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The border City of Goma: Zone of Contestation or Laboratory of Change?

by

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SUMMARY. — In order to assess the remarkable paradox of Goma's dynamic development and transformation from a peripheral town into an important regional economic hub in a generalized context of state collapse and armed conflict, this article tackles the city as a zone of contestation and a centre of opportunity. The semi-autonomous development observed is strongly linked to the city's connection to the extensive and flourishing transborder trade in natural resources. These dynamics have had a considerable impact on urban socioeconomic activities, have strengthened the position of the city as a 'borderland' and have redefined the relations between city, state and region.

Introduction

Since the early 1990s, the city of Goma, the capital of North Kivu located on the Democratic Republic of Congo's (DRC) border with Rwanda, has experienced a remarkable transformation. From a small, dormant town of marginal political and economic importance, it developed into a regional military and economic centre. More than fifteen years of state decline, violent conflict and massive displacement have facilitated the city's connection to extensive and flourishing transborder trade networks and have turned Goma into a notable centre of rebellion, attracting rebel leaders, businessmen, humanitarians and peacekeepers, but also vast numbers of refugees and internally displaced people in search of protection. The Congolese wars

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(1996-2003) also redefined Goma's relationship with the central state and has enhanced Goma's importance as a border town. Being the seat of the RCD (*Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie*) rebel movement, during the war the city was disconnected administratively and territorially from the Congolese capital of Kinshasa. This disconnection set in motion a fierce competition for control over the sociopolitical and economic space Goma represented. The border town of Goma became a pivotal centre of political contestation, military rebellion and economic competition.

It has been noted that the political economy of natural resources tends to produce powerful centrifugal forces that not only further fragment the state but also create "multiple unstable, ungovernable spaces" (KORF & FUNFGELD 2006). In the case of Goma, the rising importance of natural resources during the Congolese wars turned the city into a vibrant and autonomous centre of economic transaction and accumulation, connecting Kivu's artisanal mining centres to the international resource market and strengthening its position as regional trading centre for imported and manufactured goods. As a consequence, the city shifted from a peripheral urban centre to a vibrant city of opportunity. This strongly redefined political and economic bounds between the city, the state and the region. As was also observed elsewhere in the DRC, these changes in the local sociopolitical and economic context not only engendered new economic realities but also new issues of contestation that "leave their imprint [...] on the sociological composition of border towns and villages, as well as on the shape and architecture of traditional political and power structures" (DE BOECK 2008).

Given the notion that borderlands have their own social dynamics and historical developments (BAUD & VAN SCHENDEL 1997), this paper wants to challenge traditional studies that tend to study border places with a view from the centre. In order to evaluate the remarkable paradox between Goma's expansion, and a generalized and regional context of state decline and violence, the city will be considered as an autonomous space and a laboratory of change. The first section of the paper reflects on the position of Goma as a centre of change and contestation. The second one focuses on the different dynamics that explain the city's growing autonomy, and analyses the different transborder dynamics that have shaped contemporary Goma. Here, special attention will be given to an evaluation of the economic and political impact of the cassiterite trade. In a last part, these dynamics will be illustrated through an in-depth ethnographic study of the current socioeconomic reality of Goma's border district — Birere. The starting points of this analysis are socioeconomic and political realities at the local level, but without neglecting interactions between the state, region and city.

The Borderland as a ‘Laboratory of Change’

Located at the periphery of the Congolese state, Goma can be considered both as a borderland and a frontier zone: it is part of a social and cultural system straddling a territorial border as well as being a peripheral or marginalized space within the state (GOODHAND 2003, SCOTT 1976), and at certain moments of recent history even a “non-state space” (GOODHAND 2003). The dynamic and contested character of Africa’s frontier zones and borderlands has gained renewed attention since the publication of Kopytoff’s internal frontier theory at the end of the 1980s, which tries to offer a model for the historical understanding of frontiers and their relationship to metropolises in sub-Saharan Africa. According to Kopytoff, the African frontier “consists of politically open areas nestling between organised societies but ‘internal’ to the larger regions in which they are found — what might be called an ‘internal’ or ‘interstitial frontier’” (KOPYTOFF 1987). Two elements are of particular importance in Kopytoff’s thesis: first, mobility is explained as a structural feature in the (re)production of the social and political order of these frontier zones; secondly, frontier zones are highly contested places, in which both exogenous and endogenous forces try to gain social control, reduce mobility and impose their authority [1]*. In this sense, Goma can be regarded as a city of transborder mobility and ambivalent refuge, located in a region of Central Africa that has always been characterized by a considerable in- and out-migration, an African frontier in which many different social groups intermingle, constantly contending for power and space (NEWBURY 1992).

