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Under the shadow of violence: are the Banyamulenge experiencing a slow genocide?

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ABSTRACT

Colonialism, racial categorization, abolishment of local chiefdoms, and the reified post-colonial autochthony have left the Banyamulenge identified as "immigrants, foreigners, and invaders". The Banyamulenge are specifically targeted by the Congolese state, non-state armed actors, and militias. Killings and massacres are often preceded by demonizing and dehumanizing campaigns. For five decades, attacks have used a similar modus operandi: men, boys, and unarmed military soldiers have constituted the primary target to be killed first and then women and girls afterward. Rape is used to destroy female bodies as survivors were threatened to be allotted for marriage among male perpetrators. They have been subjected to forced displacement and attacks have narrowed their territorial boundaries. The remaining Banyamulenge in South Kivu are currently besieged and starved. Their villages and their economy – source of livelihood were destroyed. Violence has largely targeted their culture and social identity while trying to erase or/and hide evidence. This slow-elimination experience is frozen within the complex violent setting in Eastern DRC that followed the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. The violent setting justifies targeted attacks and backs denialist arguments of the Banyamulenge's vulnerability. This article tries to disentangle genocidal killings embedded in the sense of eliminating "invaders" from widespread violence.

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Introduction

Genocide Watch has consistently warned that the Banyamulenge situation falls within the category of a genocide emergency (Genocide Watch, 2020). Late 2022, the United Nations Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide (UNSAPG) warned about ' … widespread and systematic attacks, including sexual violence, against especially the Banyamulenge … ' (United Nations, 2022).

Since 2017, the Banyamulenge in South Kivu have been largely besieged, regularly attacked, deprived of their livelihood, subjected to hate speech as 'immigrants' and

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collectively accused of being 'perpetrators'. The Banyamulenge's experience raises the unsettled debate around victims-perpetrators of genocide (Moses, 2021). For instance, Banyamulenge soldiers, regardless of their military positions and locations, have been collectively accused of massacres held in different localities including Makobola, Kasika and Katogota. However, these massacres were carried out by rebellions that comprised soldiers and military commanders from various Congolese ethnic communities including the Banyamulenge and military units from Congo's neighbouring countries. Individuals' and groups' responsibility have not yet been independently established (Davey, 2024, p. 92). However, massacres have, among other things, overshadowed the Banyamulenge's unique experience of violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

As an identifiable group based on 'racial and tribal' characteristics (Ntanyoma & Hintjens, 2022), the Banyamulenge are an ethnic group that has been targeted by the Congolese state and the Mai-Mai nationalist ideology which is grounded in eliminating 'others'.[1] The 'otherness' portrayal of the Banyamulenge is largely linked to colonial misrepresentations between 'native' and 'immigrant' communities and the subsequent territorial ethnicisation (Vlassenroot, 2013; Mamdani, 2020). The 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda was almost entirely grounded on a such dichotomy (Eltringham, 2006). The United Nations Joint Human Rights Office (UNJHRO) has qualified violence against the Hema community, targeted as non-native in Ituri, as mass atrocities. In 2023, the UNSAPG warned that genocidal atrocities were being committed against the Hema community in Ituri (United Nations, 2023).

Due to widespread violence that erupted in the 1990s, millions of Congolese have likely died in Eastern DRC (Moses, 2021, p. 11). This article tries to disentangle deliberate and targeted killings from widespread violence that has characterised Eastern DRC for decades. I do not intend to excuse atrocities and crimes committed by individual Banyamulenge or groups that claim to affiliate to this community. I understand how subjectivities and narratives may construct an ungrounded idea of collective victims and perpetrators (Ndahinda, 2013). Rather, this article complements recent research on the Banyamulenge,[2] by historically and chronologically interlacing killing events, patterns of forced displacement and the progressive impoverishment of the Banyamulenge. This case study presents specifics that contribute to understanding the complex nature of civil wars and violence. For many years, killings of the Banyamulenge were preceded by political mobilisation as state officials called for the elimination or forcible return of the Banyamulenge to their 'country of origin' (Roht-Arriaza, 1990). This rhetoric of chasing 'invaders' has remained the driving force behind local militias when attacking the Banyamulenge.

From the 1990s to the present, there have been patterns of specifically targeting Banyamulenge men and boys first, followed by women and girls. Early signs of targeting men and boys can be seen as far back as in 1966 during the Simba rebellion. Targeting men and boys first can be categorised among measures intending to prevent births within the Banyamulenge and possibly be intended to weaken the protective component of the community (UNGA, 1948). The dead bodies of civilians and unarmed soldiers were sometimes burned or dumped in rivers and lakes.[3] Such a modus operandi was associated with wiping out and erasing evidence.

There have been reports of ethnically motivated rape (Wing & Merchan, 1993). Perpetrators have repeatedly expressed their intention to forcibly allot women and girls for

marriage. Due to cultural attitudes and taboos, it is unlikely that rape has been openly reported. Throughout Banyamulenge history, attacks and killings have been coupled with cattle-looting, cattle being a source of livelihood and economy, and culture (Rosenberg & Silina, 2013, p. 113). Recently, there have been systematic attacks that have destroyed almost all villages and widespread cattle-looting, while those remaining in South Kivu are largely besieged. Particularly, the Banyamulenge are victims of hate speech and online campaigns that continue to dehumanise and demonise an entire community (Ndahinda & Mugabe, 2024).

