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SPECIAL ISSUE ARTICLE

War, Displacement and Rural–Urban Transformation: Kivu's Boomtowns, Eastern D.R. Congo

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Abstract This article addresses rural–urban transformations in the war-torn Kivu provinces. The spectacular growth and development processes of fast-expanding boomtowns in Kivu's rural areas serve as an entry point to investigate the relationship between conflict, displacement, urbanisation and development in Eastern D.R. Congo. Based on qualitative research on urban expansion in different smaller towns in North and South Kivu, this article analyses the characteristics of these 'new' urban spaces. It demonstrates that boomtowns represent centres of opportunities as well as contestation, and that they play an important role in the economic dynamics of development as well as in the political dynamics of stability and conflict.

Résumé Cette étude traite les transformations rurales–urbaines dans les provinces du Nord et Sud Kivu (République Démocratique du Congo), ravagés par la guerre. La croissance et le développement spectaculaire des villes d'expansion rapide (en anglais : boomtowns) dans les zones rurales de Nord et Sud Kivu est utilisé comme point de départ pour étudier la relation entre le conflit, le déplacement, l'urbanisation et le développement dans l'est de la République Démocratique du Congo. Basé sur des recherches qualitatives sur l'expansion urbaine dans diverses petites villes au Nord et Sud du Kivu, cette étude analyse les caractéristiques de ces 'nouveaux' espaces urbaines. On démontre que les « boomtowns » sont des centres au même temps pleins d'opportunités et de contestation, et qu'elles jouent un rôle très important dans

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les dynamiques de l'économie du développement, ainsi que dans les dynamiques politiques du conflit et de la stabilité.

Keywords DRC · D.R. Congo · Boomtown · Conflict · Urbanisation · Kivu

Introduction: Highlighting 'Hidden' Forms of Current Urbanisation in Eastern DRC

At the start of this year 2018, the World Bank published a volume in their series 'Directions in Development' dedicated to urbanisation tendencies in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (D.R. Congo, DRC). The document, titled 'Productive and Inclusive Cities for an Emerging Democratic Republic of Congo', aims to 'develop a diagnostic of the current situation of urbanisation and identify the key bottlenecks holding back its potential benefits' (World Bank 2018, p. ix). This 'current situation of urbanisation' is presented in different chapters, identifying five 'urban profiles', corresponding to the five major economic regions of the country. The East region (including the provinces of North Kivu, South Kivu, Ituri and Maniema) is identified as the region with the fastest urban growth. The focus is mainly on Goma, the provincial capital of North Kivu, which is identified as an 'intermediate small city' that stands out as the fastest-growing city in a war-torn region. The report further mentions the regional cities of Bunia, Uvira and Butembo as 'incipient' forms of urbanisation, with significant economic potential. In a short paragraph, the report notes that these cities have been affected by 'the country's two civil wars, from 1996 to 1997 and from 1998 to 2003 (…) causing direct and indirect destruction and dislocation, derailing the urbanisation process' (World Bank 2018, p. 51). According to the report, this 'derailing' manifests itself through for example welfare inequality, low housing standards, poverty, destroyed road and school infrastructure and malnutrition.

When carefully studying the realities on the ground, this World Bank reading of the complex relationship between the dynamics of violent conflict and the urbanisation in Eastern D.R. Congo appears rather superficial, ignoring a number of crucial issues. First of all, conflict dynamics did not end with the peace process in 2002; to the contrary, fighting escalated in the decade that followed (especially in the Kivu provinces). A complex military landscape of countless armed groups emerged in a context where armed mobilisation (often along ethnic lines) has become an essential political strategy of protection for local elites (Stearns 2012). The Kivu provinces were at the centre of this post-2002 armed conflict. The expansion of the City of Goma (mentioned in the report) especially took place through different waves of forced displacement resulting from upsurges of violence in for example 2007–2008 and 2011–2012 (Büscher 2011). Secondly, the urban effects of nearly 30 years of violent conflict are much more dynamic and diverse then the report's list of destructive impacts suggests. Indeed, war and violence have put enormous pressure on cities and their urban social, economic and infrastructure 'tissue', but simultaneously new urban opportunities take shape. To understand how small towns in Eastern

DRC have grown into booming economic markets, for example, a transformative approach to conflict dynamics seems much more accurate. Cities and towns did not only adapt to a protracted situation of violent conflict; through their transformation, new urban markets, new systems of accumulation and profit and new forms of urban governance emerged. Finally, by focussing on provincial capitals and mid-size cities, the World Bank research ignores an important process of urbanisation that is a direct outcome of this transformative power of violent conflict: the mushrooming of new boomtowns that did not exist before the war. With population figures between 20,000 and 100,000 inhabitants, these towns have emerged in the rural hinterlands of the Kivu provinces in Eastern D.R. Congo as a result of people's mobility in search for protection and livelihoods. Some of these towns developed and 'boomed' around a refugee- or internally displaced person (IDP) camp, others around mining pits and still others around trading axes.

These boomtowns, which are not 'fully urbanised' yet strongly distinguish themselves from the surrounding villages by their urban characteristics, form the main focus of this paper. They represent an outcome of the profound rural–urban reconfiguration of the Kivu landscape in a context of war, violence, repeated displacement and transforming livelihoods. Their growth reveals distinctive urbanisation patterns of provinces that were before the war inherently rural in nature. Their infrastructure, settlement patterns, mobilities and economies differ from the urban expansion of the main, established cities in the Kivu provinces that grew out of colonial economic and political urban centres. Although these secondary towns often occupy a weak and peripheral position on national maps, they are often leading cities within more invisible regional, (trans)national and even global networks (De Boeck et al. 2010).

