"EVERYONE IS DOING IT": THE CHANGING DYNAMICS OF YOUTH GANG ACTIVITY IN BUKAVU, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

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INTRODUCTION

In Bukavu, the capital of South Kivu province in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), youth gangs are a relatively recent phenomenon. In the post-Mobutu Sese Seko era, crime rates in Bukavu have drastically increased and criminal activities have become more organized and violent. More segments of society are now involved in criminal activities, most notably unemployed university graduates. This paper analyzes how recent trends, particularly the increase in and changing dynamics of youth crime in Bukavu, are interpreted and perceived. It does so through two lines of argument. The first is that the participation of unemployed university graduates in organized crime is strongly linked to social injustice in Bukavu. Our research suggests that many young people in Bukavu—already abandoned by government—feel that Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have been implicated in what Stephen Jackson calls the "war economy." [1] They allege that those who have stepped in to mitigate the various consequences of state failure and war have been co-opted into a corrupt system. The second is the culture of "fending for oneself" at any cost, another consequence of a weak and ineffective state, which has led to people having less regard for the rights of others where their own well-being is involved, and has made

anti-crime movements—which were often radical and uncompromising—more accommodating of criminal activity.[2] The popular phrase "everyone is doing it," captures the widespread public cynicism and increasingly permissive attitudes towards crime in Bukavu.

To answer the central question about how people in Bukavu make sense of urban youth crimes, this paper begins by considering the situation of street youth, commonly referred to as *maibobo*, to illustrate the worsening state of affairs for many young people in urban Bukavu. Despite the large number of NGOs dedicated to helping them (and other vulnerable groups), many *maibobo* are now offering their "services" to criminal gangs in exchange for protection and others favors. Among these groups is *Fin d'heures* (FH), an urban gang that operates in Bukavu. This paper also explores the controversial relationship between FH and *Jeunes Essence Force Vives* (JEFV), a local anti-crime organization in Bukavu that was well-known for combating crimes committed by FH. I will then consider JEFV, itself a registered NGO, within the context of the NGO sector as a whole, and examine the reasons why NGOs have featured negatively in recent conversations about crime in Kivu. Finally, I will briefly highlight some of the local youth-led initiatives aimed at reducing youth involvement in regional violence.

NOTES ON METHOD

This study is strongly influenced by the work of Janet MacGaffey and Rémy Bazenguissa-Ganga. I relied on qualitative research methods and "establishing trust and confidence" between researchers and informants, not only because these methods are "suited to investigate activities that may be clandestine to the law," but also because these methods are appropriate for research that critiques socio-economic and political structures in a country that limits freedom of expression as vigorously as the DRC does.[3]

My research team carried out structured interviews with fifty men and women in Bukavu between the ages of twenty-two and forty-five in order to identify the major sites of youth violence and the main groups involved. The informants were chosen based on their knowledge of youth crimes in Bukavu, and included *maibobo*, former gang members, victims of gang activities, pastors, community leaders, and NGO workers. We developed questionnaires to help identify gang names, the year each group emerged, how violent they are, the weapons they use, and the people they target most frequently, among other things. The data collected indicated that *Fin d'heures*

was considered the most prominent gang in Bukavu. Informants were also asked to identify which NGOs they believe are working to empower youth, and to share their own ideas on how to reduce urban youth violence.

Twelve people from the above group volunteered to participate in six focus group discussions (FGDs) organized in Bukavu between January 12-26, 2017.[4] The focus group participants were from a variety of backgrounds and occupations including NGO workers and owners, pastors, former street youth, unemployed university graduates, and others keen to share their knowledge of FH and other youth networks of violence in the city. These FGDs were used to help determine the issues that needed to be highlighted with regard to FH. Topics discussed included the root-causes of violence in Bukavu and how people viewed the socio-economic injustices in the city. The research team decided to first focus on the issue of street youth, who many said are linked to FH. They are also the target beneficiaries of many NGO aid programs, which makes them uniquely situated to comment on the activities of both gangs and NGOs. We then examined the changing dynamics of gang activity, highlighting FH's recent shift, before looking at perceptions of NGOs by educated urban youth. Finally, attention was directed towards youth initiatives aimed at fighting or reducing crimes locally.

To supplement this information, twelve additional individual interviews were conducted with informants who were considered particularly knowledgeable about youth violence in Bukavu, in order to learn more about the reasons for the participation of educated youth in criminal activities. University graduates constituted the majority of these key informants. Fieldwork also involved participant observation such as attending church services, sitting in bars with youths, and touring Bukavu during the day and evening.

BACKGROUND

Youth participation in violence in DRC is a common phenomenon. In the numerous armed conflicts in the region, youth and children have often been involved as combatants on various sides. A striking phenomenon in DRC is that "since the signing of the Global and Inclusive Agreement in December 2002, which led to the official end of the Congo Wars, the number of armed groups has only increased."[5] The upsurge in armed groups has led to a corresponding increase in the number of structures and organizations —mainly local and international NGOs—working to contain and eradicate violence by addressing its socio-economic causes and effects. As the number of NGOs

has increased, so has the range of roles they aim to play.