Across time and space, this article reveals that perpetrators and instigators of violence are connected to the 1960s Simba-rebellion's actors and ideology (Verhaegen, 1967). The Banyamulenge's unique experience takes place in a complex and violent setting where the state plays the role of an actor within the conflict (Cederman et al., 2010). The killings are associated with denial mechanisms (Bandura, 2002). The Banyamulenge's case suggests that moral justification is strongly reinforced by 'popularity' and a socio-political context that rewards those contesting or killing the Banyamulenge.

The slow elimination of the Banyamulenge is obscured when events across time and space are treated in isolation away from the wider context of their legal, political and economic exclusion and the longer-term 'othering' of the Banyamulenge (Rosenberg & Silina, 2013). Rosenberg argues that 'genocide is a process, a collective cataclysm, that relies more heavily—thancurrently appreciated—on indirect methods of destruction for its success' (Rosenberg, 2012, p. 18). Similarly, Rosenberg and Silina emphasise that many unfolding genocides are overlooked because of how 'each death or massacre was treated as if it were a photograph, a snapshot, frozen in time, to be compared singularly to the definition of genocide' (Rosenberg & Silina, 2013, p. 109). They suggest instead understanding genocide as a slow-moving process, combining legal and historical perspectives on the way policies and actions can eliminate entire groups.

This article[4] is organised as follows: the following section contextualises violence complexity in Eastern DRC and briefly explains the methodology used, the third section elaborates on the meaning of 'attrition or a slow genocide' (Zarni & Cowley, 2014) as a proposed lens to understanding the Banyamulenge case. Before the conclusion, the fourth and fifth sections highlight, respectively, chronological killings of the Banyamulenge across DRC and abroad and how such violence has led to forced displacement and impoverishment.

Context and methodology

From Ituri, North Kivu, South Kivu to Tanganyika provinces, thousands of civilians have been killed in a renewed upsurge of violence since 2017 (Titeca & Fahey, 2016; KST, 2019, August). This region has more than 120 active armed groups, largely organised around ethnic kinship while pretending to protect their communities (KST, 2019, August). South Kivu itself has around 70 active armed or self-defence groups, and many ethnic communities, including the Banyamulenge, have groups mostly viewed as being affiliated to communities. The landscape of armed groups in South Kivu and the role of Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo (FARDC) in stoking violence have been widely researched.[5] Armed (self-defence) groups commit violence, though the majority (except the Banyamulenge-affiliated) believe that they should get rid of

Banyamulenge 'invaders'. Hence, the Banyamulenge's experience is frozen within such widespread atrocities committed against civilians.

The Hauts Plateaux of Uvira-Fizi-Mwenga, the Banyamulenge's homeland, has experienced huge destruction reminiscent of mass atrocities in the full sight of UN peacekeeping missions. Local communities in the region, including and not limited to Banyamulenge, Babembe, Bafuliro and Banyindu civilians, have been affected by the rising violence that has forced thousands to flee their homes. In July 2019, *Deutsch Welle* estimated that 140,000 people had ended up homeless in the previous two years, adding to millions of internally displaced people (IDPs) across DRC already in camps and hosted in people's homes.[6] Since April 2017, around 1,500 Banyamulenge people have been killed, more than 400 villages burnt and razed to the ground, and approximately 452,000 cattle pillaged or killed.[7] Data collection remains challenging, but violence has continued, and these figures may change. Meanwhile the remaining Banyamulenge in the Hauts Plateaux are largely besieged.

Recent tragedies affecting the Banyamulenge have received limited international media coverage (Bashi, 2019; Rolley, 2019). Local media tend to rely on official sources and security services, namely FARDC, the national army (Ntanyoma, 2024). Most of the attacks on civilians are presented as 'inter-community violence and militia tit-for-tat' killings. This perspective disregards the role of FARDC and foreign armed groups in attacking civilians and mostly the Banyamulenge's vulnerability (UNSC, 2020). In 2020 and amid renewed violence, the UNJHRO's report described the Banyamulenge's situation as complex, in which foreign groups and armies have been involved.[8] The UNJHRO discussed nonetheless the inter-community component, leaving aside the involvement of foreign militias and the role of the DRC state and that of FARDC (UNJHRO, 2020). As a result of being cattle-herders where transhumance still dominates (Bujakera-Tshiamala, 2019; Rukata, 2019), sometimes reports tend to interpret violence against the Banyamulenge as linked to cattle-farmer conflicts.

