema being outnumbered by the Lendu nearly three to one) and because the occupying Ugandan army made their alliances along ethnic, as well as economic, lines.

De Dieu explains, “Specifically, the war was started by a Hema man, Linga, who killed his Lendu wife. It was hard to punish him, because the government had lost its power and all the administrative agents were Hema, anyway. The Lendu asked for mediation, but the Hema refused, so finally people started to fight. We used to be well together at church and school, but the Hema withdrew from us. They decided to be apart.” Any other interpretation of events, especially by a Hema, “is a lie,” he adds.

But Ngoni insists that De Dieu's explanation is the "total lie." Instead, he says, "Under Mobutu, the whole population was too scared to fight. But when Kabila [who succeeded Mobutu] came in [during the Second Congo War], the Lendu community started to go against the Hema with whom they lived because of some problems between Hema herders and *concessionaires* and the Lendu cultivators of Ituri. War first broke out in the concession belonging to Ugwaro, who was a Lulu, not a Hema or Lendu, between him and the population of Lomea, just about 5 miles from Tsupukidogo and Sanduku. The ones who attacked him were Lendu. He went to get the Territorial Administrator, who was Hema, and the police to solve the problem with the Lendu population. The Administrator went there with the police. When they spoke of the conflict, the population revolted in front of the police and the Territorial Administrator. Ugwaro was very hurt. The Lendu burnt his house and his bicycle. The police fired shots, but the population was increasing and the Territorial Administrator, the police, and the Hema of Lomea fled. In the *localité* of Uchukpa, that same day, the Lendu killed the Hema there, so the war started there, too. And at 11 p.m. that night, there was the arson of Nzer'kpa. The population of Nzer'kpa fled, and Hema started to flee from other *localités* to get together at Djaiba, a suburb of the town of Fataki in the *collectivité* of Bahema-Badjere (though Fataki itself is in Walendu-Djatsi). After one week, the whole territory of Djugu was taken by ethnic war. Why a conflict between a Lulu and the Lendu should provoke war against the Hema, we will never understand, except to say that Ugwaro grew up among the Hema and the Lendu saw him as one of us. And more unimaginable things have happened. How could one have thought that a conflict between the Hema and Lendu

of Djugu would engulf all of Ituri, from Bunia to Mahagi?” Ngona concludes, “What I’ve said is the truth.”

The truth is there may never be a definitive answer to the question of how the Ituri Conflict actually began. What is known is that within a week in early June 1999, not only all of Djugu, but all of eastern Ituri—those parts occupied by the Hema and Lendu—was engulfed in an ethnic war that had started in Walendu-Pitsi. Soon, other ethnic groups were drawn in, often against their will, by armed militias from both sides who accused neutral bystanders of collaborating with their enemy. By then, both De Dieu and Ngona had become *déplacés*, or internally displaced people (IDPs). De Dieu would be a *déplacé* until 2009, and Ngona, for longer still.

When the war started in June 1999 and he was chased from the hill of Hû, De Dieu was already a man of 26, but he still lived with his father. De Dieu was studying at the veterinary school in Fataki, so he would not have been able to look after his own *parcelle*, or plot of land. In addition, his ex-wife, Chantal, who was pregnant with their second son, lived with their first son, Trésor, at her father’s house in the town of Djugu some 15 miles away, so he did not need his own house and *parcelle*. His parents-in-law had forced Chantal to divorce him because De Dieu, a man of modest means, could not come up with the bride price by the date set by her father. De Dieu still hoped to win her back, but the outbreak of war put an end to that possibility. De Dieu, like many others, lost everything.

“The Hema said, with their attack on Hû, ‘You are in war. It has already started,’” De Dieu recalls. “After we left, the Hema burnt our houses. My whole family was dispersed.” After two days, he was reunited with his father and some of his siblings, whom he found in the bush in a concession near Sanduku. But he had no news of Chantal and Trésor, and De Dieu’s mother, who had been in the maternity ward at the hospital in Fataki with De Dieu’s newborn sister Imani, was presumed dead. “We went to Libi, from Libi to Ala, from Ala to Ara . . . We did a whole tour. We were in the bush the whole time because there was no way of traveling on the road due to the lack of security. We spent about two months in the bush before we got to Kpandroma. In the meantime, we made little huts in the bush, with *paille* roofs only, no walls. Eating was hard. We lived on the fruits of the bush that we could gather, like avocados and mangos, and sweet potatoes from the field—anything we could find. We slept in the rain. We were like animals, only animals lived better than we did. Sometimes people helped us, but life wasn’t normal. As *déplacés*, we lived very hard. It was traumatizing and shocking, believing people were dead and finding out they were alive, believing they were alive and finding out they were dead. Joy and sorrow, both extremes. For example, when my mother and Imani found us in Kpandroma, we had been sure they were dead. But then we heard that my grandfather and uncle had been killed in the fire at Djô. In Kpandroma, all of us *déplacés* lived in little *paille* huts. It was cramped, maybe five people living in a tiny hut. To eat, we had to work for someone else. It was like we were slaves.”

De Dieu’s second son, Innocent, was born in December 1999. “It was miserable, no money, no food. Chantal suffered greatly trying to raise them during

the war, and the children became malnourished. They were struck by Kwashiorkor,” the protein deficiency which renders children’s bellies swollen, their hair brittle and yellow, and their spirits listless (to this day, little balls of protein-rich peanut butter are stocked at the pharmacy in Fataki, rather than at any of the tiny shops selling foodstuffs along the main road, as one might expect). Chantal and the children lived out the war with her parents in Djugu, the capital of Djugu territory. Djugu is on the other side of Fataki, about 30 miles from Kpandroma, so De Dieu had no way of safely getting to them. He missed them terribly—he had never even seen Innocent—and worried about their safety. He couldn’t be sure they were still alive.

Nonetheless, in Kpandroma, De Dieu married a woman named Jeanine, who died in 2004 before they had any children. On December 18, 2005, he remarried, this time to a woman 12 years his junior. She was named Médiatrice, “the mediator,” and she lived as a *déplacé* in the same camp as De Dieu. De Dieu hoped that, true to her name, his new wife would bring him some measure of peace. But although there were occasional moments of brightness, “we always knew we were in a war. We, the *déplacés*, never just relaxed over a beer, like some of the Lendu *autochtones* [Lendu from Kpandroma] did from time to time. Médiatrice and I decided not to have children during the war. I suffered so much worrying about Trésor and Innocent that I couldn’t bear to bring more children into that environment.”

As hard as life was for De Dieu, Kpandroma was never attacked during the war, and De Dieu therefore had limited direct exposure to its horrors. Ngona, his childhood friend and “bench colleague” from a simpler time, was not so fortunate.

In the turbulent month of June 1999, Ngonu lived in Tsupu-kidogo, the *localité* on the other side of the Tsuba concession where he had spent his entire life. Sensing that trouble was coming, Ngonu and his wife Yemima were preparing to preemptively abandon their home in search of safety for themselves and their three young children. In light of the brewing conflict between the *cessionnaire* Ugwaro and the Lendu of Lomea, Ngonu and his family had started to sleep hidden in the bush at night in order to avoid surprise attacks. Then some Lendu friends—“there were those among the Lendu community in Ituri who didn’t want us Hema to die”—came to warn Ngonu: “It is very serious. If you don’t leave, and not just during the night, you will die. You will lose your life.” The same day, news of the massacres and arson in Nzer’kpa and Uchukpa reached Ngonu. He and Yemima, who was pregnant with Emanuela, took their daughters Nzale, 4, and Sifa, 3, and their son Lobini, 2, to Yemima’s mother’s home on the hill of Lî in Djaiba. It was situated in the Hema *collectivité* of Bahema-Badjere and just outside of Fataki, which served as a garrison for Ugandan soldiers sympathetic to the Hema. It seemed like the safest option.

Yemima’s mother lived in a large *paille* hut perched on the top of Lî. Yemima’s father had already passed away, so Ngonu took on the strenuous work of cultivating the surrounding fields. The arrangement suited everyone, particularly Yemima’s mother, who doted on her grandchildren. But soon their idyllic life on the breezy hill of Lî came to an abrupt end. One morning in mid-July, enemies crested the hills to the north, northeast, south, and southeast. Ngonu sent Yemima through the fields toward Fataki with the children and her mother, but he stayed behind, hoping to guard the property from looters and arsonists. But when the only

surviving soldier of a group employed to defend a nearby concession ran past with an arrow protruding from his back, screaming to Ngona that the enemies were coming, Ngona abandoned the homestead and ran after the others to Fataki.

By then, most of the surviving Hema from the surrounding countryside of Walendu-Pitsi and Walendu-Djatsi had gathered in Fataki. The town had become overcrowded and unsanitary, and finding shelter, clean water, and adequate food was a struggle. Ngona and Yemima claimed an abandoned *mandro* bar: an unwallled, 10-foot by 10-foot hut with a *paille* roof, built to shade hungry customers while they consumed calabash bowls of thin, fermented corn and sorghum porridge, a nutritious version of African beer known locally as *mandro*. For six months, the family of five—and then six, after Yemima gave birth to Emanuela in December 1999—lived in the tiny space, which Ngona improved with the addition of hurriedly constructed crude mud walls. Though it was better than nothing—many *déplacés* slept in the bush with little but a few wide banana leaves to shelter them from rain—there was no available land to cultivate, and the outskirts of Fataki were targeted for enemy raids. Ngona worked relentlessly to scavenge and hunt for enough food to feed his family, but he could see that the children were becoming weak and beginning to suffer from Kwashiorkor. Ngona left Yemima and the children in Fataki and went to work in the coffee fields at Tsuba. There he hoped to make enough money to purchase decent food for his family.

Ngona worked and lived in the orange brick building with a mixed group of about 50 other Hema and Lendu laborers. The Lendu had been affiliated with the concession before the war and, like a small number of other Lendu concession

workers in Ituri, had preferred to continue working for their Hema patrons, whom they believed could offer them protection during the ethnic war. Relations between the Hema and Lendu workers were good. Most mornings, they were in the fields by 5 a.m., as even Tsuba's coolness evaporated once the March sun rose overhead. That day in March 2000 was no different. As usual, Ngona returned to the living quarters for breakfast sometime between 6:30 and 7:00 a.m. The clearing by the orange brick building was always a hive of activity during this time, and Ngona enjoyed the buzz of so many people, Hema and Lendu alike, busying themselves with mundane chores. It was almost as if the war hadn't happened.

Back in Fataki, Yemima hadn't seen Ngona for over two weeks. Normally, he returned twice a month to visit his family and drop off his salary—if he had worked very hard, it was about \$8 per week. But Ngona's salary was late, so he hadn't come. Short of money and food, Yemima decided to check on him. She could also use the opportunity to collect some wild vegetables on her way back. Leaving her older children, Nzale, Sifa, and Lobini, in the care of a neighbor at the *mandro* hut in Fataki, Yemima rose early, tied baby Emanuela to her back with a bright fabric *pagne*, and walked the 7.5 miles to Tsuba.

At almost the same moment as Ngona entered the clearing and noticed Yemima talking to a group of women near the brick building, he caught sight of enemies on the ridge on the other side of the valley. He screamed, "Run! The enemies are coming!" and turned to flee, assuming Yemima would be right behind him. But Ngona didn't know that she had brought Emanuela, who was with the other

children and babies in the cool interior of the building. Yemima and the other mothers, unwilling to abandon them, rushed inside to grab their children.

As soon as he shouted out, what seemed to Ngoni like hundreds of armed enemies emerged from the forested area surrounding the clearing. A handful of male workers evaded them, but the women who had gone to get their children inside the building were trapped. They barricaded the green wooden door from the inside and began to scream frantically. Children wailed. Ngoni kept running. By then, he knew that stopping would mean sure death; he was unarmed and hopelessly outnumbered. His only chance of helping Yemima, Emanuela, and the others was to bring Ugandan soldiers from Fataki—quickly.