While political scientists and historians have paid a lot of attention to how states have tried to deal with these peripheral and difficult-to-govern frontier zones and borderlands, far less attention has been given to how these borderlands deal with states (VAN SCHENDEL 2005). Nevertheless, besides providing “an institutional vacuum for the unfolding of social processes” (KOPYTOFF 1987), frontier zones and borderlands can also be understood as regions of inventiveness, having their own social dynamics and historical developments and creating their own institutional arrangements and regulatory regimes that also define their relationship with the central state (RAEYMAEKERS 2009). As spaces of contestation and resistance against exogenous attempts to control/define these zones, borderlands often are beyond the reach of the state though, with an “insurrectionary tradition” (SCOTT 1976) continually destabilizing and upending “the established meanings and limits of place and identity” (KAISER & NIKIFOROVA 2006). The history of the Kivu provinces

* Numbers in brackets [] refer to the notes, pp. 175-176.

offers a perfect illustration of these dynamics. On the one hand, this region has been subject to continuous attempts by the Zairian/Congolese state to impose its authority. On the other hand, it has been a site of continuous contestation over what was locally perceived as a strategy to establish and territorialize exogenous domination [2]. The result of both dynamics is, as LE MEUR (2006) also observed in Benin, the reshaping of local relations between mobility and locality and a redefinition of local governmentality that is “strongly influenced by a frontier ideology combining a discourse of autochthony [...] with a capacity to integrate and reshape exogenous parameters”.

Given their ambiguous character, these frontier zones represent attractive spaces of opportunity. As zones in the shadow of colonial and post-colonial administrations, they are spaces of engagement (VAN SCHENDEL 2005) and continuous negotiation, through which activities and goods easily pass unnoticed (NUGENT & ASIWAJU 1996) and fortune-seeking opportunists as well as political opponents try to evade state regulation and control. In cases where the political centre is gradually losing its control over these regions and is forced to enter into bargaining processes with non-state actors, new political orders tend to emerge from the complex interdependencies between these state- and non-state actors, resulting in the development of forms of authority and political-economic regulation that are increasingly ‘transborder’ in nature [3]. For the case of Goma, we will observe for example that the privileged relationship between Banyarwanda business elites and the RCD rebel leadership engendered several processes of economic control and eventually redefined the local economic space. For these Banyarwanda elites, the city increasingly became the centre of power and the place where its strategies to gain economic and political control over the rural areas were designed. However, since the start of the peace process in July 2003, growing division between Hutu and Tutsi Banyarwanda, attempts from the political centre to expand its authority and local competition from other networks of power again have drastically modified this local power balance. In 2008, the National Congress for People’s Defence (CNDP) military campaign, which was led by Laurent Nkunda and in October 2008 arrived at the outskirts of the city, set in motion new processes of contestation over the city’s political and economic space.

ENWEZOR *et al.* (2002) argued that: “The African city is the site for the challenge to the political and at the same time the location for negotiations and agreements where new organizations and services, freedoms and autonomous spaces are emerging and developing”. Today’s urban realities in Goma should be understood as expressions of growing urban autonomy, which itself is directly linked to processes of state decline and dynamics of regional