Patterns of violence in Eastern DRC are multi-faceted and multi-causal involving local, regional and international actors (Stearns, 2011; Cramer, 2006; Prunier, 2009). This complex violent context tends to overshadow the fact that the Banyamulenge have been deliberately singled out as 'invaders'. Drawing from Rosenberg and Silina, this article applies a case study methodology to chronologically adjoin events across space and time. As a methodology, a case study is conceptualised as an empirical enquiry and strategy that 'investigates a phenomenon in its real-life context.' (Priya, 2021, p. 95). Priya states further that, a case study methodology involves

> a detailed study of the concerned unit of analysis [a community in this specific case] within its natural setting … [and] it allows the researcher the leeway to use any method of data collection which suits their purpose (provided the method is feasible and ethical). (Priya, 2021)

Case study methodology has contributed to broaden the scope and understanding of mass death in the field of genocide studies. For instance, Libaridian has applied it to unveil processes and events that led to the genocide of the Armenians (Libaridian, 1987). Recently, Ullah and Ahsan, and Zarni and Cowley have applied a similar methodology to uncover historical genocidal violence against the Rohingya community (Ullah & Ahsan, 2011; Zarni & Cowley, 2014). I choose case study methodology because it allows the combination of different research methods and techniques; and in this study, I used

oral histories and testimonies, interviews and the critical theory approach. With critical theory, this article reconstructs particularly the Banyamulenge's half-century of persecution in relation to colonialism misrepresentation and its subsequent 'nationalism' ideology. Specifically, the critical theory approach enables this study to account for Mai-Mai nativeness ideology that drives violence intending to expel 'invaders'.

Personal experience as a native researcher enhanced this methodology. For a decade now I have researched this subject and gathered abundant literature on the Banyamulenge (Ntanyoma, 2019). The Banyamulenge's persecution has been researched extensively but no single study (to the best of my knowledge) has interlaced killing events across time and space and other forms of violence that have singled out this community. My positionality (Ntanyoma, 2021) drives the interest to fill this gap within the scholarship. As discussed in 'Fieldnotes, Field Research, and Positionality' (Ntanyoma, 2021), I reflexively understand the advantages and limitations of being a native researcher and a member of the Banyamulenge. From a perspective of multiple positionalities, I argue that research objectivity is not exclusively associated to 'outsider' researchers. The relevance of research is mostly linked to its objectivity and acknowledgment of one's positionalities.

Genocide by attrition or slow genocide as a social phenomenon

The Genocide Convention (UNGA, 1948) emphasises intentional acts committed to destroy a specific group, defined as racial, national, ethnic, or religious. Violence becomes genocidal if it aims to destroy in whole or in part a group (Harff & Gurr, 1988; Straus, 2001). Simon stresses that genocide involves killings and massacres grounded within an intention to collectively harm a group maliciously identified as negative (Simon, 1996; Straus, 2001). He defines genocide as an 'intentional killing of members of a group, negatively identified by perpetrators, because of their actual or perceived group affiliation' (Simon, 1996, p. 244). Additionally, Straus argues that annihilation encompasses three necessary conditions: the mode, subject and object (Straus, 2001, p. 360). The mode implies ways in which destruction is carried out, while the subject is the actor as perpetrator, and the object is a group to be eliminated – victims (Straus, 2001, p. 360).

Intent to eliminate plays a role in defining genocide compared to other mass atrocities. It suggests that violence has the primary objective of a group annihilation (Straus, 2001, p. 364). Goldsmith remarks that intent distinguishes genocidal crimes from crimes of mass murder or other crimes against humanity (Goldsmith, 2010). Goldsmith reiterates that in genocide 'the perpetrator commits an act while clearly seeking to destroy the particular group, in whole or in part' (Goldsmith, 2010, p. 242). Intent is hard to prove and can realistically be proven if explicitly expressed by the perpetrator (Goldsmith, 2010, p. 242). To circumvent difficulties of discerning intent, Goldsmith suggests a 'knowledge-based approach' that consists in proving that an:

> individual commits an act knowing that it would contribute to other acts being committed against a particular group, which when put together, would bring about the destruction of that group, in whole or in part. (Goldsmith, 2010, p. 245)

Curthoys and Docker state that genocide 'signifies a coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of the essential foundations of life of a group' including physical, economic, cultural and physiological destruction (Curthoys & Docker, 2008, p. 11).

Rosenberg and Silina suggest that recent genocidal phenomena tend to use indirect methods to annihilate entire groups – methods which serve to conceal genocidal intentions (Rosenberg & Silina, 2013, p. 107). The modern era is characterised by a mediatised coverage of mass murder that may reduce sensitivity to ongoing genocides (Rosenberg & Silina, 2013, p. 112). Perpetrators seek to blur mass killings involved in warfare with their intent of committing genocide. Pauline Wakeham argues that slower and more attritional methods to eliminate in whole or in part tend to obscure the 'causal-effect relationship of perpetrators' acts' (Wakeham, 2022). This leads to 'the slow process of annihilation that reflects the unfolding phenomenon of mass murder of a protected group' (Rosenberg & Silina, 2013, p. 110). Forced displacement, denial of access to health and healthcare, denial of food, and sexual violence have all been used as indirect methods of extermination (Rosenberg & Silina, 2013, p. 113).

Rosenberg and Silina underscore that indirect methods are 'silent and efficient'. They eliminate a group while avoiding the vigilance of international humanitarian agencies and the media (Rosenberg & Silina, 2013, p. 112). Therefore, perpetrators take time to erase evidence or create denial narratives (Goldsmith, 2010, p. 253). Bandura identifies four mechanisms through which perpetrators legitimise violence (Bandura, 2002). The mechanisms include moral justification for violence, minimising the consequences of perpetrators' acts, blaming the victims for what is happening to them, and displacement of responsibility (Bandura, 2002, p. 103). In the case of the genocide against the Armenians, Bilali has found these four mechanisms of genocide denial applicable (Bilali, 2013).