Ngoni ran all the way to Fataki through the bush. He estimates that it took him about 45 minutes: “I was young and apt still, and I was able to run very quickly. I jumped over fallen logs, and when I fell, I got back up immediately and kept running. I ran through thorns; I was like an animal. I just ran. I had so much adrenalin that I didn’t feel anything. I felt no pain until the day after, when my whole body began to ache.” When he arrived at Fataki, “people thought I had been attacked by the enemy because I was bleeding profusely from the thorns. They thought I had been cut by a machete.” His yellow shorts and navy polo were torn and wet with blood, and he was barefoot, but all Ngoni could think about was finding help. He went directly to the army garrison and breathlessly explained what had happened. He returned to Tsuba with the military convoy.

“We saw dead children everywhere,” Ngoni said. “So many dead children, some cut in half. There were dead women and dying women as well, but many were

missing. I saw my brother-in-law, Yemima's brother, under a bed in the brick building. He was still alive but he had been stabbed. He wanted water, and I wanted to give him some, but the soldiers said no. They said he wouldn't recover. I assured my brother-in-law that he would, that we would get him to the hospital, but he said that the soldiers were right, he wouldn't survive. I lifted the bed and saw that the enemies had cut off his penis and he was bleeding a lot. He was dead before we could get him to the hospital. We also found some survivors on a plain some distance away. The Hema women and Lendu women with Hema husbands and all their babies had been killed with machetes in the valley. They let the Lendu women who were not married to Hema men live. One woman, a Lendu, said they had offered to let the Lendu women with Hema babies go if they would let the soldiers kill their babies, but the women refused. She said that my wife and daughter and some other women had been taken even further away. My mind was so troubled because my wife and child were missing. I didn't know if they were dead or alive. After two days, the military pursued the enemies to Mola, a *localité* that was very far away. There they found the bodies of the women and their babies, burnt. They also found a body that the enemies had grilled with onions. The soldiers returned with the bodies to Fataki, but I did not want to see the bodies of my wife or my child. I could not bear it. That's how I lost my family. But we saved the lives of some people that day."

After Yemima and Emanuela were killed, Ngonu returned to Fataki to care for Nzale, Sifa, and Lobini. Most days, he went into the forest to scavenge for avocados and bananas from abandoned gardens and for wild fruits and vegetables.

Occasionally, Ngonu would come across a beehive, from which he would collect

calorie-dense wild honey. It was a difficult time for Ngona, and he turned to religion for comfort. There he found explanations for why he was still alive and Yemima and Emanuela were not. "It was God's spirit guiding me through that period. I communicated in my heart with Him, and He told me where the enemies were so I could avoid them, and He told me where the bees were, so I could protect the lives of my children. I would get a vision of where I would find bees, and I would go in the forest and get the honey easily. I became invisible to the enemies in the forest. If I am alive today, and if any of my children are alive today, it is because God guarded me. He chose to save us."

Yet despite his best efforts and God's protection, the children were still clearly malnourished. In early 2001, Ngona decided that the security benefits that came from living in Fataki were outweighed by the increased exposure to attacking enemies and the lack of sufficient food in town. He moved about 6 miles down the road, just past Sanduku to the neighboring *localité* of Djokpa, and occupied a house abandoned by a Hema who had fled to Fataki. Today, that house where Ngona and his children lived is long gone, and the avocado and banana trees growing from the waist-high, tangled underbrush offer the only signs that there had once been a household on the spot. Now rotting black avocado pits roll underfoot, invisible under the blooming kalanchoe bushes and the scarlet spears of a flowering plant that might be found in tamed miniature in the floral sections of North American grocery stores. The rapidity with which nature reclaims its space comes as no surprise to Iturians; they simply shrug and ask how Ituri could be anything but

fecund when the soil has been watered with the blood and fertilized with the bones of so many corpses.

But even in the midst of unspeakable violence, there are elements of normalcy; months and years pass, and people continue to go about their lives. About a year after he lost Yemima and Emanuela, Ngona fell in love with a Lendu girl named Clarice. He was living with his family on the *parcelle* he had occupied in Djokpa, and he began to cut both men and women's hair for some extra money. Clarice worked in a nearby concession owned by a prominent Hema businessman named Savo, who was later found by the United Nations to have been complicit in the land-grabbing and illegal expropriation that started the war. One day, she came with a group of other workers to have Ngona cut her hair. Ngona "found her comportment pleasing, more than all the other women," but Clarice refused his advances. As they got to know each other, Clarice became more interested in a romantic relationship, and Ngona proposed. His "heart had chosen her like it had chosen no other woman but Yemima."

In August 2001, Clarice became pregnant. It was at this time that the United Nations had been given its most expansive peacekeeping mandate for Ituri. It seemed possible that peace might soon return. But in late 2001 and 2002, "while she was pregnant, there was a new war, very serious"—another surge of fighting and civilian massacres broke out. The United Nations peacekeeping troops were able to impose some semblance of security in the district capital of Bunia, 54 miles from Fataki, but that was worlds away from Ngona's and Clarice's reality. Ngona reasoned that it simply wasn't safe for either of them to go through with the wedding. "It

would cause us big losses. The Hema wouldn't see it well if I took a Lendu woman, especially since the Lendu killed my first wife, and if my Hema brothers wanted to kill her, I would have no power to stop the evil. If they killed her, I would lose another wife, and she would lose her life. So I said, 'No, I can't protect you well. Your boss, the Hema *concessionaire* Savo, has the power to guard you. Stay with him. After the war, we'll meet up.'" She stayed on the concession and gave birth to his son, Ngabu Gikwa, in May 2002.

But the war escalated, and Ngona "regretted" that as a single parent, he couldn't take care of his children properly. One day in February 2002, while he was working in the Tsuba concession, Ngona saw Graciana, a Hema woman whom he did not know, collecting firewood. He asked around about her and found out that she was divorced and had a four-year-old daughter. Although he didn't love her, Ngona married her "because the war continued, and I regretted leaving my children alone while I went out to work, with no one to take care of them if the enemy came. So I married her about one year and a half after the mother of Nzale and Sifa [Yemima] was killed, so she could help during the war."

Yemima's death had devastated her mother. When Ngona married Graciana, Yemima's mother asked him if Lobini, Yemima's youngest surviving child, could come live with her for a time. Ngona agreed. He never saw Lobini alive again. About a month after Lobini had gone to his grandmother's, Ngona received news that the child had succumbed to Kwashiorkor. The funeral was to be in Fataki. "It gives sadness to a parent's heart to consider the death of his children. I still miss my children now, and I think often of Lobini—of all the dead children. And I miss

Yemima in my life, because I decided on her as my wife for life, but the war did what it did. Even if I think about it all day, there is nothing I can do about it,” Ngona says. His stoicism is neither a sign of emotional deficiency nor of virtuous moral reasoning. It is simply a necessity in an environment where death is a daily menace and debilitating grief is a luxury that few can afford. Ngona still had Nzale and Sifa, and both Ngabu and Choisie—Graciana and Ngona’s first child together—would soon be born.

Meanwhile, Clarice learned that Ngona had married another woman. “She saw that I took Graciana and didn’t want to come back to me. Also, I felt incapable of supporting two women during the war. She married a Hema in the *localité* of Bule after the war.” She is no longer living, and though Ngabu knows his father and has visited Ngona, Ngona is saddened by the fact that “he prefers to be with his grandfather, and he isn’t interested in me.”

In 2003, the United Nations peacekeeping forces’ presence began to extend into Ituri’s rural areas. This was during the “war of Jérôme,” as Ngona calls the period of violence epitomized by the actions of self-declared “General” Jérôme Kakwavu, whose militia, the People’s Armed Forces of the Congo, was responsible for committing grave human rights abuses against civilians, including the Hema they ostensibly supported. For example, Jérôme’s soldiers shot Graciana’s five-year-old daughter from her first marriage, Solange, three times; she did not survive. After Solange was killed, Ngona and his family left the house in Djokpa and hid deep in the bush with some Hema *déplacés* from Sanduku. They built makeshift *paille* shelters

next to the river Djuda, where they could easily obtain fresh water. Ngona remembers that UN “helicopters circled overhead constantly like they were about to do something.” Then, “the whites [the UN]” announced that all people living in the bush would be “viewed as enemies, as militants,” so non-combatants were called to come live openly along Ituri’s main road. “They told us to build where we had built before, but I said that I hadn’t built any house since the start of the war, so did that mean I had to go back to Tsupu-kidogo, my native village, which was in the hands of the enemy? They said no, to just build where there was empty space.”

The Hema *déplacés* from Sanduku invited Ngona to come live next to them by Sanduku’s roadside, where the peacekeepers assured them they would be safe. Ngona reluctantly agreed, though he worried about attacks from passing militants. Ngona built a temporary hut. When he saw that a kind of peace had come (so it seemed as if he wouldn’t have to flee again in the near future), but low-level conflict in Walendu-Pitsi prohibited him from returning to Tsupu-kidogo anytime soon, he built a more permanent structure on a patch of land that had been razed by war of all previous buildings and most agricultural products. The hut, in which his family continues to live today, is “bizarre”—a word Ngona uses liberally in describing his living conditions, and which is apparently his preferred euphemism for “squalid”—because he had few resources at the time that he built it. There is no proper ventilation for smoke to escape, and every time the family cooks or burns wood for warmth, a thick cloud of eye-watering smoke gathers in the conical roof and slowly expands, sometimes filling all but the bottom three or four feet of the house. There are no windows, and the only light that enters comes from the low door, which

means that most of the hut is in permanent darkness. The walls are piled high with mildewed corncobs that Ngonu was forced to store before they were properly dried because they were being stolen from his fields during the night. A goat, several chickens, and 17 guinea pigs roam freely during the day, defecating and urinating as they wish, but at night, they are locked in the hut with the family. The family sleeps on elevated papyrus mats above the uneven dirt floor but doesn't have enough bedding to ward off the nighttime cold. He is ashamed of his living conditions, but Ngonu continues to live "bizarrely" because "I am afraid to build or improve my house at all. I once started a foundation for a proper house, but the Lendu *retournés* saw it and it gave a big problem. I am afraid to build anything better on this land, in case they come to burn it or to take my life and the lives of my children to heaven."

Back in 2003, when the UN ordered non-combatants to build by the main thoroughfare, just over 300 Hema households—most belonging to *déplacés* but some to *autochtones* (people residing in Sanduku prior to the war)—had clustered together for safety on the side closer to Hema-controlled Djaiba. Even the Hema *autochtones* who had lived on the other side of Sanduku before the war built there. "Everyone sticks together when they're afraid," Ngonu explains. "So even though the Hema were from Sanduku, they built next to us. It was impossible for them to go back to their land because it was too far away from the other Hema who were building." It was a time of insecurity, and no one wanted to sleep alone.

In the meantime, once the Ituri Conflict officially ended in 2003, De Dieu and the other Lendu *déplacés* from Sanduku continued to live in Kpandroma and surrounding villages for several years.

“Although there was ‘peace,’ there was no security,” De Dieu explains, his tone betraying his point of view on the official end date of the war. “We tried to go back to Sanduku a few times, but each time, the Hema chased us from here. The first time we wanted to come back, we informed the administrative chief in Fataki, the chief of Walendu-Pitsi, the Territorial Administrator. They all said it was okay. But the Hema didn’t want us to come back. I started to build a house, but before I could put mud on the walls and *paille* on the roof, a Hema boy came at 5 a.m. and destroyed everything. They, the Hema *déplacés*, were well organized with the military, and to not involve ourselves, we went back. We did not want the war to start again, so we stayed in Kpandroma.”

De Dieu eventually took the Hema who had destroyed his partially built house to a local traditional court, where the man was found guilty and ordered to reconstruct what he had damaged. The man complied, and “fortunately, the matter was finished peacefully.”