Yet, not only do donor agencies such as the World Bank ignore this form of rural–urban transformation, the local government as well does not pay much attention when it comes to urban planning or intervention. As this boomtown urbanisation unfolds in the absence of policy agendas, not much is known about these places, about their geographic expansion, their demographic evolution, their social and economic networks and their political characteristics. As such, their roles in processes of conflict and peace, stability and instability remain largely unexplored. We argue that, to fully understand the urban outcomes of the dynamics of protracted violent conflict as well as the urban potential for peace and development, one has to look beyond the transformation and expansion of cities such as Goma or Bukavu and investigate these secondary, more 'hidden' processes of urbanisation.

This paper represents an attempt to shed light on these 'new' urban spaces, by bringing together fieldwork data from different boomtowns in North and South Kivu. We refer to boomtown urbanisation as a sudden and rapid demographic, spatial and economic growth of rural villages driven by people's search for protection and livelihoods in a context of violence and militarisation. Academic literature on boomtowns in Africa is largely concentrated on studies of border towns and mining towns, where transborder trade or the extraction of minerals are the main instrumental dynamics transforming formerly marginal places into vibrant urban spaces (Dobler 2009).

As we have argued in earlier work, we need to look at the dynamics of violent conflict to understand current urbanisation processes in Africa (Büscher 2018a, b).

Along that same line, to capture the role and significance of small towns in current processes of rural–urban transformation in Africa today, the dynamics of violent conflict are key. In large parts of the continent, patterns of mobility and migration are driven by violence and insecurity, shaping the spatialities of changing rural–urban connections. Violent conflict and forced displacement in countries such as Uganda, South Sudan or the DRC lead to an (often fast and uncontrolled) urbanisation of formerly rural societies (Bakewell and Bonfiglio 2013; Branch 2013). Small towns emerge in these contexts as new urban configurations, producing new urban identities, landscapes and institutional arrangements. In the Kivu provinces, they have developed into dynamic centres of development, exchange and accumulation, but also into strategic nodes in the dynamics of armed mobilisation and forced displacement. In a context of profound militarisation and the violent mobilisation of ethnic identities in struggles for power and control, boomtown urbanisation is in different ways closely interwoven with conflict dynamics.

The main argument of this paper is that, in a setting of war and militarisation, violent conflict is both productive as well as a product of boomtown urbanisation. As such, the principal intention of this study is to reveal the 'hidden' dynamics of boomtown urbanisation by starting from a dynamic or dialectic, instead of one-dimensional, relationship between the processes of conflict, urbanisation, displacement and development.

Within the current political process of decentralisation, these small towns play a crucial role as decentralised localities which in theory should be empowered institutionally. The World Bank report states that current urbanisation processes in the DRC present 'an opportunity for D.R. Congolese policy makers to make investments in cities that can lead the country's structural transformation' (World Bank 2018, p. 1). Therefore, these small towns deserve special attention of academics as well as local and international policy makers involved in development- and peace-building processes in the DRC. Their unique position in broader processes of war and peace, instability and development needs to be recognised.

Methodological Opportunities and Challenges

This paper is based on fieldwork carried out by a team of Belgium- as well as D.R. Congo-based researchers between 2010 and 2015 in the North and South Kivu Provinces of Eastern D.R. Congo. The core of the paper refers to empirical data gathered in the boomtowns of Numbi (South Kivu), Hombo Sud (South Kivu) and Kitchanga (North Kivu). During the fieldwork in the different boomtowns, interviews and focus-group discussions were organised with different actors such as local government representatives, customary authorities, religious authorities, security personnel, traders, farmers, shopkeepers, prostitutes, IDPs, teachers and leaders of social and professional associations. Observations took place during sessions of land-conflict mediation, market selling of agricultural and mineral products, demonstrations and numerous every-day activities. Participatory sessions were being organised with different groups of informants to draw social, economic and political maps of the

towns. Additional interviews and focus-group discussions were being organised in the provincial towns of Goma and Bukavu, with for example traders moving between the smaller and bigger towns and investors based in the provincial capital involved in businesses or real estate in these boomtowns.

Doing fieldwork in Eastern D.R. Congo, the researcher is confronted with a number of important challenges in terms of access, security, positionality and ethics. The challenges with regards to researching conflict dynamics in the Kivu provinces have accurately been addressed by Vlassenroot (2006) amongst others. While access to some sites was easier than to others, during the moments of fieldwork, the conditions were such that access and security did not pose a major problem. While researching trends of urbanisation, not so much the dynamics of insecurity but the effects of the dynamics of state informalisation have an impact on the data collection; For example, obtaining demographic statistics is a tough mission. A visit to a local or provincial desk of the *bureau d'état civile* confronts the researcher with the bitter reality of a malfunctioning and under-resourced administrative apparatus and its dilapidated infrastructures. Aiming to determine the number of inhabitants in a particular locality often leads to sharply contrasting figures. The under-representative official statistics are based on mere estimations, since often no official census has been carried out since the 1990s. If present on the site, local health establishments may be able to offer their own generated demographic statistics. If the place hosts an international non-governmental organisation (NGO), it might provide its own version of the statistics. Demographics is but one challenge; maps or documentation data on for example urban planning are yet another challenge. The offices of the *bureau de cadastre* and *urbanisme et habitat* are known to be highly 'corrupt' instances in the DRC, as staff depend on their own generated 'income' to compensate for the lack of a structural salary. Cadastral documents often exist in different versions, most of the time contradicting each other. Beyond 'hard facts', one thus has to start, armed with an ethnographic sensitivity, from observations and accounts of tendencies, processes, histories and changes (Della Porta and Keating 2008). As such, apart from the use of numbers and maps, patterns of urbanisation have in the first place been reconstructed through qualitative research methods such as those described above.