Recent scholarship on the Banyamulenge has concentrated on links between citizenship, exclusion, local authority contestation and armed mobilisation (Court, 2013; Stearns et al., 2013a; Vlassenroot, 2002, 2013; Verweijen & Vlassenroot, 2015). In opinion articles, Mathys and Verweijen refer to how 'autochthony and indigeneity' drive violence against the Banyamulenge (Mathys & Verweijen, 2020). Verweijen questions a mono-explanation of violence and suggests that causes of conflicts are multiple (Verweijen, 2020). A recent article by Davey investigating multidirectional violence focuses on popular discourse and subjectivities around the use of genocide in Eastern DRC and mostly around the Banyamulenge (Davey, 2024). Davey's research uses a multidirectional violence perspective that includes atrocities for which popular discourse believes they were committed by the Banyamulenge. However, in his analysis, Davey concludes that

> The label of genocide is certainly applicable to the long-term experience of Banyamulenge communities but must be seen through the complexity of regional targeting of Tutsi across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, alongside the multidirectional participation of Tutsi actors like Banyamulenge soldiers in creating violence. (Davey, 2024)

Following this debate and gaps within the scholarship, it remains crucial to historically and chronologically unpack violence that intends to get rid of the Banyamulenge 'invaders'.

Chronological killings and collective guilt

Affiliated with the Tutsi, the Banyamulenge are a small, contested community[9] living in South Kivu province (Uvira, Fizi, Mwenga territories) (Vlassenroot, 2002). Most scholars

agree that they settled in what became Congo between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[10] Confusingly, colonial administrators variously portrayed the Banyamulenge as either Ruandas or Banyaruandas, Watuzi, Batutsi, Tutsi d'Itombwe or Pasteurs d'Itombwe. 'Bantu-Hamitic' racial narrative dichotomy (Sanders, 1969) reproduced locally 'autochthonous' and 'immigrant' groups (Bøås & Dunn, 2014). The Banyamulenge and more generally the Tutsi have come to be defined as 'invaders' (Sanders, 1969; Hintjens, 2001). This social status has always been at the centre of their plight.

Precursors of the Banyamulenge's elimination

The origin of the Banyamulenge's vulnerability can be traced far back to colonial misrepresentations and the abolition of their chiefdoms in 1924 and again in 1955, leaving them without local authority.[11] Kayira, one of the Banyamulenge chiefs, entered in fraught against the Bafuliro leader Mahina Mukogabwe.[12] Restructuring traditional chieftaincies through enlargement (*chefféries agrandies*) came at the cost of the Banyamulenge. Up until post-independence rebellions erupted, the colonial policy created a divisive time-bomb that later fuelled recurring violence up to the present.[13]

In the first place, the Banyamulenge enlisted and sympathised with the Simba-Mulele rebellion (Vlassenroot, 2002, pp. 503–504). Attacks against civilians and cattle-looting made them withdraw to defend themselves (Vlassenroot, 2002; Stearns et al., 2013a; Muzuri, L'évolution des Conflits Ethniques.). Early incidents targeting Banyamulenge took place around June 1964, when a traditional chief in Uvira territory was killed.[14] Between February and August 1966, Banyamulenge were further targeted and killed by Simba-Mulele rebels in Gatongo, Kirumba, Kirambo and Gahwera localities (Uvira and Fizi territories).[15] Within a single day, around 30 Banyamulenge civilians were killed in Kirambo locality by Simba rebels dominated by Bafuliro and Babembe combatants. Informed accounts tend to corroborate that in Gatongo, Kirumba and Kirambo men and boys were killed first.[16] In this specific context such killings were unique and not exclusively driven by political motives. Widespread attacks against Banyamulenge villages led to killings targeting individuals, villages and their properties. Oral sources believe that by February 1966 the Banyamulenge were entirely evicted from the Hauts Plateaux and fled towards the Ruzizi plain and Lake Tanganyika's shores.[17] This forced displacement 'inflicted huge damage, with people and cattle dying due to the unfamiliar climate in [the] sparsely populated, but much hotter, Ruzizi plain and Baraka' (Ntanyoma, 2019, p. 36).

Consequently, the Banyamulenge sought support from Mobutu's national army to fight back the rebels. The 'switch' triggered a 'security dilemma' (Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2002; Ndaywel è Nziem, 2006; Verhaegen, 1967) and set the tone for future political manipulation including ongoing contestation of the Banyamulenge's citizenship (Stearns et al., 2013a; Muzuri, 'L'évolution des Conflits Ethniques'; Vlassenroot, 2013). Through political manipulation and media, politicians like Anzuluni Bembe influenced national politics to deny the Banyamulenge's civic rights including contesting their nationality (Huening, 2015). During the Sovereign National Conference (1992–1995), the Vangu Mambweni Commission resolved to expel the entire Banyamulenge community and those considered as being of 'Rwandan and Burundian descent' to Rwanda-Burundi by December 1995 (Vlassenroot, 2013; Stearns et al., 2013a). The situation in

the Kivus deteriorated further due to the massive influx of Rwandan and Burundian refugees in 1994 (Prunier, 2009, p. 69). All of these factors contributed to worsening the Banyamulenge's security in DRC.