Gradually, Lendu *déplacés* began to return to Sanduku, where they became the *retournés*, those who had returned. Over the two years following De Dieu’s homecoming on May 20, 2009, about 300 Lendu families came back to Sanduku. They found few traces of the properties they had left behind; everything had been destroyed by war. They chose for security reasons, as had the Hema, to rebuild their homes in a tightly clustered area on the side of town closer to Kpandroma. This was

the area the Hema *déplacés*, like Ngoni, and *autochtones* had avoided because of its proximity to Lendu-controlled spaces. At the time of his return, De Dieu's father, Thoro Ndjula B'ebbu, recovered much of his pre-war land, unlike some *retournés* who before the war had lived on *parcelles* still occupied by Hema *déplacés*. He claimed, however, not to have enough space for his son to build a house. Gossips whispered that Thoro had plenty of land but also many children and just wanted to force the chief to give more land to his family. In any case, when he returned to Sanduku in 2009, De Dieu was a man of 36, and Médiatrice was pregnant. De Dieu had also brought his son Trésor to live with them in order to ease Chantal's burden. He needed his own *parcelle*, where he could build his family a home, and he needed land to farm in order to support them.

Typically, the chief of the *localité* allots land and ensures everyone has access to enough space to meet their needs, but Chief Dieudonné Tsedha-Didô found his hands tied by "the presence of those illegal occupants on our land who never obey me and who have no right to be here." So, like other *retournés* who lacked their own land or found their land occupied, De Dieu made an arrangement with another Lendu *retourné*, Florence B'ebbu (no relation, although they share the same last name), to borrow a space measuring 65 feet by 65 feet on which he would build a temporary house and plant a small garden until he could obtain his own *parcelle* from the chief. When the agreement was made in 2009, both had expected that De Dieu would have his own space before long. But Chief Dieudonné kept procrastinating, arguing that the *déplacés* were taking up all the land. While it was true that many *retournés* continued to rely on the hospitality of their neighbors,

others privately believed that De Dieu was a pawn in a power struggle, *politique*, between the chief and De Dieu's land-holding father, Thoro. With baby L'Avenir needing clothes, food, and medical care, and Trésor back in school and requiring a uniform, school supplies, and school fees, De Dieu began to look for additional sources of revenue. In 2011, he began to plant pineapples, bananas, sugarcane, and manioc beyond the limits of the field Florence had lent him, occupying an additional 65-by-70-foot area. He planned to sell some of the produce in Fataki.

In early April 2011, a court messenger arrived at De Dieu's door with a handwritten summons. Florence had gone to the Tribunal in Libi to accuse De Dieu of *débordement*, or cultivating beyond the agreed upon boundary—the same serious accusation leveled against the Hema *concessionnaires* believed to have provoked the war back in 1999.

“That was when I discovered I was called, when I got the note from the Tribunal,” De Dieu said. “I felt shocked. Florence didn't come speak to me before going to the Tribunal.” De Dieu saw Florence's decision to go to the courts rather than to resolve the situation between themselves as a betrayal. “Because we are both Lendu, we can say we're the same family. We should manage that between ourselves. It doesn't need to escalate.”

But Florence says he did ask De Dieu not to plant beyond the agreed-upon limit, and De Dieu disregarded his request. Florence also tried to go through the traditional procedure of land conflict resolution. He visited Chief Dieudonné, “but the chief wasn't interested in that. Normally, since it's a problem concerning the

land in his territory, the chief should occupy himself with it, but he did not want to get involved,” explained De Dieu. “I don’t know why. That only he can say.” Florence, who is either unwilling or unable to contain his disdain for Chief Dieudonné, was more blunt: “He just didn’t care.” Both the Hema and Lendu of Sanduku regularly accuse the chief of not involving himself in the resolution of conflicts between two Lendu and of only responding to cases between a Lendu and a Hema or two Hema. The Hema say that he discriminates even more, only recognizing conflicts between a Hema and a Lendu when the Hema has done wrong. According to Ngoni, “if a Lendu will be found guilty, he does not pursue the accusations and even says that the Lendu did right because this is Lendu land.”

Despite the chief’s lack of interest in the conflict between De Dieu and his Lendu neighbor Florence, De Dieu was still unwilling to take this case to the Tribunal—and was, frankly, a bit scared of what might happen to him if he were found guilty. De Dieu decided to take matters into his own hands. “I said to myself, ‘No, this cannot be a matter for the Tribunal.’ I thought about it for two days, and then I went to the UN Habitat office in Fataki without speaking either to the chief or to Florence.”

UN Habitat, the UN organ tasked with resolving land conflict in Ituri, had been active in Fataki since mid-2009 and had conducted countless workshops to educate the population about land conflict and alternative modes of resolution. De Dieu traveled to Fataki using a bike he borrowed from a neighbor on April 11, 2011. On the way there, he mulled over the conflict. “I also worried that the Tribunal would arrest me for not appearing in court. In my absence, would they come to get

me for my case and be angry that I am not there? I was so worried that I might not find UN Habitat in town to help me,” says De Dieu. His concerns were legitimate, as the Tribunal seems to use its power to jail people for even the most minor infractions, and UN Habitat maintains only a part-time office in Fataki. Fortunately, the road from Sanduku to Fataki is downhill, and De Dieu arrived at the office after just 20 minutes. To his relief, the UN Habitat mediators were in Fataki that day.

UN Habitat does not have an official office in Fataki. Instead, the three land-conflict mediators use the two large rooms in a secondary building of the UN Development Programme’s (UNDP) office. To hold meetings with complainants, the UN Habitat land-conflict mediators sit in the conference room, which is furnished with large tables made out of local planks and relatively comfortable desk chairs. When they need to use the internet—assuming it is functioning that month—they go into the darkened back room where there are just two desks and two simple wood chairs next to two ethernet cables. When De Dieu arrived at the UNDP enclosure, he knocked on the door cut into the bright blue 12-foot security gate. A guard slid open a peephole. De Dieu explained that he was there to lodge a complaint with the UN Habitat mediators, and the guard opened the door and ushered De Dieu into the conference room.

Grévy Jacob Kavene, one of three land-conflict mediators working for UN Habitat in Ituri, was there alone. He asked De Dieu to explain why he had come. “He asked questions, and I responded,” said De Dieu. “While I spoke, he typed on his computer. He was very professional. I explained that after we came back to Sanduku, all the Lendu *retournés* got together in an assembly and decided that

everyone would build nearby to each other for security, and everyone whose land was occupied would make arrangements to build and make a little garden on someone's *parcelle*. He asked what resolution I would suggest. I said the proprietor has reclaimed his land, and I will give it back, but he must give me the same things on a new piece of land that I planted on his land. I said I needed my own *parcelle* where I can go to do these things, like build a house and farm. Grévy promised that he would directly deal with the problem of the Tribunal. He told me he would go himself to have the case withdrawn. I felt at ease after talking to Grévy. I directly felt at ease.”

Grévy said that De Dieu “was worried and felt threatened by the proprietor of the land he was living on. He was worried that he would be chased from the *parcelle* and that his house would be destroyed.” Grévy told him that the mediators would come out that very day to meet with De Dieu and Florence together in Sanduku. De Dieu set out on his bicycle, and Grévy, together with the two other UN land-conflict mediators, Patrick and Axel, gave him a 40-minute head start.

The ride home from Fataki is strenuous as it is almost entirely uphill, but De Dieu felt unburdened. “I was light-hearted because Grévy assured me he would help resolve this problem. And I also felt proud of myself that I had taken action to manage the situation. We arrived in Sanduku at the same time, and UN Habitat pulled their Land Cruiser right up in front of my house. We went to find Chief Dieudonné, my father, and Florence’s father, since it is our custom to involve our fathers and elders, and then we agreed that I would stop planting on Florence’s land and he would plant some crops for me on my new land when I got it. The chief

promised he would assign me my own *parcelle* within six months maximum. In the meantime, I can harvest the crops I already planted and live and farm on the original space Florence lent me.”

Although everyone said they were satisfied with the solution, Grévy noticed that Florence still seemed unhappy.

The next day, the mediators spoke individually with Florence at his home. Grévy remembers that he seemed “nervous and angry. Florence said, ‘De Dieu’s father has a big, empty *parcelle*. Why can’t De Dieu cultivate there? It’s like he has a double portion. If we fight, we fight. I am ready to fight.’ But I said, ‘*Ndjojoro*’—be calm. After we spoke, he understood the need for a solution and agreed to let De Dieu do his harvest if he could have his garden back after. He said, ‘De Dieu can continue to live on my *parcelle* and farm in the area that is 65 feet by 65 feet. He just cannot replant in the area beyond.’”

Grévy and the other mediators went to speak with Thoro, De Dieu’s father, who, according to Grévy, told them that “I have many children and even though I have empty land, please do not tell De Dieu he can have space on my land in front of the chief.” The mediators agreed. “It is our job to help parties find their own solutions, not to make suggestions,” Grévy explained. So De Dieu’s father’s land was left out of the negotiations, and the original compromise remained intact. Chief Dieudonné would find a vacant *parcelle* for De Dieu.

The following day, at about 11 a.m. on April 14, the mediators returned for the signing ceremony, a tradition they had created to mark the end of successful mediations and to build goodwill between the two parties who had been in conflict

and between UN Habitat and local communities. Business came first. Grévy explained what the cause of the conflict had been and described the contents of the compromise agreement. He spoke in Swahili, but his speech was translated into Kilendu so that everyone who had gathered for the ceremony—several dozen people—would understand. All parties were given copies of the agreement and were required to sign each copy in the presence of witnesses. De Dieu's and Florence's fathers signed first. Then the chiefs of the *localité* and the *groupement* (a collection of *localités*) signed. Although the chief of the *collectivité* of Walendu-Pitsi was not able to be present, he signed each copy at a later time. Both Grévy and De Dieu emphasized that with the signature of Chief Longbe, Walendu-Pitsi's highest-ranking traditional ruler, the agreement had an excellent chance of being implemented. De Dieu was almost sure to get his *parcelle* within the six-month period allowed for in the compromise. If, for some reason, Chief Dieudonné failed to find a *parcelle*, De Dieu was instructed to alert UN Habitat, and the land-conflict mediators would intervene again.

Business out of the way, the celebration began. De Dieu and Florence kicked it off by sharing a calabash bowl of thick, frothy *mandro* beer to symbolize their reconciliation. So many people came that the party had to move outside, even though it was hot, because no house was big enough to accommodate the crowd. "People were happy, everyone was joking," De Dieu remembers. "I was just happy that the problem was resolved, because Florence and I are part of the same community; we work and live together. The chief of Sanduku, Dieudonné, promised in front of everyone to give me a *parcelle* within 6 months where I can live and

cultivate freely. I gave a speech. I said, 'Since Florence and I are both young, there is still much community work to do together. If there is a conflict, we must resolve it. Florence, you must come to me directly.' Florence agreed with me, but he didn't need to apologize, as there can be no bad stories between us. We are both Lendu; we are brothers. There can be no conflicts between two Lendu."

After the festivities, Chief Dieudonné approached De Dieu privately and assured him once again that he would find him some land of his own. "I felt at ease. I knew he would keep his word," De Dieu said.

Just a few days after De Dieu resolved his land conflict with Florence, Maurice Bavi-Nguna, Ngona's friend and neighbor, was just beginning his ordeal. Maurice was a Hema *déplacé* born in 1952 in Tsupu-kidogo—the same village as Ngona—who had been living in Sanduku since 2001. Despite Maurice's more senior age (59 years to Ngona's 41), they were good friends and confidantes. Their family connection went back several generations. Ngona's father had been close to Maurice's father, a powerful and wealthy man with many fields and large herds of cattle in Tsupu-kidogo. Furthermore, both families were from the same *groupement d'origine*, Buku, Bahema-Nord. Though Maurice came from a wealthier family, he did not have Ngona's education, and he respected the younger man's intelligence. So when two or three days before Easter, 2011, Melchior Djodya, a Lendu *retourné*, came to claim the land Maurice had lived on for ten years, Maurice immediately turned to Ngona for advice. Ngona informed him that Melchior had also made claim to the land Ngona lived on. They agreed that it would be best to wait and let the

situation evolve naturally. They promised to keep each other informed of any new developments.