and local conflict. Rather than understanding the city as an embodiment of accommodation, in this paper we present it as a ‘laboratory of change’ [4]. One way of analysing the character of these urban realities is through a focus on the shift from a “formal logic of colonial urban systems” to the more recent “postcolonial attempts to redraw the old colonial boundaries for a less rigidly codified, and thus more imaginative, experiential and democratic design of urban life” (SIMONE 2005). For many African cities, this analysis reveals that while, since independence, withering state capacity and economic decline have caused destruction of infrastructure, further social inequality, marginalization and entropy — which eventually has posed “serious challenges to urban stability and sustainability” — cities have also turned into imaginative and creative spaces and dynamic poles beyond the control of the state (DE BOECK & PLISSART 2004). These creative and inventive dynamics become all the more evident in the case of border or frontier cities, which are sites of circulation and openness (AMIN & THRIFT 2002). Important differences between cities, which point at the limits of this creativity and inventiveness, can be observed though. Even if in the case of the DRC, as part of the processes of state decline most cities tended to become autonomous spaces, this autonomy did not engender similar processes in every urban centre. Contrary to cities such as Goma, Bukavu and Lubumbashi, at the end of the 1990s, Kisangani could be considered as one of the most devastated urban centres of the DRC, a city where “traces of modernity were (gradually) disappearing” (TSHONDA 2000).

Zone of Opportunity and Contestation

Goma’s current development cannot be disconnected from its mounting politico-military and economic significance. Local processes of state decline and regional dynamics of conflict have increasingly given the city its status as an autonomous space, offering new opportunities to local, national and regional actors. One element that was crucial in Goma’s rising importance and urban development was the city’s border location. Situated at the heart of the Great Lakes Region, the city has increasingly gained importance as a trading post in the region’s vast network of transborder trade routes while, since the early 1990s, regional conflict dynamics and local processes of state decline have also defined Goma’s growing political and strategic importance. The second element is the presence of vast amounts of natural resources in Goma’s hinterlands of Masisi and Walikale. During the Congolese wars, these resources became crucial aspects of warring parties’ strategies of dominance

and territorial control, with Goma turning into an essential connection point between the sites of extraction and transborder trading routes. Both dynamics have caused intensified competition between local, national and regional players and have engendered new local structures of power and control. In this section, the impact of these dynamics will be further explored, using the example of the cassiterite trade. We will demonstrate that the growing importance of natural resources has caused a shift in local urban economic realities; the same resources have also become a crucial asset for the consolidation of urban political control.

Even if Goma historically has been a focal point for migration and trading that connected communities from central to eastern Africa, the city's economic importance mainly stems from the colonial period, even if it remained limited when compared to other parts of the Belgian colony. The introduction of a plantation economy in the fertile arable highlands of Kivu by the colonial administration explains North-Kivu's reputation as the main 'food basket' of Zaire/Congo. From these productive areas, large quantities of cereals, potatoes, meat and palm oil were transported to Goma, from where these products were sold to markets in Kinshasa, Kisangani and other urban centres in the country. The construction of a port in nearby Keshero (which would later be reallocated closer to the centre of Goma) was designed to facilitate this trade and to integrate the city into the eastern north-south axis connecting Bunia to Rutshuru, Goma, Bukavu, Uvira and Kalemie. From the 1920s, investments by concessionary companies were also made in the extraction of natural resources. However, when compared to Ituri or South Kivu, the importance of the local mining sector until the 1980s was rather limited in North Kivu, as was the significance of Goma as a trading centre for these resources.

Despite the importance of these practices, economic activities were not restricted to those established by the colonists (which remained largely under the control of a small number of expatriate traders). Prior to the colonial era, small-scale local economic transactions had already been organized along historical cross-border routes that connected Goma with markets in Uganda and Rwanda and remained largely unchallenged by colonialism [5]. After independence, these routes gained in importance and became the backbone of the local economy. Given the predatory character of the Zairian state and increasing economic destitution caused by it, the Zairian population was forced into strategies of self-reliance and protection outside the official economy [6]. This partly explains the further expansion in Zaire's borderlands of informal and fraudulent trading activities, which at the end of the 1970s had become so extensive that they were not only responsible for the further

undermining of state effectiveness but also brought about important changes in the social structure on which it was based (VLASSENROOT & ROMKEMA 2002). Even if it is impossible to accurately quantify the amount of commodities smuggled across Kivu's borders, the loss of state revenue due to fraudulent export was enormous. This fraudulent export and barter was taking place in agricultural as well as mining products. Even if the liberalization of the mining sector and the institution of *comptoirs* (licensed counters for the trade of mining products) in the early 1980s aimed at reducing the fraudulent export of minerals, smuggling activities continued as before.