Regional warfare emerged in which Banyamulenge's grievances served instrumentally as a bridge for Rwanda to launch its war against Rwandan Hutu militias in the Kivus (Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2002; Stearns, 2011). This course of events soon slipped into covert and sometimes open inter-state warfare. In 1996, Burundi, Uganda and particularly Rwanda participated in overthrowing President Mobutu. Many Banyamulenge youth were recruited to fight alongside the Rwanda Patriotic Army (RPA), which seemed well-intentioned to protect them as 'natural allies' (Stearns, 2011, p. 59). A rebel group, the Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Congo (AFDL), under Laurent Kabila's leadership, was then formed.[18]

Following Anzuluni's mobilisation, pogroms instigated by Shweka Mutabazi, the then Uvira territorial administrator, targeted specifically the Banyamulenge between July and August 1996 (Vlassenroot, 2013, p. 34). Security services, militias and local groups orchestrated similar attacks in Baraka, Abela, Lweba. Amid regional security tensions, the South Kivu Governor Lwabanji Lwasi Ngabo declared on 8 October 1996 that all of the Banyamulenge community should leave Congo within six days or face military attacks (Turner, 2007, p. 89). The governor promised that security services would protect those who would 'surrender'. The governor was echoed by military generals. Though the governor promised security and safety, killings continued and were largely based on identified physical traits (Stearns, 2011, p. 95). Across time and space, Banyamulenge's killings are very similar.

Killings' modus operandi

Despite its methodological flaws, the mapping report[19] of the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNOHCHR) details 617 violent incidents of which 25 were events and massacres that specifically targeted the Banyamulenge and Tutsi (UNOHCHR, 2010). Killings also targeted individuals whose physical traits resembled the Banyamulenge or Tutsi (UNOHCHR, 2010, p. 154; Stearns, 2011, p. 194). In 1996, the Banyamulenge were rounded up by Zairean security services supported by youth gangs and militias across different localities (Stearns, 2011, p. 94; UNOHCHR, 2010, p. 72). Those who sought to dissociate themselves from armed combatants affiliated to the Banyamulenge were killed, sometimes after cruelty and weeks of imprisonment (UNOHCHR, 2010, p. 74).

Nyamahirwe[20] and Lucie Nyamwiza[21] underscored a deliberate choice to eliminate them. She survived killings that targeted the Banyamulenge in Bibokoboko where hundreds of families were rounded up by the Zairean security services and taken hostage to Baraka, Lueba and Mboko to be slaughtered. Hostages were called 'snakes' who deserved to be killed.[22] Like the 1966 killings, men and boys were killed first. Only some younger boys survived by altering their appearances and dressing like girls. Later, women in Baraka-Lueba were also separated from their children and almost all killed. Among at least 100 women, Nyamahirwe is one of only five known to have survived and not because of the willingness of the killers.[23] They escaped from hundreds of dead bodies during the night. Meanwhile, almost 150 children who witnessed the killings of their parents went missing. Their whereabouts remain unknown (Ntanyoma, 2018,

October). The case of these missing children has been recorded by the Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearance (WGEID) of the United Nations Human Right Council.[24] When I met Nyamahirwe, she was mostly concerned by the fate of those children who disappeared about 22 years ago.

Nyamwiza (2020) is a survivor of the 1996 Mboko killings (Congo) and the 2004 Gatumba massacre (Burundi). Her 1996 testimony echoes that of Nyamahirwe. Nyamwiza recalls that boys who survived had to alter their appearance to look like girls. Women and girls were taken to Rwanda as part of expelling the 'invaders'. From firsthand experience, Nyamwiza stated that when killing men and boys,

> They handcuffed their arms from behind with the belts or shirts they were wearing. Then they unloaded women and made us sit on the side. They came back, started to take the men who were lying down on the beach handcuffed, and load them into the boat in small groups. They would take a group of men and drive the boat away from the lake's shore and dump them in the waters of Lake Tanganyika. (Nyamwiza, 2020)

In September–October 1996 dozens of Banyamulenge families and their dependents were killed or disappeared as they fled from Ngandja localities towards Minembwe. On their way, security services and youth gangs arrested and killed them, claiming to be eliminating 'Rwandans'. Semahoro is the only man believed to have survived. Semahoro recalled that when he fled, men and boys were already separated from women and girls.[25] Semahoro was a husband and father of six children of whom one, Jackson, was only seven months old. Since then, Semahoro has no clue what happened to his entire family and his neighbours. Around 2018, relatives informed him that they had identified one of his children in Burundi, based on his physical traits. Semahoro started searching for his son until Jackson was found in Ubwali, Fizi territory.

As part of his 'oral will and testament', Jackson's 'guardian father' shared with him his personal story. The guardian father told Jackson that his real mother requested to relieve herself, and she left him inside a nearby facility to save the baby. The guardian family realised that a child was left in the facility and decided to secretly take care of him. During his painful sickness, the guardian father revealed this sensitive information because of Jackson's support during his illness and difficult moments. The guardian father's revelation triggered events within the family that led Jackson to get back to his real family, after 22 years. Jackson's testimony reveals the fate of hundreds of children who have experienced similar nightmares. It somehow sheds light on how evidence of killing is hidden or erased.[26] In the same period, around 200 Banyamulenge civilians were rounded up in Bukavu city and shot dead after two weeks of harsh imprisonment.[27] Similar incidents targeting the Banyamulenge took place in Kamituga, Uvira and Ruzizi plain; again men and boys were killed first.