This qualitative, ethnographic approach to processes of urbanisation brings us to the every-day constructions and manifestations of urbanisation through lived experiences and personal accounts, which remain largely obscured when using quantitative research techniques. Focus-group discussions with IDPs, life histories of urban traders and observations of state agents' daily interventions, for example, offer fascinating insights into current manifestations and characteristics of boomtown urbanisation. This offers us original entry points to understand urbanisation (the practice of urban becoming, making, growth and development) in its most dynamic form, through its 'urbanities' (actors) and its urbanisms (urban ways of life) (Oldenburg 2018; Beall and Fox 2009).

Further, to understand the dynamics of urbanisation, urban economies and urban governance in these boomtowns, uniquely focussing on government administrative offices does not make much sense. In a context of violent conflict and state informalisation, the 'main stakeholders in urban development' as identified by the World

Bank (mainly formal government bodies and government-owned service providers) only play a rather marginal role. Instead, actors such as army generals, economic big men or customary chiefs stand out as main actors in processes of land allocation, infrastructural investments and political decision-making. This requires a flexible methodological focus, by which urbanisation is inevitably approached as a spatial, administrative, demographic, socio-economic but also political process.

Conflict and Rural–Urban Transformation in the Kivu Provinces

These methodological challenges and the limited availability of 'hard data' in terms of statistics, maps and documents might explain why urban studies in the D.R. Congo's conflict areas are rather limited. Other explanatory factors are the main academic interest in larger urban centres as study sites for analysing urbanisation trends and processes and the lack of interaction between conflict and urban studies in the DRC (Büscher 2018a, b). Most of the theory-building and empirical studies on urbanism in the D.R. Congo are based on research in the capital city of Kinshasa, which has served as a case study for a rich interdisciplinary literature on urban planning, history, livelihoods, governance and identities (De Boeck 2011; Iyenda 2001; Freund 2011; Trefon 2004). As an answer to an academic call by De Boeck et al. (2010) to take into consideration 'secondary cities' as crucial research sites to understand D.R. Congo's current urban dynamics, important research has been done in several mid-size provincial cities, including in the East (Geenen 2012; Peyton 2018). The eastern provinces of North and South Kivu have historically, since the colonial period, been a densely populated region. Since independence, urbanisation rates in these provinces have been significantly higher than elsewhere in the DRC (apart from Kinshasa) (De Saint Moulin 2010).[1] Due to their transborder economic connections to regional markets, urban centres located along the border with Rwanda have steadily expanded since the 1970s (De Saint Moulin 2010; Büscher 2011). In contrast to the rest of the country, the Eastern D.R. Congo provinces are characterised by a lack of one single dominant urban centre; instead, a series of secondary cities such as Goma, Beni, Butembo, Bunia, Uvira and Bukavu have experienced rapid growth. Each of these cities has witnessed autonomous expansion, mainly being the result of the development of lucrative transborder trade that, through informal economic activities, connected each of these cities with neighbouring markets in Uganda, Rwanda or Burundi. These cities are internally weakly connected and all occupy their particular functions within this eastern urban network (Vlassenroot and Büscher 2013). Since the second half of the 1990s, waves of violence displacing large parts of the population have further reinforced rural–urban migration and the rapid growth of these towns.

The roots of the on-going violent conflict in the Kivu provinces, which has translated into the proliferation of violence, armed groups, and inter-ethnic tensions,

[1] For the period between 1958 and 1970, for example, annual growth of 14 % for Goma, 9 % for Bukavu and 8 % for Bunia and Butembo was documented.

can be traced back to the complex historical transborder dynamics in this region. Transborder migration from Rwandan immigrants to the D.R. Congolese Kivu region organised by the Belgian colonial system laid part of the basis for a deep crisis around people's access to land and national citizenship (Vlassenroot 2002). The ethnic cleavage that emerged between, on the one hand, these Rwandan immigrants locally referred to as the 'Banyarwanda'[2] and, on the other hand, those ethnic groups considered locally as being 'autochthonous' to the region has been (and is until today) an important aspect in the on-going mobilisation of armed groups in both North and South Kivu (Jackson 2006; Lange 2010). For an overview of the different episodes of violent conflict in the Kivu regions, see Stearns (2012). Today, the Kivu provinces are still the arena of operation of dozens of armed groups (Stearns and Vogel 2015).

Local societies in the Kivu provinces have experienced important social, economical, political and spatial reconfigurations because of the war (Vlassenroot and Raeymaekers 2004). Local governance is characterised by a fragmented D.R. Congolese state that has to negotiate its power and control with a number of other influential actors such as armed groups, economic big men, the international peacekeeping force and the humanitarian sector (Hoffmann and Vlassenroot 2014). Livelihoods are shaped by temporary coping strategies, the broader political economy of war and the dynamics of forced mobility (Geenen 2011). In a context where people have been repeatedly displaced, dispersed or grouped together in search for security, entire regions have become strongly militarised, and peopled could not access their lands anymore and had to look for alternative types of income. Rural–urban transformation needs to be understood within these broader dynamics of insecurity and mobility.