The claimant, Melchior, could not match their patience. Stubborn and quick to anger, he intimidated even many of the Lendu *retournés* in Sanduku. “I fled the war in the attack by the Hema in June 1999, when they killed my father, Tamba,” said Melchior in August 2011. “I went to Kpandroma and Lomea for the duration of the war. In 2007, I came and told Maurice to leave, but he wouldn’t. In fact, I have been telling him to leave since 2004. This time, I told him to get out within 24 hours, but until today, he still hasn’t left. He has to leave, and if he doesn’t, I will make him, even if by force.”

Maurice recalls that his encounter with Melchior in April 2011 “did not go well.” Maurice responded to Melchior’s order to vacate the property by saying that he would leave when Melchior paid him the value of the *mises-en-valeur*, those things Maurice has done to improve the value of the land, such as plant banana and avocado trees. Melchior refused. “He has been violating my land for ten years. He must pay me damages for using my property all this time. He says he planted *mises-en-valeur* here, but I left *mises-en-valeur* when I fled, so I owe him nothing. He owes me.”

The night after Easter, on April 25, Maurice woke to find the *paille* roof of his hut on fire. “At first I heard it in my sleep. I had my eyes closed, but my ears are always open. I heard something like the voice of a truck on the road, but it didn’t pass. It got louder and louder. I listened and listened but it didn’t stop. I opened my eyes and saw the light of fire in the house. I saw smoke in the main room. I jumped

up and opened the door, went out, and saw the roof was on fire. I started to yell, and my wife came out with the children. The youngest was still sleeping. I shouted for the neighbors to come help. The first to come was a woman with no husband, Jeanne. Then my Lendu neighbor Soti came, and then a few others, who didn't come quickly because they were still asleep. It was after midnight."

Maurice's wife, Gorette, grabbed a container of water from inside the house, and neighbors quickly fetched any water they had on hand. Gorette remembers hearing her youngest two children, just 4 and 6, wailing as the adults worked to extinguish the fire. But because Maurice had discovered the fire early, the actual damage was minimal—a small patch of *paille* was completely burnt off the corner of the house by the kitchen.

Ngona had heard the commotion through the grove of banana trees that separated his *parcelle* from Maurice's. Gorette's voice carried through the midnight calm, and Ngona's immediate reaction was to assume she and Maurice were having a domestic dispute. When Ngona was a child, Maurice had already grown up and had developed a reputation for aggressive behavior. He was good-looking, tall and strong with large, clear brown eyes and a square jaw, and he was the son of one of Tsupu-kidogo's wealthiest men—a carpenter who had been brought to Walendu-Pitsi to work on a Belgian concession and had profited from the opportunity to become a self-made man.

But Maurice was not content; perhaps he felt mistreated as a Hema in a Lendu *collectivité*. One of his earliest memories is of discrimination. As he recalls, "one day, the population of Tsupu-kidogo decided to name my father as the chief of

the *localité* because of his wealth and generosity. But the Lendu *vieux sages* [wise elders] got together and refused to let a Hema be named the chief of even a single Lendu. That's the day I learned that the Hema and Lendu were different people, and even if we lived together, we would always be kept separate."

Maurice's sense of alienation drove him to drink excessively and provoke fights. Gorette, Maurice's second wife and the mother of three of his five surviving children (ten of Gorette's 13 are deceased), readily admits that she often bore the brunt of his "brutality." But as he aged, Maurice seemed to mellow—or the hardships of war, the loss of his father's land and wealth, and the death of so many children finally broke him. He drank more than ever, but now Maurice was mostly content to sit in his kitchen or under the avocado tree in his yard in a state of quiet inebriation when he was done with his day's work, his temper dormant as long as no one provoked him.

With these thoughts in mind, Ngoni rose and made his way in the dark along the familiar path that connected his courtyard to Maurice's, with the intention of helping to settle his neighbors' marital dispute. When he arrived, he learned that Maurice's house had been set alight, although the minor fire had already been extinguished. The excitement was dying down, and Maurice's neighbors were already heading back to their houses with empty water jugs in tow to try to catch a few more hours' sleep before the sun rose. Jeanne (the unmarried neighbor) and Ngoni stayed longer, knowing Maurice and Gorette would appreciate the extra company and protection in numbers until morning came. Gorette lit a small fire on the hearth in the corner of the kitchen, opposite where the house fire had started.

Maurice, Gorette, Jeanne, Ngona, and the children sat awake, mostly in thoughtful silence, until dawn, too stunned and nervous to sleep. Maurice and Gorette worried that whoever had lit the fire would come back to finish the job. From time to time, the adults wondered out loud in the flickering gloom of the kitchen who might have started the fire and why.

“Yes, Maurice drinks,” Gorette mused, “and in his youth he was brutal and violent. But now he doesn’t bother people, even when he is drunk. He has no enemies. Who could have done this? The only thing I can think of was that Melchior had come to claim his land a few days before.” Gorette also remembers seeing something suspicious near dusk, at about 7 p.m. “There was a person who hid himself in the banana trees,” she mentioned to the group, “and when I first woke, I thought I heard feet in the banana trees.” Jeanne said she too had seen suspicious movement in the banana trees at dusk. “I was nervous as I thought of this,” Gorette remembered in August 2011. “Maurice went to look for the flashlight so he could check around the house, but he couldn’t find it, so he stayed in the house.”

Maurice explained how he had heard a vehicle pass, but the sound of the vehicle had turned into the sound of fire when he woke up. Could someone have come by vehicle to light the fire, Maurice wondered? Eventually, as the sky began to turn gray through the hole in the roof, Ngona and Jeanne left for their homes. At first light, Maurice patched the hole in the roof with plastic bags.

Melchior says that Soti, Maurice’s Lendu neighbor, found him early in the morning en route to his field in Sanduku two days after the fire. Melchior, as usual,

had walked there from Libi, 5 miles away, where he still slept in the home he had occupied during the war due to the unavailability of space to build in Sanduku. “He told me that Maurice had accused me of burning his house,” Melchior said. “I went directly to the chief to give a report. I found the chief at home and explained that Maurice had called out my name when he discovered the fire. How could I have started the fire, when I was in Libi that night? The chief called Soti and Maurice to come, but they wouldn’t come, so we didn’t continue with a discussion of the case. So I decided to take my land back.”

Maurice says he did go to see Chief Dieudonné. He went three days in a row to the chief’s house and asked him to call Soti so that they could resolve the matter. Maurice denies accusing Melchior, and he wanted his name cleared. “But Soti never came to testify and the case was never pursued,” Maurice said.

Emile Lombo, the assistant chief of Sanduku and a Lendu, says that in reality, all three men—Melchior, Maurice, and Soti—appeared before the chief at various times to discuss the case, but never in a coordinated manner, and the chief did not go out of his way to bring them together for a meaningful discussion. At one point, both Melchior and Maurice were in front of Chief Dieudonné at the same time. Emile remembers that Melchior was livid at the alleged accusation that he had burnt the house, “as that is a very serious offence.” Maurice, his bad temper awoken, angrily insisted that he had never accused Melchior, but he did say that “what surprised him was that Melchior came to evict him and just a few days later, his house was burnt.” Melchior countered, “Maurice started the fire after I said I wanted my land back so he could accuse me of arson.” But Maurice had reported the fire to no one. Without

Soti's testimony, "it was hard to continue, since it was one man's word against another's," Emile explained. "So the chief said, 'I am surprised to see both of you here because there had been no report of a fire in the *localité*. Then, all of a sudden, Melchior comes saying he has been accused of starting a fire that had never even been reported to me.' That was the end of the matter."

Maurice later explained, "I did not make a report to the chief because he does not want to hear reports of problems from Hema. He would have said the perpetrator did right by lighting my hut on fire, since I am occupying Melchior's land illegally. Telling the chief would only have caused more problems."

Melchior still speaks of Maurice's attempt to conspire against him, though Soti has publicly denied telling Melchior that Maurice accused him, but officially, the case is closed, and Chief Dieudonné does not want it discussed further.

On May 13, 2011, Melchior arrived in the courtyard in front of Maurice's home to dig holes for the foundation of a house. The holes spanned nearly the entire packed dirt space that Maurice, as is customary, had cleared for a variety of household uses—drying beans and cassava in the sun, shucking corn and pounding flour in wooden mortars called *kambi*, washing clothes and dishes, and entertaining friends and neighbors. Melchior's house was to be a mammoth octagonal structure that, when erected, would completely block access to the only door to Maurice's hut.

Maurice was in the fields working when Melchior came to dig the foundation holes, but Gorette was doing household chores in the courtyard. She says Melchior didn't say a word to her as he walked into her yard and began to measure and dig

the holes. “Can’t you build a few feet away?” Gorette implored, not wanting to cause trouble or get involved in the affair between her husband and Melchior, but realizing that Melchior’s actions would only inflame Maurice’s temper. “The children won’t be able to enter our house if you build this close,” she added. Melchior said nothing and continued with his work, so Gorette continued with hers. They worked side-by-side in silence for several hours. When Maurice returned to find Melchior digging in front of his house, there was an altercation, as Gorette had feared. Maurice chased Melchior away and filled the holes with dirt. Then, he went to Ngona for advice.

The next day, Maurice went to see Chief Dieudonné, as Ngona had suggested. Three times over the next four days, Maurice returned to beg the chief of Sanduku to help him. “Each time,” Maurice said, “he was silent. I asked him to call Melchior for a discussion, but he wouldn’t. He wouldn’t acknowledge me.” So on May 17, Maurice and Ngona went to visit the chief of the *groupement* of Dz’na—the chief of Sanduku’s direct superior. He directed Maurice to go to the chief of the *collectivité*.

On Friday, May 20, Maurice and Ngona went to the seat of the *collectivité* of Walendu-Pitsi in Libi. The chief of the *collectivité*, Longbe, was not there, but they spoke with the head judge and two other judges, all of whom were Lendu. The judges advised Maurice to buy a *convocation*, that is, to pay to have Melchior accused and his case heard. Ngona insisted that instead the court issue a formal invitation to Melchior. A court invitation would be much less inflammatory than a *convocation*, and if the court invited Melchior, Maurice would not have to pay. The court agreed.

A handwritten summons was delivered to Chief Dieudonné, and the chief presented it to Melchior at his son's house in Sanduku that evening.

On Saturday, May 21, 2011, Maurice, Ngona, Melchior, and the *vieux sages* (wise elders, all Lendu) of Sanduku gathered at the court in Libi, the capital of Walendu-Pitsi. Maurice, as the accuser, was called to speak first. "I have brought my complaint to the Tribunal as the chief of my *localité*, Sanduku, doesn't care about my situation. My house was burnt and Melchior came to put holes for a foundation in my yard. Yes, the land is his, but I have nowhere else to go, and I have planted crops that I need to harvest. I have been living there for ten years." The judge asked Maurice where he had lived before the war, and Maurice told the court he had lived in Tsupu-kidogo but that the chief of Tsupu-kidogo would not allow any Hema *déplacés* to return to the village.

"Since living in Sanduku," the head judge asked, "where have you completed the census and enrolled for voting?"

"I enrolled in Djaiba," Maurice said. "Many of the population of Sanduku did the same. But I have not done the census since before the war, because I never heard that the census-taker had come."

"You chose to enroll in Djaiba, in a Hema *collectivité*. Why would you not enroll in Dz'na, Walendu-Pitsi? If you were the population of Sanduku, you would enroll in Dz'na. But if you are the population of Djaiba, you must go there. Stop trespassing and go to where you enrolled."