A primary objective of these NGOs has been to promote peace, which naturally involves working to end violence in the region.[6] Despite the apparent efforts of these organizations, and the time and resources invested in them, the social problems in which they claim to intervene seem to have deteriorated. These include the number of street children, child soldiers, and victims of gender-based violence.[7] All participants agreed that efforts to get children off the streets and reintegrate them into their communities have failed. On the issue of child soldiers, although progress has been made, armed groups continue to recruit children in Kivu's conflict zones, including Fizi, Shabunda, and Walungu.[9] As the situation deteriorates, women and girls continue to be exposed to various forms of gender-based violence at alarming rates.[8]

Some of the explanations given by the perpetrators of violent crimes, as well as the anti-crime groups working against them, have caused concern. Anti-crime groups such as JEFV are now viewed as mediators between criminal groups and their victims, whereas less than a decade ago they were still radical in the ways in which they dealt with youth crimes. Reports about how local anti-crime organizations have dealt with criminals in recent years indicate that they have switched from working against them to working with them (in crime-related matters). That "everyone is doing it," was found to be the reasoning behind this alleged collaboration. This has led to the new and unusual accommodation that Bukavu residents are developing towards criminal groups such as FH, by seeing them as victims of the crises the DRC has experienced for decades. This is summed up in "*sasa bafanye aye*," a common phrase in Bukavu's Kiswahili dialect that can be translated as "so what would you have them do?"

This research also found that some of the illegal activities carried out by youth in Bukavu have drawn inspiration from the sectors and individuals that are perceived to be directly or indirectly benefiting from activities linked to violence—including local and international NGOs, mining companies, and mineral dealers. The fact that these activities are seen to be highly non-inclusive of ordinary youth engenders feelings of suspicion and resentment towards NGOs.

MAIBOBO AND FIN D'HEURES

Fin d'heures is a gang of youth that has terrorized people in Bukavu during the late hours of the night, hence the name *"Fin d'heures"* which is French for "end of hours" or "late hours." Although the term has been popular in Bukavu since 2009, none of my informants could shed further light on its origin. *Maibobo*, "children who work and/or sleep on the streets," are a global phenomenon.[10] According to Bernard Pirot, street children became more of a concern in developing countries in the 1980s.[11] In DRC, their numbers increased due to the conflicts that began in the late 1990s—although the phenomenon is not unique to the war regions of the DRC.[12] Though both *maibobo* and FH are famous for operating in the city, they occupy different spaces at different hours. *Maibobo* are more active during the day and have a preference for markets and other busy places in the city while FH tend to be more active at night (but also operate during the day) and prefer dark, quiet places. The two groups differ in several ways, such as where they live, their ages, the level of violence involved in their activities, and most importantly, their level of education. In addition, the social and economic circumstances leading to their situation are crucial in differentiating between *maibobo* and FH. Although this paper focuses on FH, it was felt that some examination of *maibobo* activities was necessary because of the multiple connections between the two groups.

Street children can be "targets and victims, exploited and abused, but they can also be combatants, activists and entrepreneurs, or even rebels, outlaws and criminals."[13] *Maibobo* in Bukavu survive by begging for money, doing odd jobs and selling items such as plastic bags, bottled water, etc. They also provide services such as gardening and washing cars in exchange for either small amounts of cash, or goods such as food and clothes. They are often impoverished and are frequent targets for labor and sexual exploitation (with the latter risk being particularly acute for young girls). Due to their vulnerable situation, homeless youth often view membership of illegal groups as a means of protection and "an opportunity for social mobility and prestige."[14]

Ciza, a former *maibobo*, disclosed that street girls are often abused by their *maibobo* 'brothers' but that the most dangerous forms of abuse are inflicted by ordinary men who pay them "almost nothing for their pleasures."[15] According to Ciza and Mango (a man who has dedicated most of his career to helping vulnerable children), life on the streets often involves self-de-

structive behavior such as drug use, and other dangerous, sometimes vio-lent activities. Unfortunately, there appears to be much indifference to their plight from most of society and government; except for a few NGOs, there is no significant effort to rescue and rehabilitate these children. Additionally, efforts by street children to survive without resorting to crime are rarely re-warded. Mango explained that even when *maibobo* work hard to earn money legally through activities such as collecting and dumping garbage or picking up coal nuggets in the market to sell to stall owners at low prices, they are often robbed of their earnings by soldiers, older *maibobo*, or "other strong people," because they have no protection from the law. This leads many *maibobo* to identify a reliable *mkubwa* (big brother/ boss) to protect them from would-be harassers on the streets.[16] FH are one of the gangs that many *maibobo* affiliate with and work for in exchange for favors, including protection.

FIN D'HEURES AND JEUNES ESSENCE FORCE VIVES

FH operates like other gangs in Bukavu such as *Tiya na Se* (leave what you have), "The Wanted," *Armée Rouge* (red army), and Kaya Men. While all these groups are interrelated, they differ in the amount and type of violence they inflict on their victims, the places and hours they operate, their weapons, and their networks. Information collected in the field shows that the name FH emerged between 2009 and 2010. It is worth noting that 2009-2010 was the height of the DRC war crisis (2003 to 2013), which has been called "the unstable decade."[17]

Although considered a gang by many, it is unclear to others whether FH is actually a gang in the typical sense of the word: that is, "an organized group of criminals."[18] There are widely divergent theories about its structure and mode of operation. While some believe they have a leader and some form of hierarchy, others claim that what is known as FH is actually just individuals acting independently, and that those engaging in a certain set of criminal activities can generally be referred to as FH. Therefore, some people argue that anyone who attacks others late at night is FH, while others assert that FH always operate in groups; usually two people on a motorcycle working together to rob people. A popular explanation is that they are taxi *motards* (motorcycle taxi drivers) who turn to thievery when an opportunity presents itself, usually in dark, quiet places. FH members are widely considered to be from Bukavu, unlike the rural boys who make up the majority of *maibo-bo*. More interestingly, many are believed to be well-educated, with some

even holding university degrees. Although they frequently use the threat of violence, they do not usually inflict harm on their victims. Some robberies do however devolve into physical confrontation. Their strategy mostly consists of snatching valuables from people on the street and speeding off on motorcycles.