Different elements, such as the relatively higher level of protection in urban centres, the urban presence of the humanitarian and development industry or the urban proliferation of diversified livelihoods, all added to different waves of rural–urban migration, resulting in the urbanisation of provinces that before the war were inherently rural in nature (Bakewell and Bonfiglio 2013; Verhoeve 2004; Raeymaekers 2014). Urbanisation in Eastern D.R. Congo unfolded in two distinct forms: Firstly, in the increasing pressure on and expansion of established urban centres. Cities such as Bukavu, Goma or Bunia have boomed over the past 10–15 years at an incredible speed; For example, in 2000, at the height of the RCD rebellion,[3] Bukavu (the provincial capital of South Kivu) officially counted 338,689 inhabitants. By 2012, after a period of on-and-off fighting in the Kivu region, this number was estimated at 718,805. At the time of writing, estimations are at 900,000 (Van Overbeek and Tamas 2018). Secondly, urbanisation took the form of villages transforming into boomtowns. In terms of infrastructure, economic activities, services and culture, these boomtowns distinguish themselves from their rural hinterlands by their particular 'urban' characteristics. The cases of Sake, Kitchanga, Rubaya and Nyamilima

[2] Literally 'those coming from Rwanda' in Swahili. In Rutshuru Banyarwanda are the majority, and there a large part of them were present since long before the colonial demarcation of the political border.

[3] *Rassemblement congolais pour la democratie*, a rebel group that occupied large parts of Eastern D.R. Congo between 1998 and 2004.

(in North Kivu) and Hombo, Kamituga, Minova, Numbi and Nyabibwe (in South Kivu), are all examples of places that evolved from small villages into attractive booming centres with tens of thousands of inhabitants. These towns emerged in different contexts, resulting in different forms of boomtown urbanisation. Driving forces behind their fast expansion are a combination of push and pull factors. In what follows, three cases are briefly introduced to illustrate this.

Emerging Boomtowns: Urban Outcomes of the Search for Physical and Economic Security

Hombo Sud: Trading Boomtown

Hombo is located on national road no. 3, connecting the provincial capital Bukavu (South Kivu) and the mining town of Walikale (North Kivu). Hombo consists of two separate administrative units, Hombo Nord and Hombo Sud, as it is located right across the administrative border. The town of Hombo Sud houses a total of around 16,500 inhabitants, not including the number of IDPs, which fluctuates over time.[4] The majority of the inhabitants belong to the Tembo, Rega and Shi ethnic groups. Forced displacement and the influx of refugees and IDPs from the Hutu and Tutsi ethnic groups impacted the ethnic composition of the town.

The presence of the main road represents the most important pull factor for people to install here. As a 'border town', Hombo Sud historically developed as a trading post along the main road connecting Bukavu to Walikale. Its different phases of expansion correspond with the different 'waves' of violence since the mid-1990s, when IDPs from the rural hinterlands arrived in search for security. The intensification of mining activities in Walikale from 2002 onwards led to the intensification of trade along the main road and attracted traders from Bukavu to invest in warehouses and depots in Hombo Sud. For urban-based traders, triple profits could be made through the sale of both manufactured as well as agricultural products. Because of forced displacement, agricultural activities were increasingly abandoned and supply chains became a lucrative business. The more the centre developed into a trading post, the more it attracted IDPs in search of protection and livelihood opportunities, for example during armed clashes between the D.R. Congolese army and the FDLR[5] armed group in 2005–2006 and during the clashes between different fractions of the *Raia Mutomboki* armed group since 2014–2015. The presence of IDPs provided a concentration of cheap labour force mobilised to work the land of the surrounding communities.

Over the past 10 years, the town has developed from a village into a lively and densely populated town. With a concentration of trading and service activities (such as retail shops, restaurants, bars and pharmacies), social infrastructure (schools) and a large number of social and professional associations, the town is no longer

[4] Statistics of the *bureau du chef lieu du poste secondaire Hombo Sud*, 2015.

[5] *Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda*.

considered a village. Land that initially belonged to a small number of 'notables' has been parcelled out to private owners; rising demand has led to a sharp increase of land prices and several instances of land conflict. The housing infrastructure changed from mud huts to wooden or concrete houses with corrugated roofs. Different state actors are increasingly being deployed in the town, resulting in a proliferation of state services such as 'environment', 'culture and art', 'gender, women and family' or 'transport and communication'. Finally, road transport also offered a lucrative revenue basis for armed groups in the form of the informal and militarised economy of roadblock taxation (Schouten et al. 2017).