The dramatic increase in cross-border economic transactions, both in volume and in their illicit character, consolidated the emergence of a vast regional network of informal trade that became, according to MACGAFFEY (1987), "the means by which seemingly disastrous national economies managed to keep going". Where official international treaties in the Great Lakes Region failed to create regional economic integration, unrecorded cross-border trade resulted in unofficial market integration beyond the state. As MacGaffey concluded, "it was partly owing to the ingenuity of local entrepreneurs that [...] Zaire was able to ward off harsh blows of a decade-long flight of foreign capital and cuts in economic assistance". These dynamics explain the growing economic importance of Goma, which became an important market for agricultural and mining products and a point of access for manufactured goods to eastern DRC's markets. Several trading routes connected the city to eastern Africa. The most important one linked Goma to Rwanda's markets through the Goma-Gisenyi border post, even though smuggling activities were also increasingly organized via the smaller border posts of Bunangana and Ishasha. The second trading route, which was mainly controlled by Nande traders from Beni-Butembo, connected Goma to Uganda via Beni-Butembo and the Kasindi border post.

Goma's position as a regional trading centre was further consolidated during the Congolese wars (1996-2003), as the *comptoir* trade set in motion new processes of frontier expansion and urbanization [7]. Control over these trading networks was no longer only serving economic interests but became an essential element of local political and military power struggle. At the same time, Goma's close connection to mineral-rich areas in the Kivus turned the city into a crucial point of access to the local war economy. This new context made of Goma a space of opportunity (attracting new settlers including international criminal networks, cargo companies and traders but also vast numbers of ordinary Congolese and Rwandese in search of protection and economic opportunity), as well as a zone of contestation, in which natural resources shaped local power strategies that were increasingly based "on the

territorialisation of sovereignty around valuable resource areas and trading networks” (LE BILLON 2001).

Both dynamics have had a considerable impact on the city’s spatial development as well as on its inhabitants’ identification with the city. Goma’s image of *lieu d’opportunité* mainly stems from its particular position during the second Congolese war (1998-2003). Hosting the headquarters of the RCD rebel movement and being politically and militarily administratively disconnected from the Congolese capital, this *siège de rébellion* became an attractive location for the expansion of politico-military and economic ambition, which caused fierce competition for sociopolitical and economic control over the city. While it is often argued that rebel control over the exploitation and trading of natural resources “permitted an explosion in profiteering from minerals” (JACKSON 2006), the commercial rivalry that was caused by it was also “an expression of competition around means of ensuring one’s own and one’s community’s physical survival in an area of profound and prolonged conflict” (TEGERA & JOHNSON 2007). One of the outcomes of the Congolese war was a concentration of mineral trading in Goma, with the increased exploitation of natural resources in Masisi and Walikale transforming the city into a major trading centre. As a consequence of growing global demand for coltan, during 2000-2001 local traffic was primarily dominated by this ore. After the coltan boom, cassiterite took over as the main export product, with a dramatic rise in exports from 71 tons in 1999 to 2,904 tons in 2006 and an estimated value of US\$ 115 million on the world market in 2007 (GARRETT 2008) [8].

Control over this trade became part of larger power strategies between Nande and Banyarwanda elites. As the import of manufactured goods in eastern DRC is traditionally dominated by Nande traders, Banyarwanda elites have increasingly tried to get control over the resource exploitation and trade in order to reduce the Nande’s commercial, and consequent political, dominance [9]. This rivalry partly explains the division of North Kivu during the war between the Banyarwanda-backed RCD and the Nande-supported RCD-K-ML movements. The heightened importance of the Goma-Gisenyi border post results partly from Banyarwanda’s attempts to generate local income through control over trade routes and trade incomes [10], as well as by the closure (due to security considerations) of the traditional trade route connecting the city to the border post of Kasindi (which during the war was controlled by the RCD-K-ML). This concentration of mineral trading in Goma resulted in another effect: besides strengthening Banyarwanda’s local position, it also reinforced the city’s autonomous status. Since the peace process started, roads between both zones of control have reopened and the DRC has