FH members have various backgrounds. Among their ranks are a few former *maibobo*; military deserters and demobilized members of the national forces; former members of armed rebel groups such as *Mai-Mai* and M23; and ex-convicts. As previously mentioned, some FH members are educated youths who feel frustrated by unemployment. In conversations about FH and their actions, many research informants suggested that FH members do what they do to survive because "no one is there for them," as Mango explained, referring to the lack of strong social bonds and government assistance that make many young people in Bukavu feel pressure to be self-dependent. According to Mango:

> "The government helps no one but their friends. NGOs and other civil and religious organizations help vulnerable children such as *maibobo*, the disabled, victims of rape, and so on. Where do you see organizations that take care of university educated unemployed youth?"[19]

In response to pervasive insecurity in their community caused in part by FH and the weak police response to it, a local vigilante group emerged in Essence quarter in Bukavu, known as *Jeunes Essence Forces Vives*, "Essence Youth Strong Force" (JEFV), which used violent tactics to suppress the FH gang between 2009 and 2010. According to James, "police and soldiers were not helping" to alleviate crime in the area.[20] The self-styled anti-crime group took radical measures against FH, including lynching suspects. Many in the local community believe that JEFV dealt correctly, though rather extremely, with the earlier generation of FH. Essence quarter—one of the busiest and most dangerous neighborhoods in Bukavu—is also known to host the bosses of both FH and JEFV. This has raised suspicions about the true nature of the relationship between FH and JEFV, suggesting to some people that the dynamic has changed drastically and is no longer antagonistic.

JEFV is a registered non-profit association founded and run by a law school graduate named Christian Wanduma who lives in Essence quarter. Wanduma's work fighting crime and defending human rights is both praised and contested in Bukavu. His success in finding and returning stolen goods to

their owners, and the work he does with the government forces to catch the criminals, have made many people suspicious of how he operates.

Wanduma and his team have received recognition for their role in fighting crime and raising political awareness, even being singled out in 2012 by *Radio Okapi*, a reputable UN-funded radio station, when they led a protest against the balkanization of the DRC during the M23 rebellion, and called for a "patriotic awakening to save the nation."[21] However, their contribution to the city's security has frequently been called into doubt. The biggest question is how JEFV knows where to recover stolen goods taken by FH during muggings. When a person reports having been robbed or mugged by FH, Wanduma and his team collect information such as the location of the incident and the items taken, retrieve it, and charge a fee based on the value of the stolen good(s).

The notion that there is now extensive collusion between JEFV and FH is shared by many. An informant from Essence quarter, whose brother works with JEFV, had a theory—which was corroborated by many other research participants—that JEFV and FH "are essentially the same team."[22] He claimed that one of the "biggest bosses" of FH lives in Essence quarter and is the main person Wanduma and his men work with to recover stolen goods. If this is the case, it would appear that crimes are being staged to make JEFV's services seem necessary to a desperate community so that its members can enrich themselves. It has been alleged that since 2012, JEFV members regularly meet with FH leaders to negotiate the "peaceful" retrieval of stolen goods, representing a remarkable shift from the earlier dynamic between the two groups.

According to James, who knew many of the founders and prominent early members of FH, many of the group's initial members were delinquent youths, most of whom were high school dropouts, while others were former child soldiers. Many of them had friends serving in the armed forces, which was partly why they were easily released when arrested.[23]

In 2007, FH made so much money from illegal activities that a faction known as *Armée Rouge* broke off. Later, following JEFV's success in weakening FH, the group splintered further, leading to smaller FH groups all over the city. The FH in the city center of Bukavu differed on two levels from those operating in or near Essence quarter between 2007 and 2010. The first difference was their level of education, which was higher than that of their

peers. The second was their affiliation to a leader, in some cases, one who was colluding with crime-fighting groups such as JEFV.

The evolution of the relationship between FH and JEFV was primarily due to the desire of leaders of both groups to develop an arrangement where "everyone can get something," as Mango put it.[24] When goods are stolen, the victim is more concerned about recovering their property than bringing the person who robbed them to justice. Given the corruption of law enforcement officials in DRC, even when a criminal is apprehended they are likely to be released after paying a bribe, and the stolen goods will rarely be recovered. As for the precise dynamic of the relationship, many study participants suspect that part of the fee paid to JEFV to have stolen property returned is passed on to the FH leaders who provided JEFV with information about the incident. The FH member who committed the robbery is then compensated by the FH leader.

Between 2009 and 2010 the campaign by local youths to destroy FH in Essence quarter was essentially a voluntary service to the community provided at no expense. The fact that it was mainly relatively wealthy people benefiting from the increased security encouraged the youths involved to transform their voluntarism into an 'employment opportunity' by creating JEFV—not to catch or punish FH, but as an organization through which victims are assisted in having their stolen goods returned (for a fee).

JEFV now has a number of branches in Essence quarter, including Mulengeza, Bizimana, and Gihamba. The neighborhood is still notorious for high levels of insecurity and other illegal activities, such as prostitution, drug dealing and abuse, and fraud. Ironically, Essence quarter is also where radical anti-crime networks developed more than anywhere else in Bukavu. Despite the many criticisms of JEFV, some research participants praised the organization for monitoring criminal activities and providing income for its employees, who are mostly youth from relatively poor families. For many of the informants, JEFV, with its ambivalence towards criminal activities, is not significantly different from many other local and international NGOs in the region.