Numbi: Mining Boomtown

In contrast to Hombo, the boomtown of Numbi emerged in geographical isolation, disconnected from the main road infrastructure and only accessible by motorcycle transport. In May 2015, a mobile phone mast was being erected by the telecom agency Vodacom in the remote town of Numbi, located in the green hills of the Kalehe Highlands or *haut plateaus*. In the absence of a concrete road, the entire equipment had to be transported by foot along a 27-km-long muddy road from the nearest town of Kalongo. The introduction of mobile phone connection generated strong excitement amongst Numbi's inhabitants, as it would have a positive impact not only on the town's commercial activities, but also on people's security, and more importantly, it would finally 'put Numbi fully on the map', taking it out of its isolation.[6] During my research in Numbi in 2014, the lack of a mobile connection was cited several times when discussing whether or not the town can be considered as 'urbanised'; without proper roads and mobile phone reception to take the town out of its isolation, Numbi cannot be fully urban.[7]

With its estimated 11,000 inhabitants,[8] Numbi is one of the towns that developed around an artisanal mining site and that boomed during the early 2000s when global mining prices pulled and the raging war pushed people into its centre, in search for security and a livelihood. Over the past 15 years, the town has experienced a steady influx of diggers, entrepreneurs and displaced people, some of them installing temporarily, many permanently. The local mining economy (in the form of artisanal exploitation of coltan and cassiterite) generated an urbanisation process which is referred to in the literature as 'mining urbanisation' (see for example Bryceson and Mackinnon 2012). As explained in detail in earlier research, this urbanisation process was characterised by a steady proliferation of non-mining economic and service/leisure activities, attracting outsiders from rural as well as urban areas to install and invest in this town (Büscher 2018b). This 'urbanised' economy remains however critically unstable, given its total dependence on fluctuating mining revenues.[9]

[6] Phone interview with *chef de village* (Numbi, August 2015).
[7] Focus-group miners (Numbi, April 2014); interview with *chef de village* (Numbi, April 2014).
[8] Data from 2014, interview with *chef de village*, interview with *chef de poste*, statistics from local health centre.
[9] Focus group with shop owners (Nyabibwe, May 2013); Interview with federation of economy and commerce (FEC) representative (Nyabibwe, May 2013); Interview with traders (Numbi, April 2014).

Its expansion was further triggered by the influx of IDPs, of whom many joined the mines, while others integrated into other economic services. Compared with the rural hinterlands, towns such as Numbi represent relatively 'safer' places due to their demographic concentration, ethnic mix and the presence of the D.R. Congolese Army.

The town is located in between large concessions held by powerful political elites that emerged during the RCD rebellion, when Numbi was governed by the 'parallel' rebel administration. The involvement of these politico-military elites is still visible today through the governance of land allocation and formal and informal taxation mechanisms. As a vibrant commercial centre, its economic expansion has become incorporated into the taxation mechanisms of several armed groups. In a setting of violence and conflict, mining towns such as Numbi represent productive spaces with increasing economic and political importance in the region (Büscher 2018a, b). Its geographical isolation is as such misleading, as this boomtown forms a strategic node in broader networks of the political economy of the violent conflict.

Kitchanga: Boomtown of Refuge

The urbanisation process of Kitchanga is strongly interwoven with the dynamics of forced displacement in North Kivu. In 2016, a total of 2,230,000 people in the DRC were displaced because of conflict.[10] Since the 1990s, the North Kivu Province has been the centre of forced displacement. At the end of 2017, North Kivu hosted more than one million IDPs.[11] The majority of these internally displaced people stay outside camp infrastructures and 'self'-settle. The example of Kitchanga represents a unique case of the permanent urbanisation of a refugee and IDP concentration (Mathys and Büscher 2018). The town stretches over the territorial border between the Masisi and Rutshuru territories with an estimated population of 80,000 inhabitants.[12] Since the earliest phases of the D.R. Congolese wars in the early 1990s, this town has developed into a concentration of IDPs coming from the surrounding Masisi and Rutshuru territories.

The town is flanked by two IDP camps, 'spontaneous' sites that emerged between 2007 and 2009 during the height of the inter-ethnic clashes between the CNDP[13] rebel group and the D.R. Congolese Army. As IDPs increasingly purchased land and temporary structures became more permanent, these camps increasingly urbanised and became an integral part of the urban agglomeration. Apart from the permanent settlement of IDPs, other dynamics further reinforced Kitchanga's rural–urban transformation. As is the case for the other two boomtown examples of Hombo and Numbi, population concentrations created demands and opportunities for the development of secondary commercial activities.

[10] http://www.internal-displacement.org/countries/drc (accessed 7 April 2018).

[11] https://www.unocha.org/story/south-kivu-spiralling-humanitarian-crisis (accessed 7 April 2018).

[12] http://www.mediacongo.net/article-actualite-15932.html (accessed 19 April 2018). See also Mathys & Büscher (2018).

[13] *Congrès national de la défense du peuple*.

However, Kitchanga's status as a 'safe haven' was a dubious one, since during the different episodes of the conflict, it also became the operational base for armed groups; For example, around 2007–2008, the town became the stronghold of the CNDP's rebel leader Laurent Nkunda and developed into a 'state within a state', run under the CNDP flag by a parallel administration. With its large demographic concentration, Kitchanga presented a steady tax base for the CNDP as well as a pool of available labour force.

Boomtown Development as a Source of Opportunities and Contestation

What these three different cases clearly illustrate is that, besides being spatial entities that provide protection, boomtowns in the Kivu provinces also represent zones of livelihood opportunity. When asking the towns' inhabitants what brought them to places such as Hombo or Kitchanga, they very often refer to a combination of the search for security as well as economic opportunities. Both tendencies are a direct outcome of the protracted situation of violence and displacement and tend to reinforce each other. The more people come to find refuge in a village, the more it expands in terms of demographic concentration and ethnic diversity, the more it will become more attractive as a safe haven. At the same time, this demographic concentration also presents opportunities for investment and economic activities, again attracting migrants in search of a diversified livelihood. As such, becoming a boomtown is not only a matter of demographic size; it is also a matter of demographic composition, economic accumulation, livelihood diversification, public service provision, settlement patterns and political organisation (Dobler 2009; Werthmann 2009).