“I have nowhere in Djaiba to go with my children. I did not know I had to enroll in Walendu-Pitsi. The center at Djaiba was closest and had shorter lines, and I and many other residents of Sanduku, even the Lendu, enrolled in Djaiba.”

Maurice was not lying; the enrollment process had been poorly organized and inadequately explained to the population of the territory of Djugu. Many people, Hema and Lendu alike, had enrolled in the wrong *collectivité*, ignorant that it was a crime. But it was a crime, and Maurice was arrested under the charge of enrolling in a *collectivité* in which he did not reside. He spent the nights of May 21 and May 22 in jail. The prison did not provide food or water, and though the authorities had allowed him to go to the market in Libi before jailing him, Maurice had only \$2, hardly enough to sustain him on purchased water and food for two days, and certainly more money than he could afford to spend when he had perfectly good food he had grown himself back in Sanduku. Conditions in the prison were nearly unbearable. The *paille* hut that served as the jail was partitioned in two sections, each about 10 feet square. One side was for women, the other for men. Maurice slept on the bare dirt floor of the men’s ward with perhaps 15 other detainees. In order to fit, the prisoners slept head to foot like sardines.

Very early in the morning on Monday, May 23, Maurice was released from jail. He had fallen ill and begged to be allowed to return to his home in Sanduku. He had diarrhea, nausea, sweats, chills, and tremors. His illness may have been exacerbated by the appalling conditions in the prison, but they did not cause it. For two days, Maurice hadn’t had any *mandro* or *kaikpo*, the pungent local alcohol made of cassava flour and corn, suitable only for drinkers accustomed to hard liquor. He

was a regular and heavy drinker, and alcohol withdrawal symptoms were setting in. The guards, acting without official approval, allowed him to leave but told Maurice to be back for the continuation of the Tribunal before anyone would notice he was gone.

Ngona, Melchior, Chef Dieudonné, and the other *vieux sages* of Sanduku arrived in Libi expecting to find Maurice still there in the care of the prison warden. When they discovered that Maurice had gone home sick, Melchior became impatient and irritated, but Ngona was concerned. He hadn't seen Maurice at his house that morning, and they hadn't passed him on the road to Libi. Ngona feared he had been overcome by an attack of diarrhea and was lying ill and dehydrated in the uncleared bush to the side of the road. It was agreed that everyone would wait a few hours in case Maurice turned up; in the meantime, Ngona went to look for him. To Melchior and the other Lendu, it looked like another crafty Hema plot to escape jail and avoid the Tribunal. But for the most part, Melchior, Chief Dieudonné, and the other *vieux sages* waited in silence, peevish or bored as dictated by their individual natures, leaning against the wooden scaffolding used by merchants to display their wares on market days. In the adjacent lot, an old man turned the soil in front of a brick building destroyed during the war. Every few minutes, he would flick something from the earth towards a growing pile of objects on the road, each one producing a muted thud: rusted bullet casings.

Maurice was found weak but recovering back in Sanduku, and everyone involved was told to return the following morning, May 24, 2011, to continue the proceedings. On May 24, Chief Dieudonné spoke: "Melchior must build his house on

his *parcelle*. I don't know Maurice as the population of my *localité*, because he enrolled in Djaiba. Therefore, Melchior must build freely on his own *parcelle*." The judges deferred making an official decision, as the presence of the Chief Longbe of Walendu-Pitsi was thought necessary, and he was in Kpandroma on other business at the time. But the case was never reopened, even after Chief Longbe returned to Libi. Maurice and Melchior agreed on one thing, however: off the record, the consensus of the judges of Walendu-Pitsi was that Melchior was free to construct his house wherever and whenever he wished.

On Wednesday, May 25, UN Habitat arrived in Sanduku to try to reach a peaceful solution between Maurice and Melchior outside of the Tribunal. First, Patrick and Grévy spoke privately with Maurice in the courtyard in front of Maurice's hut, sitting on small, hand-made benches in the space that would become Melchior's living room. UN Habitat found Maurice eager to arrive at a compromise. Maurice admitted that the land was not rightfully his but reasoned that if the chief of Tsupu-kidogo continued to deny him the freedom to return to his pre-war land there, he had nowhere to go. If Melchior chased him from the property, Maurice would be homeless. He agreed that he would be content if Melchior allowed him to occupy a quarter of the *parcelle*, leaving the remaining three-quarters completely to Melchior—including, after the next harvest, all of the banana trees and other plants Maurice had planted. Patrick and Grévy felt that Maurice was being reasonable and that his willingness to compromise bode well for a peaceful and mutually beneficial solution.

However, “the Lendu population of Sanduku blocked us from speaking with Melchior,” explained Grévy. “They wouldn’t let us speak to him because they said we were supporters of the Hema. They said Maurice had to leave the land entirely, and this was no longer a matter for compromises. We had to drop the mediation.”

Unable to make further progress, Patrick and Grévy went next-door to update Ngona, whom Melchior was also threatening to evict. They also had some unrelated business to discuss regarding a few other mediations in Sanduku. But on this day, their meeting was interrupted. Two drunk Lendu, Rigo and Jean Louis, both of whom were *vieux* (elders), came to the edge of Ngona’s yard. “They were drunk,” Grévy says. “They attacked us verbally, yelling in Swahili that we had come to do *politique*, that we were conspiring on the side of the Hema, but that we would never succeed. We didn’t know what politics they were talking about, but we didn’t say anything. We sat quietly and didn’t look them in the eye, because they were drunk and we didn’t want to provoke the situation. Because they were *vieux*, and therefore they are leaders of the community, we knew the situation was very serious. It was not just young men talking words. We understood that they didn’t want us to collaborate with Ngona, their enemy, because he still occupied land as a *déplacé*. They also shouted at Ngona in Kilendu. We were scared, and we left. Later, Ngona told us they had said, ‘What are you still doing here? Why don’t you go back to Tsupu-kidogo?’ And other things. The next day, we went to see Chief Dieudonné. He said the same thing, that we were working with the Hema on *politique* to occupy all of the Lendu land. For the Lendu of Sanduku, UN Habitat does not work. In their minds, UN Habitat will have worked the day that Ngona and the others are gone. At

that time, our relations with the Lendu of Sanduku deteriorated. We no longer go to Ngona because the other side sees us as friends of his. So if he needs to see us, he now comes to the office in Fataki, where we can speak in private. It's really discouraging, because the population here has an ease of killing. They can easily attack, and we have no way of protecting ourselves. We are only there to help, and they turn against us."

On May 30, Ngona and Maurice went by bicycle to see the Territorial Administrator, Jean Louis Lienjo Monga Konga, in Djugu, about 15 miles from Sanduku. He had visited Sanduku with great fanfare on August 23, 2010, to declare that the Hema and Lendu populations of Sanduku would from now on be simply the population of Sanduku—there would be no more talk of *déplacés* and *retournés*. Jean Louis gave the Hema of Sanduku great hope. "I said to the chief of the *localité*," Jean Louis recalls, "Despite being Lendu, you are the chief. You must consider everyone as your population. You must do justice, not lean to one side. You cannot be only for the Lendu. Everyone here is Congolese, and the law clearly says the Hema are allowed to circulate."

Though Jean Louis, who was neither a Hema nor a Lendu but who came from the distant west of the country, was sympathetic to the cause of the Hema *déplacés*, he was unwilling to get involved in the conflict between Maurice and Melchior. "Ngona is a leader of the Hema, and if he has a problem, such as Melchior claiming the land he lives on, Ngona wants to influence all the Hema to be behind him for a problem that concerns only him. That is the danger of Ngona. I reproached him and

sent him to Chief Longbe of Walendu-Pitsi. If Ngonu has problems, that is who he must go to.” Ngonu tried to make the point that all the administrators of Walendu-Pitsi were Lendu and were discriminating against the Hema and telling lies to the Territorial Administrator and other agents of the state. He also pointed out that the *déplacés* had been born and raised in Walendu-Pitsi—it was their *localités* that had changed because of the war, not their *collectivité*, but now the Lendu were telling them to go live in Hema *collectivités*. Jean Louis made vague promises of speaking with the chiefs and dismissed Ngonu. He had grown weary of the endless quarrels between *déplacés* and *retournés* in the territory of Djugu.

Ngonu, Maurice, and a Hema *vieux sage* went on June 2 to see Chief Longbe, as Jean Louis had instructed. “When we arrived, we waited all day until 2 p.m. Finally, we spoke with Longbe, and he promised to send authorities to help us resolve the problem that week, but they never came,” said Ngonu.

On Monday, July 18, 2011, there was another altercation between Maurice and Melchior. Melchior had gone to the *parcelle* to work on his house, still laid out so as to block Maurice’s door when the walls were raised. Maurice was at home. He asked Melchior not to build in front of his door, at least not until the chief of the *collectivité* had made an official decision in their case. Melchior continued to work without acknowledging Maurice. Frustrated, Maurice picked up a stick Melchior was using to mark the dimensions of his foundation and threw it into the bush.

There are two versions of what happened next. Melchior says that Maurice threatened him, saying that “he was ready to fight and make war.” Melchior then

went to Chief Dieudonné to report Maurice's threats and his provocative action of throwing away Melchior's stick. Maurice, on the other hand, says that after he threw the stick, Melchior threatened him, so he went to Chief Dieudonné to make a report. Emile, the assistant chief who accompanied Chief Dieudonné to the *parcelle* that afternoon, says that Melchior made the report, but Ngoni, who also joined Emile and Chief Dieudonné at the *parcelle* that afternoon, supports Maurice's story. In any event, Chief Dieudonné, Emile, and Melchior arrived at the *parcelle* to find Maurice and Ngoni early that afternoon. Hema and Lendu bystanders got involved in the ensuing dispute. The Hema maintain that the Lendu ordered them to leave immediately or face dire consequences; the Lendu report that they did tell the Hema to leave in response to angry taunts that "no matter what the Lendu do, and do what you want, we will never leave your land." Maurice says he tried to explain to Chief Dieudonné that Melchior should not build until Chief Longbe had given an official decision, but Dieudonné ignored him. In frustration, Maurice called out. Maurice says that he said, in resignation, "*Niji nidji nari nidjidji*—Then you must do what you will do." Maurice explained, "They came with quarrels and noise like they were going to attack. I saw that they would not listen to me and that I could not stop them."

The Lendu heard something else: "*Oyo ekoya eya*—What will happen will happen," meaning "bring it on!" The Lingala phrase they say they heard Maurice shout was interpreted as a threat. At the height of his power, Mobutu used to brag, "*Bamama, batata, bandeko, armée na biso ezali makasi. Yango wana boyakaka ngai nalobaka, 'Oyo ekoya eya!*" Ladies and gentlemen, our armed forces are strong. That

is why you often hear me say, ‘Bring it on!’” Lingala is also the language of the military in the Congo, and the only people who might use it in Ituri (in place of the lingua franca of Swahili) would be the Congolese soldiers stationed in the region. Therefore, if Maurice did say the phrase in Lingala rather than in Kilendu, his words would have been understood as a call to war. Chief Dieudonné proclaimed, “Melchior is allowed to build at Maurice’s door, as this is his *parcelle*. All the *déplacés* must leave here!” He ordered the crowd to disperse.