"THEY ARE NOT HELPING ANYONE BUT THEMSELVES": YOUTH PERCEPTIONS OF NGO WORK

Reports of misconduct and abuse by NGO workers in developing countries have become more common.[25] It is therefore not strange to want to question whether, and how well these organizations are serving vulnerable communities. In Nigeria for example, a study showed that ordinary citizens considered NGOs "fertile grounds for corruption."[26] In Bukavu, many citizens have their own testimonies about how NGOs have influenced criminal activity, with many identifying a link between NGOs and youth crime.

Since the 1980s, as a result of disease, war, poverty, and hunger, most African nations witnessed an increase in the number of international NGOs operating in-country.[27] In DRC, NGOs multiplied due to a series of wars, both internally and in neighboring countries, which resulted in numerous humanitarian and refugee crises.[28]

Since then, the number of local NGOs has mushroomed in Kivu, where they work closely with international partners to help war victims—mostly women and children. A walk around Bukavu confirms that NGOs are present on almost every street, with some even operating out of kitchens and bedrooms.[29] These developments have led some analysts to suggest that in DRC, "civil society in the last decade has become the privileged partner of aid policies across the continent, at the expense of civil administration."[30] In Bukavu, participants emphasized the many challenges associated with accessing aid from both local and international donors. Many suggested that these organizations are not helping anyone except those who work with them directly. The heavy NGO presence is also a constant reminder of the war and destitution in the region, and consequently, some look at the entire sector with suspicion because they appear to benefit from the suffering of many. NGO owners and workers in DRC are seen by some to be treating their humanitarian work "not as a means of restoring justice but of enriching themselves."[31]

These shortcomings do not mean that all NGO work should be dismissed. Researchers have noted that organizations such as churches, NGOs, and other civil society groups in the DRC have worked toward setting admirable goals for development and good governance.[32] They also note however, that these organizations are "riven with inconsistencies and opportunism that can all too easily be manipulated by unscrupulous leaders," and that NGOs

are often hampered by ethnicism and classism "to a degree that undercuts their efficacy as forces for peace and reconstruction."[33] Such exclusivity leads to further frustration, especially among the youth.[34] Youth gangs such as FH are not simply involved in violence in order to improve their socio-economic status, but also due to cynicism, distrust, and resentment inspired in part by the very NGOs and civil society organizations that claim to be working to resolve the crisis. Youth who are educated and unemployed blame their predicament on NGOs and governmental organizations for failing to provide equal opportunities and allegedly misrepresenting their objectives. Our research found that according to many youths, NGOs sustain crises more than they help to end them. This reasoning is based on the observation that the various effects of chaos and war in the DRC represent the indirect source of NGO income.

NGOS: FIGHTING OR EXPLOITING VIOLENCE?

In interviews, people who work for NGOs and other civil society organizations emphasize their goodwill and commitment to the communities they serve, including their contribution to reducing and monitoring violence in DRC. They claim that the situation would be much worse if they had not stepped in to help.

The primary concern of many informants was the way in which NGO owners had accumulated their wealth. It seemed to many that NGOs are firmly entrenched within the "war economy," which operates like a "vicious circle."[35] The relative prosperity of those in the NGO sector is evidenced by the significant amount of property they own in Bukavu. Everyone claimed that if the war ended, "the majority of the construction projects in Bukavu's city-center would never be completed."[36] Many believe that this accumulation, and the exclusivity of these organizations, come at the expense of poor youth, and that such behavior implicates NGOs in an economy that engenders violence. Muba, a former child soldier and an unemployed 25-year-old university graduate who studied rural development, and whose best friend is a member of FH, explained:

> "NGOs are not there for the poor or the oppressed. We all know that they are created by rich people who use their personal networks to apply for funding which they then use for themselves and their families. They only employ their family members and friends, not poor people like us. To get a job in a NGO, you need to have someone on the inside. Even when jobs are advertised to everyone, those who get them have

their friends or family or their money which makes them successful candidates. We who have no one and no money, we do not get anything…It has been two years since I finished my degree at ISDR [Higher Institute of Rural Development]…I have taken a number of tests required for employment in NGOs…but that will not get me a job. Now tell me why did I leave the Mai-Mai [a community-based militia group]? At least there, food was secure, and I had respect. My father sold part of his land in Kabare to pay my university fees…I went to ISDR hoping that after I graduated, I would be employed in an NGO and in the future, found my own to help street children. But… these NGOs and their owners are selfish and they are happy to see more crimes because without them, they would close down, meaning no more money for themselves, or their friends and family with whom they eat the money."[37]

Muba's account of his experience with NGOs was echoed by Jean, a former UNICEF employee. After being retrenched by UNICEF, he started working for another NGO in Bukavu.