Around August 1998, the Banyamulenge and Tutsi were specifically hunted down and killed in Kinshasa, Katanga, Kasai, Province Orientale, the Kivus and Maniema. Massacres happened when new rebel groups supported by Rwanda and Uganda erupted. Killings were ordered by President Laurent Kabila and his entourage and largely based on certain physical characteristics (Stearns, 2011, p. 194). In different cities, corroborated accounts indicate that men and boys were killed first and women were targeted afterwards. Survivors were exposed to inhumane jail conditions that lasted, in some cases, for several months.

Like in Darfur (Kristof, 2006), Rose Mapendo's imprisonment and her survival journey in Kasai speak loudly (Irwin, 2009). Alongside many other Banyamulenge and Tutsi, Mapendo describes her 16-month imprisonment conditions.

> It was more like a death camp than a prison … We were crowded into rooms with no doors and with guards always watching us … The men were killed quickly, including my husband. Many children died from cold, from sleeping on cement, from hunger. Every day they would come and take some people away and shoot them. (Irwin, 2009)

From Mapendo's testimony, imprisonment and killing reflect a premeditated choice to harm an entire ethnic group, civilians and soldiers (Goldsmith, 2010, p. 243). For instance, 350 unarmed military Banyamulenge cadet trainees and soldiers deployed in the Kamina Training Base (Katanga Province), were killed possibly before 2 August 1998 (Ntanyoma, 2019, p. 139). The UN mapping report stresses that:

> … The victims were not armed. They were reported shot dead in large hangars close to the rails, near the base's arms store. The bodies of the victims are then thought to have been buried in the surrounding forest or burnt … (Ntanyoma, 2019, p. 161)

Similarly, hundreds of civilian men and boys and unarmed soldiers were killed in Kalemie and Moba territories in 1998 (UNOHCHR, 2010, pp. 159–161). Banyamulenge soldiers in Kalemie and Moba were disarmed ten months before August 1998. Without guns they did not constitute a threat (Ntanyoma, 2019, p. 135). In 2004, killing the Banyamulenge in Bukavu and Gatumba reflected an intentional choice. In Bukavu, civilians who had nothing to do with military officers' disagreement were specifically targeted by soldiers of the national army (HRW, 2004). Meanwhile, around 50 Banyamulenge soldiers were selectively shot dead in Walungu and Shabunda (Ntanyoma, 2019, p. 148).

Nyamwiza, who survived the 2004 Gatumba massacre, recalls that the attack targeted only Banyamulenge refugees. For unknown reasons, Burundian returnees and Congolese refugees had their camps divided into two separate clusters (40 m distance). One cluster belonged to the Banyamulenge and another one to Burundian returnees. Within 40 m, the 2004 Human Right Watch (HRW) report indicates that the 'attackers harmed only [the] Banyamulenge, or others sheltered in tents with them' (HRW, 2004, p. 15). Moreover, perpetrators expressed their intent in language used to distract the victims, telling them 'We are coming to rescue' whilst they destroyed almost 70% of the Banyamulenge's tents. The Banyamulenge's history has been characterised by low-pace killings taking place across South Kivu and Tanganyika province, targeting mostly cattle-herders or commercial traders (Stearns et al., 2013b). Recent violence that erupted in 2017 replicates a continuum of killing and destruction modus operandi.

Collective victimisation: argument to deny the Banyamulenge's vulnerability

In recent years, Banyamulenge youth have organised their distinct armed (self-defence) groups which have been accused of committing violence against civilians of their neighbouring communities. For instance, in July 2020 and amid largely unmediated destruction in the Hauts Plateaux of Uvira-Fizi-Itombwe, Twirwaneho-Gumino attacked Kipupu locality. In the first place, sources, including prominent figures such as members of the parliament and a 2018 Nobel Prize winner, asserted that 220 civilians

were killed. Across the world, the Kipupu massacre attracted much attention including that of the international media (Kamale, 2020). A MONUSCO (Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies pour la stabilisation en République démocratique du Congo [United NationsOrganization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo]) and UNJHRO investigative mission found later that 15 people had died whom they could not ascertain whether if they were solely civilians (UNJHRO, 2020). Kipupu's massacre shows that violent events in a polarised context need more attention when interpreting them.

From 1996 onwards, rebel groups were formed with the support of regional countries and recruited combatants from several local ethnic groups including the Banyamulenge. The rebels committed violence against civilians including local communities neighbouring the Banyamulenge. Reports of massacres indicate that thousands were killed by these rebel groups in which individual Banyamulenge soldiers have participated. The mapping report lists events and massacres that were perpetrated by 'Tutsi/Banyamulenge' and the RPA in South Kivu (UNOHCHR, 2010, pp. 133–135). One of the noticeable ones, before the public announcement of AFDL, is the Lemera massacre. The Banyamulenge and RPA-dominated combatants, and possibly the Burundian army, attacked a hospital on 6 October 1996 (Turner, 2007, p. 92). The mapping report posits that 37 people were killed at Lemera hospital and 50 people in Kidote, a nearby locality (UNOHCHR, 2010, p. 134). It is believed that attacking Lemera hospital was motivated, among other things, by looting the stock of medicine (Stearns, 2011, pp. 11–12). While these events can easily be qualified as war crimes, in Lemera or Kidote there are limited signs of an intention to harm an entire Bafuliro community.