Despite Chief Dieudonné’s vocal support, Melchior was still not fully satisfied. He called a representative of the Kpandroma branch of the state-affiliated *Commission Foncière D’Ituri* [Ituri Land Commission], the CFI, to mediate his case against both Maurice and Ngona. A single Lendu mediator, Loi Dhei Medard, came to conduct the mediation on August 2, 2011. A makeshift court was arranged in Maurice’s courtyard in the *parcelle*, in the space where Melchior was constructing his house. Medard sat on a bench under the shade of Maurice’s *paille* roof overhang with his green Budget Exercise Book balanced on his thin knees. He held both blue and red ballpoint pens. The blue pens were for recording his questions and the witnesses’ answers, and the red pen was for underlining the name of the speaker and drawing the question marks at the end of each of Medard’s queries. The witness that Medard called to speak sat on a small bench in the middle of the courtyard in the harsh glare of the sun. Around the edges of the courtyard, in the shade of the avocado and banana trees, other witnesses waited to speak, and a growing crowd of curious bystanders gathered around the perimeter of the yard to listen. As the accuser, Melchior spoke first.

“I accuse Maurice and Ngonu of occupying my land. I want to come back to my *parcelle*.”

“But the *parcelle* is already occupied with houses and banana trees. Where will you build?” Medard asked.

“They must leave. I left this land the day the Hema attacked Sanduku. That day, my father, Tamba, and many of my family were burned in the house on Djô. When I left this land, there was a house, *mises-en-valeur* [items such as avocado trees that increase the value of the land], and 67,000 bricks and a brick-making machine. All those things are now gone, and I insist that Maurice and Ngonu pay damages for these things and for using my land during the last ten years. Why won’t they go? They don’t even respect the chief of the *localité*. I am starting to build my house, and if they move the sticks I put up, that means trouble. I’ve put up with this for years, and I won’t put up with it any longer. If they move even one piece of wood, that day there will be another problem.”

Chef Dieudonné added, “Maurice said ‘*Oyo ekoya eya*.’ But each one must return to his place from before the war. That is why you, Melchior, are doing this construction in your *parcelle*. So the problem now is that this is your *parcelle* and Maurice is saying bad words. We will only stay with the Hema with whom we were before the war.”

“These people are like cows who graze. We farm so that they can fill their stomachs,” said Melchior.

Slowly, Medard recorded these statements in his green book. Maurice was called next. Small beads of sweat glistened on his forehead. His hands shook

uncontrollably, as they did every morning before he began to drink, but perhaps more violently than usual. Maurice's nerves were rattled. He crossed his arms to hide his trembling. Medard asked, "Why did you fill the holes Melchior made to build his house?"

"I have lived in this *parcelle* for ten years. I believe I should be allowed to stay."

"When you came here ten years ago, did you find anything here?" asked Medard.

"There was nothing here but a mango tree and that one avocado tree."

Maurice pointed to a tall tree laden with unripe fruit, under which Ngona sat with his own Paperline notebook, adding to his meticulous personal files of everything that passed in Sanduku between the Hema and Lendu communities. As he wrote, he stuck out his startlingly pink tongue and tucked his left hand into the collar of his shirt, resting the palm of his hand on his back.

"The proprietor is back and wants to start construction. Why do you stay here in his *parcelle*?" Medard questioned Maurice.

"I think we should share the fields. But if he is going to take the fields, he must pay me the value of the banana trees I planted here. Then I will leave his *parcelle*."

"So you say you are going to leave this *parcelle* . . ." Medard said.

"I said I would leave this *parcelle* if he pays me the value of the things I planted here," Maurice clarified.

“Let’s go to another issue. Here we are in the *groupement* Dz’na. The population registers and enrolls for voting in Dz’na, on the soil of Dz’na.” Maurice shook his head with disgust at the direction Medard’s questioning had taken, and Medard snapped, “Listen to me! Where did you register? Because you are on the land of Dz’na . . . well, what is your response?”

“I already spoke of this at the Tribunal in Libi. It was a mistake. The chief of the *collectivité* said he would send the census-taker to us so we could do our census in Sanduku.”

“So you are saying the census-taker never came here? That there is no census?” Medard questioned.

“If there was, we, the Hema *déplacés*, were not informed.”

“Did you enroll here?”

“They didn’t announce it here.”

“They announce it on the radio. The rules say that if you don’t enroll in a certain *groupement*, you do not reside there. Then you can’t use the things of that *groupement*. You must go to where you are enrolled,” said Medard.

“But people from all over enrolled at Djaiba, not just me. People from outside of Dz’na enrolled at Dz’na. Must they be sent to live here? When there is confusion about the process, is it not the fault of the person in charge of enrollment, the chief, and not the fault of the population?” Maurice protested. His hands shook wildly. He clasped his palms together as tightly as he could, but the gesticulation continued.

“You know where your place is. You must go there right away. Speak to the chief of Walendu-Pitsi to see if he will give you some other land here if you want to

stay. I came to instill peace between you. I am not in a position to appraise the value of your property; that is the work of the agricultural officer. Melchior will build here in his *parcelle*, and you will leave. You have already spent ten years on his property," Medard decided.

"Where will I go? Can you give me another place?" Maurice asked desperately.

"I cannot. That is the job of the chief of the *collectivité*. Melchior has also been displaced for ten years, so now he will build. Do not try to fill in his holes or stop him. For your problem of the value of your banana trees, call the agricultural officer of Walendu-Pitsi. You will give him money, and he will come tell you the value of your *mises-en-valeur*."

"I have no money for that," said Maurice.

Chef Dieudonné spoke. "You are not my population. You didn't do the census here. Each one must go to where he is from. Can't you go to your own *localité*? The place that your father left, is it not there? Instead, you torment us."

Ngona was called next. "Come here," Medard said.

"That seat is in the sun. I will stay here in the shade," Ngona said.

"I am in the sun, so you must put yourself in the sun, too," Medard responded.

"You are not in the sun. You are in the shade of Maurice's *paille*."

"The law demands that you come sit here!" Medard said.

The debate went on a few minutes more, before Ngona capitulated and came to sit on the small bench in the middle of the courtyard. The sun was indeed hot, as

it was by now midday. Fastidiously, Ngona flipped his notebook to a fresh page and labeled it with the date and the occasion: "Testimony of Mr. Ngona Gikwa Floribert before the CFI, *groupement Dz'na*."

"Why have you been called here today?" Medard asked.

"I don't know," Ngona responded.

"Why did Melchior cite your name in this case?"

"It's he that must answer that." Ngona seemed determined to be difficult.

"You know that Melchior says that you are living in his *parcelle*."

"All I can say is that I came here in 2003 during the war, when everyone was displaced. I farmed in order to live. If I had not farmed, my children would have died," Ngona explained.

"Do you know that this is Melchior's *parcelle*?"

"I did not know at the time. As I am not from here, I know nothing of that."

"On this land, were there 67,000 bricks and a brick machine?"

"No, there were others cultivating this land before I arrived, and I did not see those things. I only came because the whites [UN troops] ordered us to come live by the road. The land was empty, and I know nothing of a brick machine." Both men were silent as they recorded Ngona's words in their exercise books. By now, the crowd was beginning to show its boredom. Men tore off small rectangles of dried cornhusk and sprinkled dried tobacco from their pockets, rolling neat little cigarettes. The smoke was fragrant and light, more natural than the acrid grey smoke of Melchior's and Emile's mass-produced, highly coveted Supermatch

cigarettes, which De Dieu's son Trésor sold individually at a markup to residents of Sanduku for pocket money.

"So if I inspect the property, will I find the bricks or will I not find the bricks?" Medard asked.

"There are a few bricks, but not 67,000, and they were already destroyed when I came to the land."

"Should the proprietor of this *parcelle* start working on his *parcelle*, or not?"

"Before I respond to that, you must ask the chief of the *localité* of Tsupu-kidogo, who is presently here, if I can return to my place in Tsupu-kidogo," Ngona offered.

Medard dismissed Ngona and called Chief Martin Pilu Ngatipi to sit on the witness bench. As he took his place, the sun disappeared behind a bank of clouds.

"Should Ngona come back to his place from before the war in Tsupu-kidogo?" asked Medard.

"Ngona's father killed someone before the war, and his family was chased from Tsupu-kidogo. He is not my population," said Chief Martin Pilu.

Ngona pursed his lips and carefully closed his notebook. He put it into a tinted green plastic pouch that read "My clear envelope" in an ornate font. He folded the envelope with precision around the notebook within. When Ngona is agitated, he becomes even more punctilious than usual. The chief's testimony was a story he had heard before; the Lendu of Tsupu-kidogo say that Ngona and his family are not welcome back because his father killed a man named Dzanga. Dzanga is still living (in fact, Ngona sheltered him for a month and a half during the war), but when

Ngona points that out, the Lendu respond that his father tried to kill Dzanga by tapping him with a poisoned stick. Even if his father had tried to harm Dzanga, Ngona says he should be allowed to pay damages—the customary method of dealing with accusations such as this—and return to his land. And, indeed, Ngona’s father’s actions should have no bearing on whether Maurice is allowed to return to Tsupu-kidogo. Ngona believes the story about Dzanga is a *politique*, a tale invented to try to justify the exclusion of the Hema from Tsupu-kidogo. “*Furiku njegu runi ts’djo ri*. It is an antelope that hides itself on the steppes,” Ngona says. “It’s a badly disguised *politique*.” Nonetheless, the chief of Tsupu-kidogo refuses to have any Hema in his *localité*.

“It is the Hema who said they cannot live with the Lendu,” Chief Martin Pilu said when pushed. He was referring to a statement apparently made by a Hema at a meeting in Bunia in 2009 between the two communities, which has gained great traction as a justification for failing to accept the return of Hema *déplacés* to their original *localités* throughout Lendu *collectivités*. “We only refuse them because it is they who said we could not live together.”

“*Furiku njegu runi ts’djo ri*,” Ngona repeated.

The mediation session was nearly over. Medard asked for a tour of the *parcelle*. He put on his small backpack and found a tall stick in the bush behind Maurice’s house. As the entire party of several dozen people hiked through Maurice’s fields and then Ngona’s, Medard looked like a hiker out for a day in the mountains with his pack and walking stick. Near the end of the tour, Ngona led the group to an overgrown patch in the middle of his banana field. He lifted some vines

to reveal a small pile of disintegrated clay bricks. Medard reached out, flaked off a piece of brick with his finger, and said he has seen enough. Back in Maurice's yard, he had each witness sign next to his name in Medard's green book. Ngona took the book and read each page, muttering to himself and cross-referencing the document against his own notes. Maurice initially refused to sign, but Medard told him this was no joke, and reluctantly, Maurice complied, his hand shaking as he scribbled an illegible signature.

Ngona was furious. He had been trained in land conflict mediation by the Belgian NGO RCN Justice & Démocratie and by UN Habitat. He knew the powers of a land mediator and the limits of those powers. He felt that Medard had acted as a judge, not a mediator. The next day, August 3, Ngona sat in his yard and called his daughter Nzale to fetch his files. From one of his plastic envelopes, Ngona withdrew two certificates on heavy stock paper. Issued by the Belgian NGO and UN Habitat, they certified that Ngona had been trained in land conflict mediation. He balanced them carefully on his knees. Next, he drew out a typed document listing the powers and mission of CFI land conflict mediators. There were two columns: one listing the roles of mediators, the other listing the powers of the state. The document made it clear that mediators were meant to facilitate a discussion in which the parties arrived at a mutually satisfactory compromise. Medard, instead, had acted the part of a judge, calling witnesses and dispensing with an opinion—at least in the case of Maurice. "He played the role of a chief, but he is not a chief!" Ngona complained. Medard had not had time to judge the case between Ngona and Melchior. Ngona and

Maurice discussed what to do next, and Ngona decided he would go speak to the CFI branch in Fataki.

The mediators in Fataki work in a dark, spacious room in the center of Fataki. All five of them listened to Ngona, interrupting every so often to ask him to please get to the point or to ask a question. Ngona, not one to be rushed, would say, “you are cutting me off” or “that we will come to.” The mediators were made visibly impatient by his detailed account, but Ngona continued to explain the situation in his slow, clear, precise voice. When he had finished, the six CFI mediators from Fataki were stunned.

“But he is not to go alone . . .”

“He should not decide things . . .”

“He went outside his role . . .”