"Getting in was not easy. Although I had a university degree in management and had had studied development and English, I searched for three years before I got a part-time job at UNICEF helping in project planning and translating documents from French and Kiswahili into English and vice-versa. I met one man who had an important post and a good salary….but he did not know much about his work. I let him take credit for my work and later he helped negotiate a permanent position for me as his personal assistant. I was happy to get the job and he was happy to have me around doing his work permanently. After three years I was retrenched, but not for the right reasons. His nephew, who has just returned from Kampala where he was studying engineering, took my position. Despite my experience, I did not get another NGO job for two years. One day, a friend told me that there was an open position for a translator where he works. He told me that for $100, the person in human resources will do his best to give it to me. I had to borrow money from four people to pay. I discretely handed it to my friend the day I submitted my application. After a week, we wrote the test. There were about fifty of us but I felt confident, not just because the test was easy for me, but mostly because I had paid already…A week later I signed my contract and started. One day I was sent on a mission to Bunyakiri along with my friend who connected me to the job and another man who drove. We passed through a dangerous road where several rebel roadblocks are usually found. As we entered Kalonge, my colleagues informed me that we were going to make a lot of money in this mission, about $1000 to share between the three of us. They told me that Alfa, one of the Mai-Mai commanders in Kalonge, was going to kidnap us and demand a ransom from our coordinator. My friend, who was obviously the mastermind behind it all, told me that an employee of another NGO gave him a contact for the rebels and

explained how to arrange a kidnapping. He added, "but you need to understand that it will take some beating to make it look real." I could not refuse as I feared not just the beating, but what my colleagues were capable of. Because I looked scared, my friend said "relax, I am sure you know this is what everyone is doing. We have our chance and we will use it to get more of that money they like to eat alone." We met the rebels and we were taken into one of the mud houses where they gave us beans and potatoes for dinner. They made us call our office and they told our coordinator that if they do not get $1500 by 10 am the next morning, they would send the driver back with the heads of the other two. We were not beaten-up until 9 am, when the rebels were informed that the money was on its way. The Mai-Mai commander took his $500 and we were given $1000. He asked us to pass his number on to others who may need his services...I was given $300, my colleague and the driver took $300 each. I was told the remaining $100 was the commission for the person who procured the contact of the rebel."[38]

Muba and Jean's stories are just a few of the many examples that illustrate the corruption of the NGO sector, and why young people think NGOs are exploiting and even sustaining the crisis.

In an interview with *Radio Okapi* in 2015, Fernando Nkana Wakatamba, the director of *Fondation Solidarite des Hommes* (FSH), an NGO well-known for their work with children and female victims of sexual violence, said that FSH was concerned with vulnerable children, such as those who have been in the army, militias, gangs, on the street, or those who "have been in conflict with the law."[39] The FSH director talked about the "professional training" they provide to children to help them develop skills to change their lives and build careers. This is supposed to be part of the 'socio-economic reinsertion' that FHS claims is among its goals for these children. FSH also provides counselling to enhance "psycho-social" well-being. However, Ciza, a former street child who had been a recipient of such professional training for vulnerable youth, was skeptical:

"I was at Cheche Center [a Catholic center that takes care of vulnerable children] when I was still a *maibobo*. We were put in the carpentry workshop and the women were in the sewing workshop. There were many more of us than the tools available for our training. The teachers were so mean and the older people bullied us during the training; they only let us learn when they were done or when they felt like it. First, they said the training was only for those of us under eighteen years of age but we saw a lot of older people arriving every day. Some of them were not even *maibobo,* but instead were brought in by the teachers. They were friends and relatives who

had paid to be taken in. I attended for two years. Sometimes we were given food, other days nothing—even though they said we would be having porridge in the morning and lunch in the afternoon. When the training was over, we were supposed to be given some tools to go start our own work. The big guys got the tools but my friends and I got nothing. They asked us to return to fetch them the following week when new stocks arrived. For over three months we went there at least three times a week until the watchman told us to never come back. So, we went back to the street. Others I know who were lucky to get tools for woodwork did not get jobs and eventually sold the tools and returned to the street. Others are now FH. If university graduates lack jobs, who is going to employ a *maibobo* who studied at Cheche? That is a useless training program and they all know it."[40]

Though some vulnerable youth succeeded in making a living from the professional training given by NGOs such as Cheche Center, Ciza's experience highlights the often superficial nature of the assistance NGOs offer to those in 'deserving categories.' It also emphasizes the fact that most of this training is often not recognized in the actual professional world for two major reasons. The first is that the training period is typically short, which means that the skills that are taught are not mastered by many. The second reason is bias against these youths due to their backgrounds: either because of prior criminal activity, or the fact that they were previously *maibobo*. In Ciza's case however, it was the fact that personal relations of NGO management and staff who did not fall into the category of vulnerable people, were allowed to benefit from the NGO's resources undeservingly. Unlike those without connections (like *maibobo*), some of these 'non-deserving' individuals were able to secure training and eventually jobs through their personal networks.

Donors usually have in mind a type of vulnerable group they want their donation to benefit, and successful NGOs have mastered the "formal types and genre-based subject depictions" that humanitarian funders are interested in.[41] Educated and unemployed youth are not categorized as 'vulnerable,' or in need of NGO assistance. According to several research informants, NGOs wanted to assist only those "who will waste the help," a reference to the fact that many street youths who receive training will eventually return to the streets, rendering the investment "useless."[42]

"NO NGO TAKES CARE OF US"

Many study participants felt that the money NGOs "wasted" on training uneducated street children should instead have been used to create more jobs for young unemployed graduates. This study noted the bitterness associated with poverty and insecurity, as well as the resentment towards the emerging middle class of NGO staff whose flourishing is dependent on war and unrest in the region. Unfortunately, the cynicism in Bukavu has led many to be suspicious of almost any initiative that benefits from humanitarian aid, regardless of how genuine and impactful it is. For example, a few informants referred to the work of the famous gynecologist Dr. Denis Mukwege, who founded and works in Panzi Hospital, which specializes in the treatment of women who have been raped. Jean was of the opinion that without the ongoing conflict in the region, in which many women have been victims of sexual assault, Panzi Hospital "would not be that big, with all that equipment, and Dr. Mukwege would not win all those international prizes for 'fixing women' or be heard on the radio and featured in all those documentaries."[43]

I expected that at the very least the female research participants would view Dr. Mukwege's work with rape survivors positively. Instead, a female law school graduate remarked that without violent conflict in the region, the doctor "would not have had the money to send his children and relatives overseas or build that big house."[44] These informants cynically described the doctor as if he were just another war businessman, accumulating a fortune from armed conflict, and even sustaining the violence.