been administratively reunited. This has caused renewed animosity among Banyarwanda elites in Goma, who, according to TEGERA & JOHNSON (2007), “fear that Nande traders using the Kasindi/Uganda link would take advantage of the newly opened roads to inundate Goma with cut-price imports and undercut current Goma prices, while Banyarwanda traders are still not accepted in the *Grand Nord*”. These differences in price are explained by the introduction of preferential trade agreements (*système forfaitaire* or pre-financing system) that during the war were concluded between Nande traders and the RCD-K-ML rebel leadership (in the RCD zones of control, the official method of declaration, or *système déclaratif*, remained in place). Even if the reunification of the country put an end to this plurality of rules, in practice Nande traders were largely able to safeguard their trading advantages. Moreover, on a provincial level, the parliamentary and provincial elections also strongly reduced the political impact of Banyarwanda leaders to the advantage of Nande representatives. This politico-economic competition was further complicated by the growing interference of Kinshasa-based actors who, with the start of the peace process, attempted to secure their share of the local resource exploitation and to reverse trading routes back towards the Congolese capital [11]. Control over mining sites and trading networks has also been forwarded as the key reason for the continuous proliferation of armed groups in North Kivu (GARRETT *et al.* 2009) and were believed to be of crucial importance in the armed resistance led by Laurent Nkunda’s CNDP. As was confirmed by the Panel of Experts’ report of December 2008, close alliances also existed between the CNDP and Banyarwanda traders and other influential Banyarwanda based in Goma (United Nations 2008).

The impact of this natural resource trade on the city of Goma went well beyond political and economic issues. For example, its position as a regional trading centre caused a considerable spatial expansion; those who were able to profit from the local war economy reinvested part of the rent in the construction of houses and hotels. During the coltan boom (2000-2001) in particular, numerous new constructions drastically changed the cityscape. Economic opportunities in Goma were not limited to the trading business, though. Particularly after the influx of Rwandan refugees in 1994 and the volcanic eruption in 2002, the humanitarian organizations’ and donor agencies’ share in the local labour market grew excessively (interview mayor of Goma, February 2008) [12]. The international humanitarian presence in the city offered additional opportunities and increasingly promoted the development of alternative urban economic activities. *Le secteur humanitaire*, as they call it in Goma, has become an important new source of economic opportunity, which affects the economic, social as well as spatial structures that

characterize the city of Goma. The sector was perceived as a new source of income by Goma's population, through its search for local staff, but also as these organizations became a new clientele for some local urban businesses. Real estate in Goma, for example, got a new impulse by the presence of the international sector (not to forget the huge numbers of humanitarian staff with the UN peace-keeping force). But also the new service infrastructure (luxurious hotels, restaurants, supermarkets, etc.), almost exclusively oriented towards this humanitarian clientele, became an important element in Goma's current economic development.

However, the image of Goma as a centre of opportunities is largely linked to its significance as a border space. The city has mainly developed as a result of intense contact and interaction with the other side of the border and in a context of crossing and exchange. The development of Birere — a lively district located between the border and the area of the city that was devastated during the Nyiragongo volcano eruption in January 2002 — illustrates very well the significance of Goma as a transborder space.

Birere: The Benefits of Transborder Mobility

From the city centre of Goma, along the border that separates the DRC from Rwanda, a popular and vibrant commercial centre has developed, housing thousands of small shops, warehouses, depots, restaurants and popular clubs or *ngandas*. This centre daily attracts thousands of Congolese and Rwandese *commerçants*, small petty traders as well as established businessmen to do some *affaires*. The crowded Birere district that occupies parts of the *zone tampon* (neutral buffer zone between Congo and Rwanda) is marked by its multi-ethnic character and its bustling activity but also by insecurity and poverty. Although sometimes referred to as the city's *zone rouge* — a chaotic, filthy and insecure place and a home for prostitutes, criminal bands and children of the street —, the attractiveness of the district cannot be denied. It is at the same time perceived as a centre of opportunities as well as a site of insecurity and danger.