Urbanisation in these boomtowns is the outcome of the agency of a varied set of actors (mining cooperatives buying land and constructing a neighbourhood; the association of motorcycle taxis building a road) instead of the outcome of urban planning. Inhabitants refer to this process as 'ad hoc urbanisation' or sometimes 'anarchic urbanisation', a term that is somehow misleading, as urban interventions by these non-state actors can also be driven by a clear rationale or agenda. This process of 'informal' urbanisation is not unique to these small boomtowns and lies at the core of urbanisation everywhere in the DRC. What is different from the capital city of Kinshasa or the North Kivu provincial capital of Goma, whose development was at some point decided upon by a (colonial) urban plan, is that these boomtowns never existed on paper. Without urban administrative recognition, boomtown development was locally framed in urban terms. Settlement clusters that emerge organically over time are referred to by an 'urban' vocabulary and identified as *quartiers*. Although state agents play a marginal role in these urbanisation processes, this does not (at all) mean that the state is absent. To the contrary, these towns often form concentrations of state representatives. Economic activities and the dynamics of accumulation presented opportunities not only for traders or IDPs but also for the state agencies that were gradually installed in these boomtowns. In 2012, the office of *urbanisme et habitat* opened a small office in Numbi. The state agent responsible for the office started to investigate 'infractions' of the urbanisation standards and to

identify houses that were not built according to the 'norms' (for example encroaching on what was supposed to be a 'road'). Since there had never been an urban plan, it was not clear at all to which norms he was referring. After only a couple of days he was being 'intimidated' by some homeowners and went back to the territorial office in Kalehe. Since then, he has been going back and forth. The state discourse of 'order making' under which state officials like him are being sent to these boomtowns masks the reality of boomtowns representing resources which individual agents of the state can tap into.

When asking inhabitants what distinguishes the town from a village, many people refer to its so-called cosmopolitan character, bringing people from different social and ethnic backgrounds together, by forced and voluntary mobilities. This ethnic mix is generally perceived as an important motor for the development of these places. Economic diversification is often mentioned as a result of this. Social exchange and general dynamics of 'opening up to the world' (in the form of media, communication etc.) is another issue often associated with the 'boom' process of these towns. The extensive associational life in these towns is remarkable. Especially women emphasise the opportunities this has offered them (compared with the rural environment 'back home') by starting their own small businesses and organising food or petty trade between the villages and the town.[14] These discourses are always countered by (men's) discourses on 'social degradation' and the 'erosion of cultural norms and values' that come with the urbanisation process. Some informants talked about a 'cultural catastrophe', referring to the proliferation of prostitution, 'drinking culture', the mounting number of divorces, child pregnancies and 'sexual vagabondage' etc.; For example, in Hombo Sud, the road clearly symbolises opportunities and decay. As one man explained: "From the moment these women choose to be along the road, we can not control them anymore, it makes them free, too free".[15] This resonates with the literature on mining urbanisation in Africa more broadly, by for example Werthmann (2009) and Bryceson and Mackinnon (2012), in which this social transformative power of boomtown urbanisation has been elaborated upon extensively.

Apart from a threat to social cohesion, boomtown urbanisation and its cosmopolitanism are also perceived as a source of tension and instability. To understand these tensions, we have to contextualise them within broader historical processes of competition for access to land and political representation between the so-called autochthonous and Banyarwanda (Hutu and Tutsi) ethnic groups in the Kivu provinces (cf. infra); For example, through the different episodes of violent conflict in North Kivu, the Town of Kitchanga has been subject to contested claims for control between, on the one hand, the Hunde, who identify themselves as autochthonous inhabitants of the place, and on the other hand, the Hutu and Tutsi communities, whose presence dates back to the colonial period and was intensified by transborder mobility and forced displacement during the war. Currently, the part of Kitchanga Town located in Masisi has a Hunde majority, while the part in Rutshuru has a Banyarwanda

[14] Focus group discussion with *commerçants*, Hombo, February 2014.

[15] Interview with representative of conflict mediation initiative, Hombo, February 2014.

majority. Different armed groups that have been active in Kitchanga during the wars have used discourses of the ethnic politics of presence in their violent mobilisation strategies (RCD and CNDP rebel groups on the Banyarwanda side, APCLS[16] on the Hunde side) (Mathys and Büscher 2018).

The more these boomtowns grow, the more the urbanisation process impacts the existing contesting claims over authority and control. The intensity of this contestation has increased with the political process of decentralisation, as explained below.