The 1998 Makobola and Kasika massacres are part of this pattern of killings. For instance, the Makobola and Kasika massacres took place in the South Kivu region, and members of the Babembe and Banyindu communities were respectively affected. Rebels from the 1998 Congolese Rally for Democracy (RCD) and RPA were identified as perpetrators (Stearns, 2011, pp. 260–262). Massacres happened likely within retaliatory contexts due to previous incidents in these localities (Verweijen et al., 2021, p. 24). In Makobola and Kasika (to the best of my knowledge), members of the Babembe and Banyindu were not hunted down, let's say in Mboko or Mwenga centre, localities within a short distance. Throughout 1996 onwards, there have been other massacres and killings in South Kivu and in other regions. As compared to the Banyamulenge, there are no historical contestation records, mobilisations or plans to expel the Babembe and Banyindu.

Massacres and sufferings in Eastern DRC started to be collectively attributed to the Banyamulenge, viewed as natural allies of the RPA. Whilst questionable, Stearns suggests that '[t]here will be long-term repercussions of the Banyamulenge's participation in the two rebellions'. Nevertheless, the Banyamulenge's individual responsibilities in these massacres vis-à-vis their comrades from other ethnic communities, rebel politicians and that of regional armies are yet to be independently established (Verweijen et al., 2021, p. 265). However, campaigns have continued for decades to portray the Banyamulenge as the perpetrators of all massacres in DRC (Huening, 2015). Researchers have documented the widely shared ideology and beliefs among armed Mai-Mai groups in the Kivus of protecting their lands against all 'invaders' (Mwaka-Bwenge, 2003; Stearns et al., 2013b, p. 22; Verweijen & Brabant, 2017, p. 16). These narratives are

still of relevance and ideologically embedded in 'nativist' forms of identity politics.[28] It builds on colonial misrepresentation of 'native' and 'immigrants' amplified by the 1960 Simba rebellion.

The most-cited Vangu Mambweni Commission has been influenced by Anzuluni Bembe who has played a major role in mobilising to chase 'invaders' (Jackson, 2006, p. 105; Prunier, 2009, p. 67; Turner, 2007; UNOHCHR, 2010, p. 75). At the national level, Vlassenroot (2013, p. 34) states that Anzuluni Bembe has played a role of 'linking local tensions between Bembe and Banyamulenge … '. Anzuluni Bembe is a native of Fizi territory, whose ethnic community, the Babembe, has had close ties with the Simba rebels (Stearns et al., 2013a). In 1987, Anzuluni played a role in stoking tensions against the Banyamulenge in Vyura (see the next section). During the Sovereign National Conference, he occupied and exploited his key position to influence the constitution of the Vangu Mambweni Commission. He has been working closely with other political figures from Uvira, Fizi and Mwenga.

Mai-Mai politicians have garnered support in Kinshasa while stoking animosity at local levels including erasing some evidence that could indicate the Banyamulenge's plight. For instance, around 300 victims buried in a mass grave in Baraka were dug up and their remains were 'dump in Lake Tanganyika to erase all trace of the massacres' (UNOHCHR, 2010, p. 74). In Kinshasa, Banyamulenge were burned alive on tires, thrown alive into rivers and lakes or exhumed to erase evidence (UNOHCHR, 2010, p. 156). Information about the missing children is hidden.[29] There is still a question of locating the remains of the 300 trainee cadets in Kamina Military Base in 1998.[30]

The erasure of evidence and denial of the Banyamulenge's vulnerability tend to obscure how, who, and why these killings took (are taking) place. While some victims of atrocities in DRC are remembered, there is no Banyamulenge memorial site as of now. Instead, there is a tendency to amalgamate all Banyamulenge victims as if they were combatants. Survivors' stories are scary due to the killings' modus operandi. Their plight is likely misconstrued due to the politics of genocide denial syndrome.[31] Such bias explains a startling failure to understand their vulnerability and mostly interprets violence as being inter-community. The failure to rightly frame this human tragedy is linked to the powerful personal, political and business interests and/or biases of several actors including the Congolese military and MONUSCO officials (Autesserre, 2012, p. 208; Ntanyoma et al., 2022).

Mass displacements, besiegement and impoverishment

Ancient and 'modern' genocides use mobility restriction of targeted communities, in ghettos, camps or confined areas, claiming sometimes to offer 'protection' (Fein, 1997; Rosenberg, 2012, p. 18). Besides the physical attacks, above-mentioned, the Banyamulenge's mobility tends to gradually narrow across the Eastern Congo territory. Many have fled to neighbouring countries while those remaining in the Hauts Plateaux have been forced to retreat into tiny localities mostly since 2017 onwards. Attacks have almost destroyed all rural settlements, social infrastructures, cattle and crops. Recent attacks have exhibited coordinated efforts to completely wipe out the Banyamulenge in their own homeland region by impoverishing them and forcing displacement.