The reasoning of these study participants illustrates the intense suspicion associated with hardship in DRC's war zones, and the misunderstanding it can cause in people's perceptions of NGO work. Every research participant agreed that graduate youth struggling to find employment do not fit into the NGOs' and their donors' category of "vulnerable" persons. It is no wonder that many desperate youths are willing to do "all it takes" to survive. They also feel that no one should judge them for their actions because of the great pressure they are under from their families and communities, who will consider them failures if they cannot "leave in the morning and return in the evening with something."[45] For men in particular, one's masculinity therefore becomes closely associated with one's ability and willingness to use a certain level of force to get what one needs or wants. According to Mango, no one will ask how a man earns his living; instead, the question is

often "how can you sit here the whole day instead of going out and returning with something in your hands like every other normal man?" Mango added that most people know that although finding jobs is hard in Bukavu, finding money is not, so youth are joining criminal gangs to access their "share" of the wealth supposedly obtained through everyone's suffering (including their own).[46] My research suggested that this is one of the reasons FH like to rob NGO workers.

YOUTH INITIATIVES FOR PEACE

Aside from the problematic JEFV, there are other less controversial youth crime-fighting initiatives in Bukavu. In 2011, the mayor of Bagira, a municipal district in Bukavu, thanked local youth movements for their efforts to reduce armed robberies in their neighborhoods.[47] These youths collaborated with state authorities to secure their area through patrols and neighborhood watches. But youth violence is not just a problem for Kivu, it is part of the broader crisis in the Great Lakes region that has raged for over two decades. Hence, youth mobilization for non-violence and peace often involves bringing youths from these countries together to debate security issues and to collectively reject youth involvement in political violence, which only benefits the 'big men.'[48] Such initiatives suggest that youth are beginning to realize that their unfortunate social, economic, and political conditions are the result of violence which only serves the interests of powerful people, even though it is young people who are the primary participants in these conflicts.[49] Perhaps the most significant outcome of these gatherings is young people getting to know one another, becoming friends, and abandoning negative ethnic and regional stereotypes about one another.[50]

Churches and other religious organizations are also teaching the youth about the importance of respecting and defending human rights, even in the midst of the hardship they experience on a daily basis. They have also raised awareness about gender-based violence and child abuse, even organizing a number of visits to patients at Panzi Hospital. Religious concerts, prayer days, and sporting events are among the activities initiated by church organizations to keep youth off the street. Also, young men are advised to use their talents such as singing, dancing, acting, and filmmaking to generate income legally, and to use their art to educate others against violence by focusing on the importance of family, peace, human rights, and gender equality.

Migration was also mentioned as a means for youth to stay out of violence and turn their lives around. Lyndsay Hiker and Erika Fraser have discussed "voluntary migration" as a possible way for youth in conflict zones to refrain from violence.[51] This type of migration can be local or international (intra-Africa or 'South-North') and methods employed range from legal to illegal. Some make use of personal connections with those who have successfully emigrated to Western countries and South Africa.[52] Others will even "steal and sell family property, including electronic goods and expensive furniture" to raise the money for foreign travel, as Germaine explained.[53] If in the end the individual reaches South Africa and sends money back to his family, people will be proud," added Jean.[54]

Many young people, including FH members, are among those who wish to leave the country, or at least Bukavu. There are reports of youths who were involved in criminal activities, changing their ways after leaving the city for nearby mining villages and having success trading in gold, coltan, and other metals. For some, illegal activities are seen as a means to ending their lives of crime. These individuals use their income from criminal activities to leave the country. According to one report, a man known as Debisi left Bukavu in 2013 using $1000 he stole from a UN worker. He was later praised when he returned the money to the person he robbed after three years of working in South Africa.[55] This story is often used to suggest that the commission of crimes does not mean that the perpetrator is evil, and that people's circumstances often do not leave them much choice in the event they choose to turn their lives around. In such cases where a crime was committed to end a life of crime, the end is said to justify the means.

CONCLUSION

This paper examined how urban, educated, and unemployed youth make sense of the violence plaguing their city, Bukavu, the capital of South Kivu in DRC. It focuses on *Fin d'heures* (FH), a gang in Bukavu city, and how its formation and evolution have been interpreted by various members of the community. Given the large amount of research produced on youth violence in eastern DRC over the past two decades detailing the socio-economic, cultural, and ethno-regional factors leading youth to join rebel militia groups, this research focused instead on some of the main themes in current conversations about ordinary youth participating in organized crime and violence in Bukavu.

In conducting research that is primarily informed by people's own narratives of their experiences, we have had to carefully distinguish between rumor and fact. Despite the risk of conflating the two, hearing directly from Bukavu residents, especially the individuals involved in and affected by gang violence, enabled us "to see the world in the ways the story teller did."[56] The information presented has implications for the way we think about the role and impact of NGOs on local communities, including the potential effect of a large NGO presence on economic inequality and social cohesion, and the ways NGO activity can be co-opted into corrupt systems and inadvertently encourage more violence.