In spite of numerous attempts by urban planners (especially after the volcano eruption) to relocate the city's economic centre to safer areas, Birere has remained until today the single most important economic hub in town. The main reason can be found in the presence of the *petite barrière*, a border opening for pedestrians, the perfect site for the fraudulent traffic of various small goods and for many Congolese and Rwandese the source of their daily incomes. As a local trader joked (interview, October 9, 2009): "Si tu veux

faire de l'argent, tu viens ici à Birere, tu construis une maison avec deux portes, une qui ouvre du côté congolais et une autre qui ouvre du côté rwandais". This clearly shows how the ambiguous character of the border creates a space of opportunity where "members of an ethnic group, or even a single family, may choose to live on either side of a border line in order to exploit the benefits of both spheres" (NUGENT & ASIWAJU 1996) [13].

Economic activities in Birere all seem to be connected in one way or another with the intense transborder interaction between Goma and Gisenyi. Since their early existence connected through a strong economic interdependence, these two border or 'twin' towns have been intertwined by their shared history and shared socioeconomic reality (TEGERA & JOHNSON 2007). In that sense, Goma/Gisenyi can be seen as a "transboundary space" where social, political, economic and cultural networks overlap in the borderland (BAUD & VAN SCHENDEL 1997). Today, over a thousand people daily cross the border in both directions. For Rwandese, the lack of opportunities in Rwanda forces them to transit to Birere in search for a job. Goma is perceived by many Rwandese as *une ville vierge*, where markets are still unexploited and opportunities are open to anyone. Furthermore, many Rwandese go to school in Goma because of lower school rates, but many Congolese on their turn teach in Rwandan schools because of higher and more regular salaries (TEGERA & JOHNSON 2007). Because of better developed services, for a long time crossing the border to Gisenyi was for many *Goméens* the only way to be connected to the 'global world' of international banking and internet (interview local observer, Goma, December 2009). And even today it is very common to cross the border just in search for a good internet connection or to check one's bank account.

In this context of mobility of people, goods, cultures and identities, Birere, the place where socioeconomic activities of both sides connect, can be understood as a "fluid social space" and a "site of inbetweenness and hybridity" (DURRSCHMIDT 2006). Through this constant coming and going of people and goods, through this reality of contact and exchange, the border sometimes seems to become invisible, or at least irrelevant in some sense. At some places in Birere in the neutral zone, it is indeed difficult to say whether one is in Goma or in Gisenyi. "En effet, rien ne sépare Goma, ville congolaise, de Gisenyi, ville rwandaise. Difficile de savoir si on est bien en présence de deux pays différents d'autant plus que la frontière n'est pas claire" [14]. As Tegera and Johnson stated: "Goma and Gisenyi have practically merged into a single town, with houses in some places built right up the border and private doors in garden walls constituting entry and exit posts beyond public control" (TEGERA & JOHNSON 2007). Beyond this public control, an intense

traffic takes place through shielded and discrete openings. A labyrinth of small pathways crossing private yards, locally referred to as the *makoro* (literally meaning ‘the little tracks’), is used by many smugglers to get their merchandise to the other side of the border without paying the multiple and costly taxes collected at the barriers. Along these informal routes, in collaboration with local inhabitants and customs, Birere smugglers have developed an extended trading network.

This ‘permeability’ or ‘porous’ nature of the border is a reality that is considered by people in Birere as a permanent condition, something that has always been that way. In the words of a local observer: “Comme les corps qui sont enterrés au cimetière dans la bande neutre, la tête se trouve au Congo, les pieds au Rwanda. Quelque part, c’est ça la réalité des habitants de Birere” (interview local observer, Goma, December 2009). With one foot in Rwanda and the other in Congo, the borderlanders of Birere live and act in intertwined economic, social, political and cultural worlds.

Birere is considered by Congolese and Rwandese as a place where everyone can profit, whether you are rich or poor, where impressions of ‘newness’ and rapid change tempt people to continue their search for prosperity. The disorganized and marginal character and the lack of state control create opportunities. “Ce qui nous amène à faire des affaires à Goma, c’est l’opportunité du désordre si je peux dire. Ici tu es en mesure de faire des choses qui ne seront jamais possibles de l’autre côté [...] Les gens survivent pour arranger leur maison comme dépôt pour des transactions nocturnes” (interview Rwandese trader, 21 November 2009). It is in this part of the city that important business deals are being concluded, but also where ordinary *Goméens* balance all sorts of survival strategies in order to have something to eat at the end of the day (VLASSENROOT & BUSCHER 2009).