Militarisation, Decentralisation and the Conflictual Character of Boomtown Urbanisation

Urbanisation in itself—all over the globe, but especially in those contexts where state authorities are weak and the urbanisation process is marked by high levels of informality—sets in motion contestation over land, governance, services and livelihoods (Lourenço-Lindell 2007). As such, contestation is an inevitable condition and consequence of urbanisation. On the one hand, the dynamics of violent conflict in Eastern D.R. Congo have strongly reinforced these conflicts, by integrating them into the broader logic of violence and ethnic antagonism. On the other hand, existing conflicts over for example land and public authority in the Kivu provinces—which are the outcome of a long history of state fragmentation and civil war—have been intensified by the process of urbanisation. Competition over land and the investments in real estate in these boomtowns has for example reinforced (violent) land conflicts. Further, these land (or other kinds of) disputes easily take a violent turn in a situation where access to armed violence is not restricted to military actors. In Numbi, for example, many people complain about the proliferation of fire arms, despite several disarmament initiatives. The president of the local federation of economy and commerce (FEC) explained: "If you come to construct your guesthouse here, find friends first before you try to find your *parcelle* (plot of land). It's not like in Goma (…) there is too much intimidation here".[17]

Urbanisation of these boomtowns unfolds in a context of heavy militarisation of economic, social and political life. Militarisation is a generalised process in Eastern D.R. Congo and characterised by a complex interaction between military and civilian actors, which has shaped the interplay between governance, armed mobilisation and local conflicts (Verweijen 2016). This militarisation is not only visible in for example the presence of armed groups in Numbi's mining sites, or Hombo's markets or Kitchanga's IDP camps, but also by the proliferation of arms amongst civilians, or the involvement of D.R. Congolese Army soldiers in all kinds of commercial activities; For example, in Numbi as well as in several other mining boomtowns, much of the 'real estate' in the form of hotels or houses to rent are owned by army officers. Narratives about how ethnic associations in Numbi are functioning as 'intelligence

[16] Alliance of Patriots for a Free and Sovereign Congo.

[17] Interview with president of FEC, Numbi.

services' for the M23 and Nyatura rebel groups[18] are another example of this complex intertwinement of civil and military agency.

As also argued by Hoffman (2007), militarisation should be conceptualised as a defining feature in the 'productive capacity' of the post-colonial city. Violence and the militarisation of social, economic and political relations also shape urban spatial processes and vice versa (Büscher 2018a, b). Literature on boomtown urbanisation in other conflict and post-conflict settings seems to point in similar directions (Udelsmann Rodrigues 2017). By putting violent conflict and militarisation at the centre of our analysis, we demonstrate that boomtown urbanisation in war and post-war settings cannot be sufficiently captured using classic conceptualisations of urbanisation (as rural–urban migration, spatial and demographic growth and socio-economic transformations). A more dynamic understanding of the transformative character of violence and conflict is needed to study boomtowns not only in the DRC but in other similar settings with violent conflict and forced displacement.

The expansion and urbanisation of these boomtowns in a context of ethnic claims for land and political representation also generate fierce contestation over public authority and leadership. Due to their urban–rural 'in between' status, these boomtowns are governed by a dual authority structure; besides the government representative in the form of a *chef de poste*, customary chiefs still hold considerable power over issues such as land. This 'shared leadership' between state and customary authorities lies at the core of several conflicts (often translated in terms of 'autochthony') and has been strongly reinforced by the rapid demographic expansion of these boomtowns; For example, in Hombo, since 2013, a committee of the Shi ethnic community (who are not considered as 'autochthonous' to the region but who became commercially dominant in the town) tried to lobby on several occasions to have a Shi member nominated as the new *chef de poste*, which was heavily contested by the customary authorities.

Within the context of decentralisation reforms in the DRC (that were launched in 2006 but only partly implemented since), the administrative status of these boomtowns became a subject of political debate. These reforms were introduced to improve 'good' governance and accountability and promote local development.[19] In 2012, a decree presented by the interim prime minister Louis Koyagialo decided on the creation of additional decentralised territorial entities nationwide (in the form of cities and *communes*).[20] On paper, towns that had been expanding and meeting a number of conditions (such as a minimum of 20,000 inhabitants and a sufficiently developed road, school and market infrastructure) could be listed as potential *communes*. With population figures above 100,000 inhabitants, a town could potentially be 'upgraded' to 'city status'. The 'identification' process of the towns to potentially be upgraded created considerable excitement in all three cases mentioned. This excitement was driven by projections of investment, infrastructural and administrative empowerment, financial autonomy and especially access to political

[18] Interview with priest, Numbi, April 2014.

[19] Loi organique no 08/016 du 07 octobre 2008 portant composition, organisation et fonctionnement des Entités Territoriales Décentralisées et leurs rapports avec l'État et les Provinces.

[20] Décret no 012/11 du 18 février 2012.

representation in the provincial parliament by the promise of local elections. Besides excitement, the process equally set in motion tensions over local governance and reinforced existing patterns of contested political and economic claims over these towns.

When Hombo Sud was identified as a *commune* in June 2013,[21] inhabitants started to buy plots of land in the centre of town. Rumours circulated that numbers of IDPs were being counted by the *chef de poste* to add to the number of inhabitants.[22] The customary chief Bukila Fukenyi (of the Irangi Locality heading the village of Hombo Sud) wrote two letters to the provincial governor of South Kivu in an attempt to prevent the recognition of Hombo Sud as a *commune*, and to keep the town under customary authority instead of being governed by a *bourgmestre* (mayor).[23] Such 'boycott actions' by customary chiefs were observed in several other boomtowns in that same period (such as the mining towns of Nyabibwe and Rubaya) (Büscher et al. 2014; Büscher 2018b). They can be explained by the fear of these chiefs of losing their key position in the management of land and taxation.