The despair and frustration detectable in the voices of many of the research informants suggest a degree of resignation with respect to the fight for social justice, and a deep mistrust of those who claim to be fighting against social ills. The lack of appreciation for many civil society initiatives is due in part to the perception that the large increase in the number of NGOs since the 1990s has led to little tangible positive change. Many Congolese youths have come to view NGOs as income generators for their owners and employees. They have criticized the sector for two major reasons. First, though NGOs claim to assist "vulnerable" people, many unemployed university graduates resent that they do not qualify for aid, even though they see themselves as vulnerable, causing them to feel unfairly overlooked. This has led many to reject the idea that NGOs are "the solution to problems of welfare service delivery, development, and democratization."[57] Secondly, there is the perception that NGOs are part of the war economy, making them beneficiaries of the DRC's many socio-economic and humanitarian crises caused by violent conflict. This has been aggravated by the exclusivity and discriminatory practices of certain NGOs in which employment and promotions are given on the basis of nepotism or tribalism.

The most frequently recurring and challenging of all the views expressed concerning youth violence in Bukavu remains: "everyone is doing it." It represents a widespread acceptance that so much of what people in Bukavu do is either illegal, or feeds off the violent conflict in the region and the malfunctioning of the country in general. The danger of this kind of reasoning is that it undermines efforts to promote legal and peaceful means of empowering youth in conflict zones. "Everyone is doing it" was found to be the primary explanation for why more youth are turning to violence to overcome their social and economic frustrations. Regrettably, the slogan

also undermines the courage many youths display in opposing violence and related crimes. People are showing a considerable level of understanding and tolerance for violence and crime, bordering on justifying it outright. According to many, socio-economic hardship is a legitimate excuse for ordinary citizens who turn to crime to survive. With this mind-set, there is a danger that criminal activity will only further proliferate in Bukavu in the near future.

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NOTES

1. Stephen Jackson, "Nos richesses sont pillées! Économies de guerre et rumeurs de crime au Kivu" *Politique Africaine* 4, no. 84 (December 2001): 118.

2. Jean-François Bayart, *L'Etat en Afrique: la politique du ventre* (Paris: Fayard, 2006); Janet MacGaffey and Rémy Bazenguissa-Ganga, *Congo-Paris: Transnational Traders on the Margins of the Law* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000).

3. Janet MacGaffey and Rémy Bazenguissa-Ganga, *Congo-Paris: Transnational Traders on the Margins of the Law* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 19.

4. Attendance ranged from twelve (at the first focus group dialogue on January 12) to four participants at the fifth meeting.

5. Koen Vlassenroot, *South Kivu: Identity, Territory, and Power in the Eastern Congo*, Usalama Project Report: Understanding Congolese Armed Groups (London: Rift Valley Institute, 2013), 13.

6. Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja, *The Congo from Leopold to Kabila: A People's History* (London: Zed Books, 2002), 244.

7. Filip De Boeck, "Etre shege à Kinshasa: Les enfants, la rue et le monde occulte," in *Ordre et désordre à Kinshasa - Réponses populaires à la faillite de l'Etat*, ed. Theodore Trefon (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2004); Olivier Tabu and Benjamin Rubbers, "Entre collaboration et confrontation: l'ambivalence des rapports entre pouvoirs publics et enfants de la rue à Lubumbashi (RDC)," Autrepart 3, no. 47 (2008): 25-41; Bernard Pirot, *Enfants des rues d'Afrique centrale: Douala et Kinshasa: de l'analyse à l'action* (Karthala, 2004).

8. "Bukavu: le phénomène "enfants de la rue" prend de l'ampleur," *Radio Okapi*, last modified on January 20, 2018, https://www.radiookapi.net/actualite/2010/02/21/bukavu-le-phenomene-enfants-de-la-rue-prend-de-lampleur.

9. "RDC: environ 33 000 enfants recrutés par les groupes armés en 15 ans, selon l'Onu," *Radio Okapi*, last modified on December 2, 2016, https://www.radiookapi.net/2016/02/12/actualite/societe/rdc-environ-33-000-enfants-recrutes-par-les-groupes-armes-en-15-ans.

10. Backson Muchini, *A Study on Street Children in Zimbabwe* (Harare: UNICEF, 2001), 89, http://www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/index_23256.htm.

11. Bernard Pirot, *Enfants des rues d'Afrique centrale: Douala et Kinshasa: de l'analyse à l'action* (Karthala, 2004), 14-15.

12. Filip Reyntjens, *The Great African War: Congo and Regional Geopolitics, 1996–2006* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

13. Filip De Boeck and Alcinda Honwana, "Faire et défaire la société: enfants, jeunes et politique en Afrique," *Politique Africaine* 4, No. 80 (2000): 5.

14. Koen Vlassenroot, *South Kivu: Identity, Territory, and Power in the Eastern Congo*, Usalama Project Report: Understanding Congolese Armed Groups, (Rift Valley Institute, London, 2013), 11.

15. Interview with Ciza, January 2017.

16. Interview with Mango, January 2017.

17. Cathy Nangini, Mainak Jas, Hugo Fernandes, and Robert Muggah, "Visualizing Armed Groups: The Democratic Republic of the Congo's M23 in Focus," *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development* 3, no. 1 (February 2014): 3.

18. *Oxford Dictionaries, s.v. "gang,"* accessed December 22, 2017. https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/gang.

19. Interview with Mango, January 2017.

20. Interview with James, January 2017.

21. "Bukavu : des jeunes manifestent contre la guerre et la tentative de balkanisation de la RDC," *Radio Okapi*, last modified on August 8, 2015. http://www.radiookapi.net/actualite/2012/08/11/bukavu-des-jeunes-manifestent-contre-la-guerre-la-tentative-de-balkanisation-de-la-rdc-2.