The numerous disabled traders who are active across the border are a striking example of how local inhabitants exploit ‘their’ border as a source of opportunities. This remarkable group of local traders earn their daily income through the transportation of small commodities (such as flowers, charcoal, cloths or soap) from one town to the other. On both sides they work for different *commerçants* for whom they deliver goods to depots indicated by the traders. The disabled have, according to Congolese and Rwandese law, the right to import goods with reduced taxes. As a consequence, some of these traders have become well-known businessmen and respected agents in the district. In a way, *les handicapés de Birere* are borderlanders that “realize that their very marginality — their borderland advantage in the interstice — [...] to exploit the ambiguous values of powerful crossborder movements” (FLYNN 1997).

Apart from these traders, there are numerous other actors active in Birere who are directly or indirectly involved in the exploitation of the border as a source of income. On different levels of urban society, formal and informal, state and non-state actors operate in a complex web of interactions and complicity where negotiation is the essential condition to gain access to 'border opportunities'. For example, often acting as private agents, state officers directly negotiate with economic agents for personal benefits. This is creating a complex parallel system of regulation or 'management' of the border through different levels or 'scales' of authority and power, where the state is just one actor amongst many others. These dynamics confirm our earlier observations about the ways in which in borderlands, new institutional arrangements and regulatory regimes are created where among new alliances and power structures, the relation between the national, regional and local scales are constantly redefined.

Finally, the image of the city as a 'creative and imaginative space' or zone of 'opportunity' and 'inventiveness' has, however, to be nuanced. Recent anthropological theories of the African city as dynamic pole beyond the control of the state (SIMONE 2004, 2005; ROBINSON 2006; TREFON 2004) only cover part of the reality. Goma's citizens perceive their city as a place where the money flows and opportunities are open to everyone, but in fact these opportunities are only reserved for those who can make it to the city centre or who have the right connections in economic or political circles. Contestation over markets is dominated by certain groups and largely restricts opportunities for outsiders. Even if in the spectacular growth of the informal economy one can observe a fascinating inventiveness or creativity, this 'fending-for-yourself' lifestyle has proved to have its limits. For example, most new settlers are faced with the harsh living conditions of Goma's popular districts, where high levels of violence and poor or non-existent infrastructure condition daily life. The urban expansion that was observed during the Congolese wars has a double face. On the one hand, there is the current Birere centre and some nearby residential districts, which make up the economic heart of the city where all the important economic enterprises, markets, administration, banks, hotels and donor agencies are concentrated. On the other hand, there are the fast-growing popular districts, where infrastructure is lacking, running water, electricity and health services are absent and where inhabitants' search for success usually ends in survival strategies. The present spatial reality of the city thus very well illustrates how the search for economic opportunities has mainly resulted in the creation of a new urban proletariat, including hundreds of thousands of people who will never be able to take advantage of this urban space of opportunity.

Concluding Remarks

It was in a context of conflict and state decline that the city of Goma became an attractive economic centre and evolved into a transboundary space of opportunity. The history of violent conflict in eastern Congo strongly marked Goma's relationship with the central state and redefined its economic and political position in the national and regional context. Presented in this paper as a zone of accumulation, contestation and opportunity, the city gained an increasing autonomous status as part of processes of state collapse, informalization of political and economic structures, armed contestation and the development of alternative regional networks of accumulation. Key to the city's increasing role as a point of commercial transit and transaction was the natural resource trade, as well as economic interactions with the East-African and Asian markets. However, emerging opportunities also brought with them new contestation over the political, economic and social urban space. Goma's significance in the local war economy fostered fierce competition between local and regional, political, military and economic elites for control over urban networks of opportunity and power. These dynamics were obviously enhanced by the significance of the city as part of the Rwandan-Congolese borderland and frontier zone. Intense transborder mobility and the interaction between the local, national and regional scale strengthened the city's autonomous position and stimulated processes of profound urban transformation, which at the same time explain Goma's remarkable development and expansion in recent years as well as its increasing economic and political importance.