“You must do a report.”

Though they agreed unanimously that if Ngona’s account were correct, the Lendu from Kpandroma had obviously acted unprofessionally and beyond the authority vested in him, they could do nothing about it. The branches in Fataki and Kpandroma were equal in status; in order to lodge a formal complaint about the mediator’s conduct, Ngona would have to send a report to Bunia or go there to speak to the central CFI in person.

Bunia was nearly 60 miles from Sanduku, and traveling there was impossible. Back in the shade of Ngona’s banana trees, he and Maurice tried to estimate the cost of sending a report to Bunia. Ngona could write it, but they would have to purchase paper, rent a typewriter, hire someone to type their letter, and pay for it to be sent

to Bunia. Ngoni estimated that the total cost might be about \$20. It was far beyond their means, so they did not file their complaint.

On August 4, Melchior began to dig the holes for his home's supports once again. By August 7, he had begun to erect the walls. Maurice was at the *parcelle* but said nothing. Melchior worked that day from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. Maurice and his family went to church, and in the afternoon, Maurice came home alone, drunk. Melchior says Maurice picked up Melchior's machete and threatened him. Melchior was afraid Maurice would cut him, so he left, saying "If you damage my construction, I will destroy your whole house." After that incident, Melchior became busy harvesting a field, so he did not have time to finish the construction of his house immediately.

Normally, as the secretary of Chief Dieudonné, De Dieu would have been very involved in the case between Melchior and Maurice, but he had other things on his mind. Since the party to celebrate the resolution of his land conflict with Florence, Chief Dieudonné had done nothing to find De Dieu a *parcelle*. It was true that the chief had until mid-October to grant him one, but Florence was starting to get antsy again. On August 16, Florence—who has a cell phone—called Grévy, who was at the UNDP office in Fataki. According to Grévy, "Florence called to say that there was a problem with the compromise, that even though De Dieu had done his harvest of the crops he planted before the compromise, he had not yet liberated the land for Florence's use."

Grévy worried that the relationship between Florence and De Dieu had deteriorated, so he and the other mediators, Axel and Patrick, promised to come

first thing the next morning. When the vehicle pulled up in front of the neighbors' houses, Grévy saw them sitting on De Dieu's porch under the *paille* overhang, chatting. Grévy was briefly relieved, but he soon realized that if the problem was not between the two individuals, it must be between them and their chief. Conflicts directly involving chiefs were much more sensitive for the UN Habitat team, who relied on the chiefs' goodwill to operate within the communities and had no authority over the traditional chiefs. And since Grévy and the other mediators had been chased from Ngon's *parcelle* by Rigo and Jean Louis on May 25, the relationship between UN Habitat and the chief of Sanduku had been fragile.

"Something was really off," Grévy said. "De Dieu is the chief's secretary, and as such, he has lots of access to him. How can it be that his position helping the chief doesn't give him some advantage? How can it be that even after four months, the chief still has not found De Dieu a *parcelle*? It should be an easy thing to do, and I was surprised the chief hadn't given him a *parcelle* yet. I am trying to figure why, and the only reason I can see is that De Dieu's father is sitting over there with his big empty space. De Dieu's father has a responsibility to share his land with his son. It isn't really the *localité's* responsibility. I saw that this was about a *politique* between De Dieu's father and the chief."

If it was *politique* between the chief and De Dieu's father, De Dieu and Florence were the victims. But De Dieu did not seem fazed by the fact that his father had fallow land that he did not make available to De Dieu. "It is the chief's responsibility to find land for everyone in the *localité*," he said. Although publicly he stopped there, adding if pushed that he had "full confidence that the chief would find

him a *parcelle*,” in private, De Dieu was less politically correct. He complain to Ngona—a Hema, and a very political and vocal one at that—that he was angry at the chief for not taking action to find him a space to live already “and for not involving himself because this is Lendu versus Lendu.” De Dieu admits that he did visit Ngona to express his anger toward the chief and that “the chief and I, we have no problems, but the only problem is that the chief has had four months to give me a *parcelle* and has not yet given me one, but we have no real problems.” However, he does not want the details of his feelings made public, because “we are both Lendu, and he is my chief. I must not talk about that anymore.” Though he didn’t wish to talk of it anymore, the change in the relationship between De Dieu and Dieudonné was evident. Grévy noticed in August that while “before, as secretary, De Dieu was always by the side of the chief, now when we go to see Dieudonné, De Dieu is never there. There is a problem between them.” Neighbors confirm that “De Dieu drew back from the chief and didn’t interest himself in their relationship as before.”

So when Grévy and the other mediators arrived in front of the neighbors’ houses on August 17, 2011, the conversation revealed both Florence’s and De Dieu’s frustrations.

“How are things evolving since the four months ago when we signed the agreement?” asked Axel.

“We are on good terms, Florence and I, we have no other problem than this delay. Due to the chief’s delay, we haven’t been able to accomplish the agreement yet,” said De Dieu.

“Yes, the problem is the chief,” agreed Florence.

“Do you still feel confident that the chief will fulfill his commitment?” asked Axel.

“Questions of the chief’s plans we cannot answer. You must ask him,” said De Dieu. At the same moment, Florence, less level-headed than De Dieu, said, “Only he can answer that, but he has done nothing for us. He has not yet kept his promise.”

The mediators went to the chief’s hut, but he was not in, and since there were still two months left for the chief to find De Dieu a *parcelle* according to the terms of the document, they did not pursue the matter.

Perhaps Chief Dieudonné had forgotten to find De Dieu a *parcelle* because he had more pressing problems than the conflict between two Lendu “brothers” in his *localité*. Besides the conflict between Melchior and Ngon and Maurice, the chief was involved in a border dispute with a neighboring Lendu *localité*, Djokpa, over the hill Djô, where Melchior’s father and De Dieu’s grandfather, among others, had been burnt to death in the attack of June 19, 1999. The chief of Djokpa claimed the hill as his, while Chief Dieudonné insisted it belonged to Sanduku. He and the other Lendu elders tried to keep the conflict a secret from the Hema *déplacés*—it was important to maintain a front of ethnic solidarity—but the fight became nasty. After one conflict mediation session, led by Medard (the same mediator who had ruled in favor of Melchior) on August 5, 2011, members of both Sanduku and the opposing *localité*, Djokpa, threatened to kill each other. As the meeting broke up, Chief Dieudonné stood in the middle of the road at the border between Djokpa and Sanduku and screamed at the chief of Djokpa. Other Lendu from Sanduku cried out

statements such as, “If we cannot farm Djô, you cannot farm your land, either. If you do, there will be killing!” An angry Lendu from Djokpa responded, “I will cultivate, and if anyone tries to stop me, I will kill him!”

Medard made a ruling in favor of Djokpa, and this time Chief Dieudonné echoed some of Ngoná’s sentiments about the professional behavior of the mediator. “The meeting wasn’t fair. I refused to sign Medard’s paper,” he said. “Medard has no competence to judge this problem. It must go to the level of the chief of Walendu-Pitsi, who, unfortunately, does not care to occupy himself with this.” Emile handed him a notebook, and Chief Dieudonné wrote a letter to the chief of the *groupement* of Dz’na, his direct superior and that also of the chief of Djokpa, in his own hand, in a mixture of misspelled Swahili and French:

Barua kwa groupement à Dz’na:

Sanduku le 13.8.2011

Pya anafanya sabotage ya localité. Pluseurs fois. Tuma police namna ya escorte kwa kukamata ye hapa kwa Sanduku. Tuma la police. Axanti.

Tsedha-Didô,

Chef de localité Sanduku.

(Translation by author):

Letter to the *groupement* at Dz’na:

Sanduku, August 13, 2011

He is doing new sabotage of the *localité*. Many times. Send various police of escort to seize him here in Sanduku. Send the police. Thank you.

Tsedha-Didô,

Chief of Sanduku.

Chief Dieudonné wanted the chief of the *groupement* to intervene in his conflict with the chief of Djokpa. “Before, we had conflicts with strangers, Hema *déplacés*. Now they are with people who aren’t *déplacés*, Lendu who have their own village. They have come to attack us. Always we talk about land, land, land—there is nothing else. It doesn’t stop. I’m not capable of managing it. The state administration must come deal with this. Everyone wants to take our land. There will be another war,” he said. But as always, the state never came. And since then, the chief of the *localité* of Drakpa has claimed the hill of Thô in Sanduku, and the chief of the *localité* of Ngobu has claimed Thô II, also belonging to Sanduku. The conflicts show no sign of abating, despite the fact that they are between Lendu “brothers.”

As of mid-March, 2012, De Dieu still did not have a *parcelle*. “Florence and I have decided that I will stay in the original *parcelle* he lent me, as long as I do not go beyond those borders. We have good relations,” De Dieu says. Although he refrains from publicly criticizing the chief, he has broken off all social relations and hints that he is disappointed with Dieudonné’s failure to respect the UN Habitat agreement. Chief Dieudonné released him from his duties as secretary to the chief because, De

Dieu suspects, “he is embarrassed to work with me when he has not yet found me a *parcelle*.”

But De Dieu’s land problems are among many, and he has no current plans to alert UN Habitat that the agreement has not been implemented. In April 2011, De Dieu caught Médiatrice with another man, a Congolese soldier stationed in Sanduku. She told him it had only happened once, and De Dieu forgave her. However, he several times witnessed them together in “mortal sin,” and Médiatrice decided to leave De Dieu on June 13, 2011. At first, he tried to reconcile with her, in part because their daughter L’Avenir was still an infant. Médiatrice had taken L’Avenir with her, and De Dieu, who loves L’Avenir perhaps more than anyone in the world, was trying to save \$200 to give to Médiatrice’s parents in order to have L’Avenir come live with him, as is the Lendu custom when the father wants custody after a divorce. In a stroke of luck for De Dieu, in early March 2012, Médiatrice decided “she no longer wanted to be burdened with L’Avenir, and she left her with me so that she could be free.” De Dieu, who still has a good relationship with his first wife, Chantal, is considering asking her to marry him again, but he still lacks adequate means to provide a dowry acceptable to her parents. In any case, De Dieu says that his “spirit is low, and I hesitate to get involved in another relationship in order to avoid inviting vagabondage into my home.” So, for the foreseeable future, De Dieu will be a single parent without land or a *parcelle* of his own.

On November 15, 2011, Maurice, Gorette, and their three children left Sanduku to live in a rented house in Djaiba. The rent is \$1 per month, a price

Maurice finds difficult to pay. Maurice now cultivates near Sanduku “under very difficult conditions.” He no longer farms any fields that Melchior claims as his own, although Melchior has not paid the *mises-en-valeur*.

“Twice, Melchior attacked me when I was taking care of the plants I had put on his property when I lived there. He threatened me and said that if I continued to cultivate on his fields, I would be seriously hurt. I also found that often my crops were stolen before I could harvest them. Therefore, now I work on the concession called Bala, near Sanduku. Life is very difficult for my family.”

Maurice visits Sanduku almost every day to work in the concession. He continues his friendships with the Hema of Sanduku, but none with the Lendu. He and Ngonza often meet to discuss the “horrible conditions of our lives, the conflicts we are involved in, and the problems between the *déplacés* and *retournés*. My spirit is low, I am not thriving. I would prefer to have money to build a proper house on my own *parcelle* somewhere, but I have no means. Instead, I wish to die to stop this suffering.” Maurice laughs. “Don’t worry—I don’t really want to die. It is just an exaggerated way of saying I feel discouraged. But God will give me hope, and maybe the state authorities will one day address the problems over land in Ituri.”