22. Interview with Eddy, January 2017.

23. Interview with James, January 2017.

24. Interview with Mango, January 2017.

25. Dean Maxwell et al., *Preventing Corruption in Humanitarian Assistance: Final Research Report* (Transparency International, 2008).

26. Daniel Jordan Smith, "Corruption, NGOs, and Development in Nigeria," *Third World Quarterly* 31, no. 2 (April 2010): 243.

27. Paul Nugent, *Africa Since Independence: A Comparative History* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012): 327.

28. Jocelyn Kelly, *Rape in War: Motives of Militia in DRC* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2010); Ingrid Samset, "Conflict of Interests or Interests in Conflict? Diamonds & War in the DRC," *Review of African Political Economy* 29, no. 93-94 (2002): 463-480; Filip Reyntjens, *The Great African War: Congo and Regional Geopolitics, 1996–2006* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja, *The Congo: From Leopold to Kabila: A People's History* (London: Zed Books, 2002), 214-240.

29. A former colleague spoke about the number of NGOs which operate without physical office spaces. He disclosed that when donors (local or international) visit for evaluations, they would furnish and decorate a regular family residence to make it look like an office. They would borrow computers, files, and documents, hang appropriate pictures on the walls, etc.

30. International Crisis Group, *The Kivus: The Forgotten Crucible of the Congo Conflict*, Africa Report no. 56 (January 2003).

31. Wafula Okumu, "Humanitarian International NGOs and African Conflicts," in *Mitigating Conflict: The Role of NGOs (Peacekeeping)*, eds. Henry Carey and Oliver Richmond (Frank Cass, 2003), 122.

32. International Crisis Group, *The Kivus: The Forgotten Crucible of the Congo Conflict*, Africa Report no. 56 (January 2003): 29.

33. Ibid.

34. Franck Van Acker and Koen Vlassenroot, "Les maï-maï et les fonctions de la violence milicienne dans l'est du Congo," *Politique Africaine* 4, no. 84 (December 2001): 103-104.

35. Stephen Jackson, "Nos richesses sont pillées! Économies de guerre et rumeurs de crime au Kivu" *Politique Africaine* 4, no. 84 (December 2001): 118.

36. Interview with Etienne, January 2017. It is widely believed that the most lavish houses under construction in Bukavu belong to either people involved in NGO work or businessmen involved in minerals and illegal weapons trafficking. Etienne is a 27-year-old who dropped of law school three years ago due to financial troubles. He is still unemployed.

37. Interview with Muba, January 2017.

38. Interview with Jean, January 2017.

39. Fernando Nkana Wakatamba, "L'ASBL FSH et l'assistance des enfants vulnérables à Bukavu," interview by *Radio Okapi* (February 23, 2015), https://www.radiookapi.net/regions/sud-kivu/2015/02/23/lasbl-fsh-lassistance-des-enfants-vulnerables-bukavu.

40. Interview with Ciza, January 2017.

41. Aubrey Graham, "'One Hundred Years of Suffering?' Humanitarian Crisis Photography' and Self-Representation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo," *Social Dynamics* 40, no. 1 (June 2014): 141.

42. Interview with Jean, January 2017.

43. According to their website, "Dr. Mukwege and his staff have helped to care for more than 30,000 survivors of sexual violence. The hospital not only treats survivors with physical wounds, but also provides legal, and psycho-social services to its patients. Even patients who cannot afford post-rape medical care are treated without charge at Panzi Hospital" (http://www.panzifoundation.org/dr-denis-mukwege). See the documentary about Dr. Denis Mukwege by Thierry Michel (2015), *The Man Who Mends Women: The Wrath of Hippocrates*.

44. Interview with Germaine, January 2017.

45. Interview with Eddy, January 2017.

46. Interview with Mango, January 2017.

47. "Bukavu: des mouvements de jeunes déjouent des vols à main armée," *Radio Okapi*, last modified on August 7, 2015, https://www.radiookapi.net/en-bref/2011/03/28/bukavu-des-mouvements-de-jeunes-dejouent-des-vols-a-main-armee.

48. Interview with Mango, January 2017.

49. Koen Vlassenroot, "The Promise of Ethnic Conflict: Militarisation and Enclave-Formation in South Kivu" in *Conflict and ethnicity in Central Africa*, (Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, 2000), 59-105.

50. Stephen Jackson, "Nos richesses sont pillées! Économies de guerre et rumeurs de crime au Kivu" *Politique Africaine* 4, no. 84 (December 2001): 121, 132; Filip Reyntjens, *The Great African War: Congo and Regional Geopolitics, 1996-2006* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 2.

51. Lyndsay Hilker and Erika Fraser, *Youth Exclusion, Violence, Conflict and Fragile States*, Report prepared for the Department for International Development's equity and rights team (London, Social Development Direct, April 2009): 35.

52. Janet MacGaffey and Rémy Bazenguissa-Ganga, *Congo-Paris: Transnational Traders on the Margins of the Law* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000); Didier Gondola, "La sape des mikilistes: théâtre de l'artifice et représentation onirique," *Cahiers d'Études africaines* 39, no. 153 (1999): 13-47; Joy Owen, *Congolese Social Networks: Living on the Margins in Muizenberg, Cape Town* (Lexington Books, 2015).

53.   Interview with Germaine, January 2017.

54.   Interview with Jean, January 2017..

55.   Interview with Mango, January 2017.

56.   Luise White, *Speaking with Vampires: Rumor and History in Colonial Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 5.

57.   William Fisher, "Doing Good? The Politics and Antipolitics of NGO Practices" *Annual Review of Anthropology* 26, no. 1 (October 1997): 441.

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