Goma's development confirms the general observation of the growing political and economic importance of peripheral secondary cities in eastern Congo. Being located at the margins of the nation state, yet at the centre of regional and transnational dynamics, border towns like Butembo, Kasindi and Uvira often seem to be more successful in connecting to global networks than the established, 'colonial' or primary cities. In this respect, one could speak of a changing urban order in the DRC, where these new, emerging urban centres in the periphery are playing an increasing role at the national and regional level, and where relations between centre and periphery are strongly redefined. Border towns like Goma, which developed into dynamic regional poles in a semi-autonomous way, reveal new, original urban developments, realities and identities that strongly differ from those in Congo's large, established cities. Furthermore, the significance and role of peripheral cities such as Goma will become even more apparent in the context of the current Congolese decentralization process, which is likely to result in more

autonomy and responsibility on the urban level. It will thus be interesting to see what the future role of a city such as Goma, which has developed largely outside the direct scope of the central state, will be in this new politico-administrative context.

NOTES

- [1] In doing so, these organizations tried to position themselves as the only local drivers of development, which was widely supported by international donors.
- [2] The Kivu provinces are far from unique in this 'outward orientation'. As JACKSON (2006) stated, "it might not be too much of a simplification to think of Congo's huge territory as almost all 'borderlands', as a vast doughnut with populations and productive resources clustered around its edges and borders and looking outwards while the middle of the territory is covered with dense rainforest".
- [3] See also ROITMAN (2001), who observed in the Chad Basin that the state and non-state forms of accumulation and power "are often reciprocal and complicitous as much as they are competitive and antagonistic". These non-state actors usually do not operate in opposition to the state but can "become part and parcel of the political logics of the state itself, contributing to its ability to fulfill essential political imperatives such as extraction and redistribution". While state-regulatory authority is constantly undermined by these non-state networks, the same forces thus also contribute to the viability of the state.
- [4] According to SIMONE (2005), "if an accelerated differentiation of social practices and organisation has had to compensate for the long-term absence of investment, infrastructure development, formal employment and multiplex economic articulations with the larger world, how are the ensuing complex fields managed?"
- [5] Products such as bananas, sorghum and milk products (mainly cheese) continued to be traded mainly at markets in Rwanda and Burundi.
- [6] These activities became known as '*Système D*', or 'fend for yourself'. For Janet MACGAFFEY (1987), these activities were more than survival strategies and should be understood as acts of resistance.
- [7] DE BOECK (2001) observed a similar development on the Angolan-Congolese border. As he stated, "the political economy of the *comptoir* has always been colonial in its very essence. In the past it contributed a lot to the urbanisation of the African material and mental landscape. The contemporary *comptoir* economy in Congo and Angola has contributed a great deal to the frontier urbanisation".
- [8] According to GARRETT (2008), the cassiterite deposits in Walikale, North Kivu, contribute an estimated 70 % of cassiterite exported through Goma.
- [9] One strategy was to get a firm grip on the exploitation of resources. The advantageous relationship between Banyarwanda traders and the RCD leadership made it possible to claim exploitation rights in Walikale, where most of the cassiterite originates from. The dominance of these Goma-based Banyarwanda in Walikale caused frustration among Bukavu-based traders who feared for their own business opportunities in Walikale.

- [10] Besides the trade in natural resources, the import of oil products was another source of contestation. During the war, this sector was controlled by business people that had close ties with the RCD rebel leadership. Today, the same group is still in control over this sector and mainly obtains its supplies from Nairobi and sells the fuel through petrol stations in the city. Between 2005 and 2007, the number of petrol stations in Goma has almost doubled (from thirteen to twenty-five) (Bureau Urbain de l'industrie & PME 2006).
- [11] A similar dynamics was observed in other resource-rich provinces such as South Kivu and Maniema.
- [12] An often heard complaint is that these job opportunities offered by these organizations largely remained reserved for educated people and have especially persuaded highly skilled people from Bukavu to move to Goma.
- [13] Most of the traders, dealers and shopowners do not live themselves in Birere but in other, somewhat 'higher-class' urban districts like Katindo, Mabanga or Katoyi.
- [14] "Une autoroute entre la RDC et le Rwanda: les habitants sommés de 'déguepir'" (28/08/2009) (<http://editions-sources-du-nil.over-blog.com>).

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