However, the decentralisation law was suspended, *bourgmestres* have not been installed, and local elections keep on being postponed. In October 2015, a decree was published, 'suspending the execution of certain dispositions' of the earlier mentioned 2013 decree,[24] reducing again the number of cities and *communes*. This half-implemented law created a lot of confusion and tension (Englebert and Kasongo 2016). Kitchanga, despite its high demographic numbers, has to date not been recognised as a city. The local customary chief (of the Hunde ethnic community) is in power and holds authority to levy taxes and distribute land. The reasons for the administrative denial of its urban status are deeply political, and the towns 'city status' has become a crucial asset in the current ethnic power struggle between the 'autochthonous' and Banyarwanda communities. In March 2010, a demonstration was organised in which hundreds of Kitchanga's inhabitants claimed this 'city status'.[25] It was rumoured that Banyarwanda politicians had instigated this process to chase Hunde from power over the town. The claim for political representation (and D.R. Congolese citizenship) for Banyarwanda in North Kivu has been heavily contested in Congolese politics (Mathys 2017, Jackson 2006).

These and other conflicts that arise from the transformation of rural villages into urbanised spaces can as such not be understood without analysing these broader political dynamics. Conflicts such as these are less 'local' than they seem, and involve political elites at the provincial and national level in Goma, Bukavu and Kinshasa.

[21] *Décret no 13/029 du 13 juin 2013 conférant le statut de ville et de commune à certaines agglomérations de la province du Sud-Kivu*.

[22] Focus group of IDPs, Hombo Sud, February 2014.

[23] Interview with *mwami*, Hombo Sud, February 2014.

[24] http://acpcongo.com/acp/le-decret-de-surseance-du-premier-ministre-reduit-le-nombre-des-villes-et-communes-de-lorganisation-du-territoire-de-la-rdc/.

[25] https://www.radiookapi.net/actualite/2010/03/05/kitshanga-des-gens-ont-marche-pour-reclamer-le-statut-d%25e2%2580%2599une-ville, for an analysis in more detail, see Mathys & Büscher (2018).

Concluding Remarks

Observing these patterns of contestation shows how boomtown urbanisation is both a 'product' as well as 'productive' of political or military struggles over power and control. It further demonstrates that it is not only important to recognise cities as crucial places where conflict and peace take place (Björkdahl and Buckley-Zitsel 2014) but also to understand how the urban nature and urbanisation produce conflict and peace. As such, classical approaches to the relationship between conflict and urbanisation, which often one-dimensionally perceive conflict as a product of urbanisation, appear to be insufficient and to obscure important processes defining the nature of urbanisation in Africa today. Emerging from the intersection of insecurity and livelihood opportunities, these fast-expanding towns become new crucial locations in broader political, economic and military constellations. In the Kivu provinces, we cannot disconnect the dynamics of development from the dynamics of conflict and peace or 'stability', the notion around which a huge international mobilisation is taking place in Eastern DRC in the form of UN peacekeeping forces and security sector reforms.

Finally, this study links the dynamics of urban development to conflict in ways that elucidate how developmental and political processes unfold in contemporary Africa. An analysis of the emergence and growth of boomtowns offers a critical perspective on the possible future role of urban centres in decentralised 'sustainable' development in the DRC. The transformative power of small urban centres (as identified by for example Bertrand and Dubresson 1997) is clearly expressed through the urbanisation of towns such as Kitchanga, Numbi and Hombo Sud and their transforming demographics, livelihoods, economic markets and modes of governance. Boomtown urbanisation has reinforced rural–urban mobility and the opening up of the 'deep rural', while offering security and protection in a setting of ongoing violence.

To capitalise upon this transformative power of 'the urban' and the nature of cities as 'laboratories of change' (Robinson 2006), these boomtowns represent interesting sites. Development policies by the D.R. Congolese government in this regard are stuck in a decentralisation process that is close to death (Englebert 2016). The international community, from its side, has long focussed almost exclusively on rural dynamics in Eastern DRC, influenced by the strong engagement of humanitarian actors in this region. In North and South Kivu, UN Habitat is running extensive programmes, with a main focus on the 'promotion of land governance for peace and stability'.[26] Their interventions in 'conflict affected areas' mainly centre around land mediation in rural areas. Donor agencies such as the World Bank envision capitalising upon the productive capacity of urban centres in the DRC by working with three 'sets of tools': institutions, infrastructures and interventions, which need to be implemented in a 'spatially blind' way (World Bank 2018).

[26] https://unhabitat.org/promoting-land-governance-for-peace-and-stability-in-drc/.

Notwithstanding the nature of the actors involved in reinforcing urban capacities in processes of development and change in Eastern D.R. Congo, to be able to tap into the potential of boomtowns as laboratories of change, urbanisation needs to be approached as a political instead of technical process. This analysis of cases in North and South Kivu thus aims to contribute to the literature on boomtown urbanisation by its particular political approach. It points to the need to emphasise the political nature of urbanisation and its effects on regional processes of economic development as well as on regional processes of violence and conflict.

As a phenomenon that has hardly being taken into consideration by academics or policy makers, these 'new' forms of urbanisation need further study. In this study, the dynamic interplay between urbanisation and violent conflict is key. Something such as a 'spatially blind approach' seems problematic in a context where settlement patterns are informed by dynamics of forced displacement, where governance arrangements over planning and land allocation are decided upon by military actors and where changes in a town's administrative status are translated into ethnic mobilisation. Our analysis demonstrates that violent conflict should not only be understood as a contextual factor shaping (or driving) boomtown urbanisation from the outside, but also as a central mechanism or logic through which urbanisation itself unfolds. From what we have observed, in such conditions, interventions might as well trigger tensions and conflict, instead of preventing them.

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