Melchior has completed the structural components of his new home on the *parcelle* but still needs to put mud on the walls and thatch the roof with *paille*. Maurice’s house still stands, and Melchior warns that if Maurice does not heed his call to dismantle it soon, he will call the chief to witness him destroy it himself—even though destroying the property of another man, even if it is on one’s own land,

is an offense under Congolese law. Melchior says, "I have no sympathy for Maurice. He has the right to go live with his Hema brothers in their *collectivité*, or he can go back to his own *parcelle*. I chased him from my fields with mean words this fall, just as I have been trying to chase him from my *parcelle* for many years. However, now our dispute is over, and I have nothing to do with him." As for his conflict with Ngona, Melchior believes that the CFI will find a solution to the problem of Ngona's continued "illegal occupation." Melchior hopes he "will imitate Maurice and leave." In contrast, Melchior and Chief Dieudonné are on excellent terms. Melchior praises the way in which the chief "really satisfied his role as chief during the conflict between me, Maurice, and Ngona."

As of mid-March 2012, Ngona still lived on Melchior's *parcelle*, though he would not begin any new projects, such as planting fields or building. Life had not treated him well in recent months. His youngest son, Innocent, died of diarrhea at the age of 13 months on January 12, 2012. Ngona's hand had been infected from a machete cut since June, and he was suffering from a mysterious illness that caused his legs to swell and break out in boils. He believed he had been poisoned. Though the medical center in Fataki gave him some pills, which reduced the swelling and eliminated the boils, Ngona did not feel well. His depression and insomnia had worsened. On February 4, 2012, Graciana gave birth to a little girl, Rose, but the atmosphere at home was somber. Graciana, in particular, was losing faith that her family would survive. She had lost four of her eight children (Solange from her first

marriage, and three from her marriage to Ngonu), and Ngonu had lost six of his thirteen (Graciana bore seven of his children, of which three have died).

Ngonu said that he is willing to leave Melchior's *parcelle*, but if he is to leave, he must either be allowed to return to Tsupu-kidogo or given another *parcelle* in Sanduku. If one of these conditions is not met, then "the situation amounts to ethnic discrimination and the continuation of ethnic war in another form." He pointed to the legal right of all Congolese to live wherever in the Congo they please and said that he considered himself a resident of Sanduku now. "The Lendu chief of Sanduku is my chief, and I am willing to accept his authority, as long as I am granted the rights of other residents of Sanduku."

For his part, Chief Dieudonné still rejects Ngonu and all the other *déplacés* as his population. Sitting in his hut in August 2011, a *kaikpo* distillation station bubbling away over the fire, Dieudonné is very drunk. It is the only state in which he can forget his worries, and the only one in which he can consider the situation of the *déplacés* and *retournés* of Sanduku without being reduced to a stuttering rage. He is tired of being chief, he confides. The position gives him "no benefits, only stress and worries. I hate it." The woman operating the distillery hands him a round sardine-tin shot of *kaikpo*. Dieudonné drinks it in three rapid gulps then says, "If Ngonu's chief in Tsupu-kidogo will not take him back, then Ngonu must take that chief to court. Everyone must return to where they were. He cannot stay here."

Sitting in his courtyard, Ngonu gets the wistful look that sometimes comes over him when he considers the hardships of his past and the hopelessness of his

future. After a time, he begins to speak: “The traces of what I have done are in my body. The work I have done clearing fields I will never be allowed to farm again has weakened me. Losing the fields I labored over in Tsupu-kidogo will bother me until I die. Because while I was working, they [the Lendu] had their arms crossed. Now, they want everything of ours for nothing. Even if they say Congo is a rich country, the Congolese are so poor. *C’est ça,*” he whispers. “That’s it. If you have a beautiful child and want to protect her, you can’t. Since 2003, there has been peace, but it is not peace, it is the image of peace. I see that I won’t accomplish many more years because I have lived badly. I am not normal because when I think, I think it won’t be long before I die. I just constantly wait for my death, and I constantly wait for the deaths of my children, and for the moment when I leave the earth and my children also leave the earth and it is over. *C’est ça. Oui, c’est ça.* Yes, that’s it. Even if the Lendu don’t kill me, I see I cannot be normal. My head divides in two parts. I have pain down to my upper jaw, and I can study my body suffering from stressful thoughts. Even if the problems stop, it’s too late for me. I’m already traumatized. The Bible says, ‘Living people, don’t worry about death.’ But while the politicians eat our blood [keep the conflict alive for their own profit], Ituri will stay covered in blood. If we die like this, we can say it is the Congolese state that killed us, since they have abandoned us to this conflict. If we were smart, we would negotiate with our Creator, ask His pardon, admit we did wrong, and ask Him to forgive us. Instead, we continue to live in this, a relative peace that is neither war nor peace.”

Overhead, the wind whispers through the crowns of Ngona’s banana trees. The plants have flourished in Ituri’s bloody soil, and a heavy cluster of ripe sweet

yellow finger bananas hangs ready for the eating. Ngona calls for Nzale to bring his machete. With a metallic ring, the machete easily slices the stem of the bunch, as thick as a man's forearm, with one effortless stroke. Ngona distributes the bananas among the children of Sanduku, Hema and Lendu, who have gathered at his feet to listen to him speak.

On Wednesday, March 28, 2012, Ngona was returning from the court in Libi with a small group of Hema. They had been in Libi in connection with a conflict between a Lendu *retourné* and a Hema *déplacé* in Sanduku; the Hema's house had recently been burnt down. Ngona and his companions were attacked on the road by a group of Lendu from Djokpa, including the brothers of the Lendu man whose case was being heard in Libi. The other Hema escaped, but Ngona was still suffering from the mysterious illness that caused his legs to swell. He could not run quickly enough.

The Lendu beat him by the side of the road at the border between Djokpa and Sanduku, the same spot where Chief Dieudonné had screamed his threats to the chief of Djokpa during their conflict in August 2011, and just a few feet from the lush, overgrown *parcelle* where Ngona had lived during the war prior to taking up residence in Sanduku, where God had shown him bees and hidden him from evil men. Maybe God had momentarily turned his attention from Sanduku that Wednesday afternoon in March 2012, or maybe Ngona simply chose to stop fighting, to embrace the absolute peace that eluded him in his mortal life. As his attackers dropped heavy stones on his chest and cracked his bones, Ngona's blood seeped into Ituri's thirsty soil. When they were finished with him, they carried and dragged him

to the prison in Libi, where they accused him of attacking them. Ngonu spent the night in prison; the following morning, the prison warden took pity on him and allowed him to be taken to the hospital in Fataki. He managed to ask instead to be brought home. By then, his body was as broken as his spirit: Ngonu died shortly after being laid out on his papyrus sleeping mat in the hut he had called home for nine years. He was buried in Sanduku in a little plot of land that will be his forevermore.

AFTERWORD

Although I had worked on two one-week immersive photojournalism projects prior to arriving in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to begin my thesis, I had never attempted anything remotely as involved as what I was embarking on, and I had never written a piece of immersive non-fiction. There were many times during the two years I spent on this project that I cursed myself for taking on so many new things at once: a relatively unresearched topic; the challenges of rural eastern Congo; the absence of speakers of my native language; and photography, videography, audio recording, web design, and a new genre of writing. I could have saved myself a lot of effort by working on either a written or a visual project (not one with elements of both) in a developed, English-speaking country. But I've rarely chosen the easy road for myself, and I'm glad this was no exception. I made mistakes along the way, but I'm proud of what I accomplished and I feel confident that I will do better next time I attempt a project of this magnitude.

Some things I wish I had done differently:

- Review handwritten notes at the end of the day—by candlelight, if necessary—and clarify immediately anything that is unclear, rather than trying to make sense of things later;

- Type up notes routinely, both to create an electronic backup and to facilitate searching notes while writing;
- Maintain a journal to record my additional observations or emotional reactions, and to note details about things that didn't seem important to the story at the time but might prove useful later. This would have been particularly helpful when I was working exclusively with photography. I have visual details, but since I didn't write captions for all of my images at the time, I had some trouble recalling non-visual information from that period. This is one of the challenges of trying to work with multiple media, as it is difficult to manage a camera and a notebook at the same time;
- Write the stories in the field, at least in outline form. This would enable me to more easily fact check minor details and to obtain answers to additional questions;
- Perhaps get funding for a full- or part-time professional translator. I certainly spent many additional hours trying to understand conversations and interviews in various foreign languages, and a professional translator could have saved me much frustration. However, there is something to be said for working without a translator whenever possible, even if it is more difficult. Communicating directly with my subjects allowed me to form a more intimate bond with them, and I was forced to figure out exactly what I wanted to ask them and exactly what they were telling me.

Technical details aside, this project forced me to confront ethical issues that I believe are at the heart of immersive non-fiction. Perhaps the biggest issue I encountered was finding a balance between telling the story truthfully and respecting the privacy of my story subjects. My subjects are private citizens whose lives, actions, and emotions are not inherently newsworthy. If they were public figures and I was writing about topics with direct news value, it would be easier to decide whether to publish embarrassing or private details. But my story subjects never elected to be in the public eye, and it is entirely understandable that they would not wish every detail of their lives made public. I certainly wouldn't. But at the same time, these private details often reveal a person's character, motivations, and reactions to situations that are relevant to the story. For example, Axel Kitoga kept condoms in his room in Fataki. He was very honest with me about his extra-marital infidelities, and I asked him to tell me what he thought was his motivation. If he was motivated by the fact that his job kept him far from his wife, that was relevant to my story's focus: how he struggles with the effects of his job on his private life, with finding a balance between finding personal happiness and contributing to the betterment of his country. He understood why I was interested in the condoms and spoke candidly knowing he was being interviewed, but when I sent him the story, he asked that the detail of the condoms be removed prior to widespread publication, in case his wife found out. Of course, I complied, and in fact, I removed it from all versions. Perhaps leaving that information in the story would have contributed to my readers' understanding of Axel's life in Fataki. Although the information was true and he willingly shared it, ultimately, respecting my subject's

privacy was more important to me than including it. In this instance, the correct course of action was obvious to me, but there are other situations in which the subject's privacy and the truth of the story can be in direct conflict. What is a writer to do then?

This leads me to another issue. Occasionally, my story subjects would ask what they would get out of working with me. Other than perhaps the satisfaction of sharing their story with someone who was genuinely interested in hearing about their experiences, I can think of little direct benefit to them. Of course, one can argue that the story will inform public opinion and thereby create change, from which the story subject may also benefit. In this case, it would be wonderful if my articles contributed in some way to a solution to the problem of land conflict in Ituri, for example, by provoking land reform. But realistically, a result of such magnitude is highly unlikely. Even getting people to read my stories will be a challenge, let alone somehow compelling them to act. It can be disheartening to write about serious issues that negatively affect peoples' lives, knowing that the likely outcome of the work will be insignificant.

Finally, I had to consider whether my presence may actually have exacerbated the situation and contributed, in whatever minor way, to the tragedy of Ngonza Gikwa Floribert's murder. By asking so many questions, did I stir up Sanduku's conflicts? Did my interest and presence fuel peoples' resentment? Did the fact that Ngonza collaborated so willingly and thoroughly with me mark him as a troublemaker that had to be eliminated, or would he have been just as political and just as much a target had I not been to Sanduku to document the conflict? Of course,

I will never know, and I have the peace of mind that everyone I interviewed shared information with me willingly, with full knowledge of my intentions—but of course, there are always unintended consequences.

In light of the investment my subjects made in this thesis—in sharing their time, their memories, and their lives—I feel I owe it to them to try to publish these stories somewhere where they have a chance of being widely read. I hope that readers will identify with my characters, despite the physical and metaphorical distances between them, and feel emotionally invested in the outcomes of their stories. I would deem my thesis a success if readers could consider the people impacted by land conflicts in Ituri as individuals who possess the same emotional and intellectual capabilities as the readers themselves; if readers could understand the logic of these disputes and see the people affected as deserving of our attention and empathy, rather than as nameless foreigners involved in just another senseless and incomprehensible African conflict.

To see photos, maps, and other related content, please visit www.relativepeace.com, a website that features the three articles included in this thesis.

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