Records from August 2018 indicate that more than 60% of villages burnt down in the Bijombo *groupement* belonged to the Banyamulenge (see Ntanyoma, 2018, August). The remaining percentage comprises villages of Bafuliro, Banyindu and Babembe communities. The latter communities have come together to contest the Banyamulenge's single traditional entity in Bijombo because of their status of being considered as 'foreigners'. Within months, this move of completely burning down villages reached Minembwe, almost 100 km away.

Narrowing territorial boundaries and forced displacement

Zimmerer underscores that the notion of 'space' and 'race' were tied to military campaigns, occupation and genocide during the Nazi regime (Zimmerer, 2005). The destruction of humans, villages and herds is largely associated with the notion of 'purification' (Zimmerer, 2005). In DRC, the Banyamulenge's forced displacement differs from other cases as it intends to chase 'invaders' away within the racial categorisation of communities. It is largely understood in the quest of the Mai-Mai and other military forces seeking to expel them all. The narrowing of the boundaries of Banyamulenge territory is thus an integral part of the slow elimination process.

Besides the 2017 violence specifics, history shows that the Banyamulenge were forced to flee Ngandja localities (1971 and 1996), Mirimba localities (1996), and Vyura localities (1998). Mirimba and Ngandja are in Fizi territory (South Kivu) while Vyura is in Tanganyika (former Katanga). They are now considered 'foreigners' in these localities they used to live in. Some tried unsuccessfully to re-settle there again but faced reluctance from local communities and armed groups who see them as 'invaders', while this is not the case for other communities.[32]

In the 1960s, the Banyamulenge moved to Vyura seeking economic opportunities and/or grazing land.[33] Vyura is 165 km away from Moba and 180 km away from Kalemie. Starting from the1980s, the Banyamulenge were subjected to a range of discriminatory measures like in South Kivu.[34] In 1998, they were around 18,000–20,000. Matthew stated that the situation in Vyura deteriorated around May 1998, when some 400 soldiers were sent from Kalemie to Vyura. Their mission remained widely unclear until other military units came to reinforce them in August 1998.[35] During this period (May–August), Vyura's localities were surrounded by military roadblocks and checkpoints restricting only the Banyamulenge's mobility towards neighbouring cities.[36] Imposed restrictions on one single ethnic group indicate something premeditated.

Early August 1998, the Commissioner of Tanganyika District claimed publicly that he would wipe the Vyura localities off the map. On 15 August 1998, hundreds of soldiers started rounding up local Banyamulenge, leading to approximately 2,000 civilians being arrested. Military soldiers started to shoot at them, and an unknown number of people were killed (UNOHCHR, 2010, p. 160). Matthew recalls how seven women were thrown in a pit and shot immediately to trigger attacks on civilians. As a local representative, he unsuccessfully tried to talk with military commanders who instead chose to jail him with others. Meanwhile, the rest of the local population in Vyura started to flee into bushes with no hope of seeing those who were taken hostage by the military.

Matthew recalls that hostages were split into two groups, male and female. If men and boys were to be targeted first, one can draw the conclusion that the perpetrators intended

to eliminate any threat that might oppose their plan to inflict trauma on the women and girls. Whilst community leaders suffered mostly, hostages experienced inhumane treatment; some were handcuffed while receiving machete injuries. They escaped from prisons on their third day because of an 'intervention' led by the Banyamulenge youth who bravely decided to take risks. Hundreds of men with traditional weaponry (crossbows) attacked the churches and schools where prisoners were taken hostage. They managed to liberate some, though hundreds died when trying to escape from the prison (UNOHCHR, 2010, p. 160).

The Banyamulenge in Vyura fled entirely into the bushes as the national army 'set fire to every house they passed on, pillaged property and stole Tutsi cattle' (UNOHCHR, 2010, p. 160). Afraid of how attacks would continue, they were later forced to leave Vyura in the direction of South Kivu despite the presence of APR (Armée Patriotique Rwandaise [Rwanda Patriotic Army])/RCD rebels that had arrived in Vyura to rescue them. Had it not been for the efforts of the local population in defending themselves, there are signs across Katanga province that they would have experienced the worst: elimination (Roht-Arriaza, 1990; Straus, 2001). As a matter of fact, hundreds of Banyamulenge civilians and unarmed soldiers were selectively killed in Kalemie and Moba, the closest cities to Vyura. Again, men and boys were selectively killed before women and girls. Ntanyoma indicates that killings of Banyamulenge civilians, unarmed military soldiers and soldiers in their military units were highly organised and coordinated (Ntanyoma, 2019, pp. 134–137).

The perpetrators of Vyura, Kalemie and Moba were from the same military units operating under the command of Army General Yermos Lukole (alias Madowadowa).[37] The military general was a former Mai-Mai, who along with Laurent Desiré Kabila served in the 1960s Simba rebellion. In 1998, former Simba rebel commanders formed the inner circle of Laurent-Desiré Kabila, and these included the Military Intelligence Chief (DEMIAP), General Sikatenda Shabani (Ngolet, 2011, p. 13). The latter played a determinant role in killing the Banyamulenge and Tutsi in 1998. Following the mass displacement in Vyura, no one has tried to re-settle in this region again. There are only a few Banyamulenge (and their cattle) within the neighbourhood of Kalemie city, and they have been facing cruel attacks from Mai-Mai groups. Nonetheless, hundreds of Bafuliro and Banyindu families have been easily settling in Tanganyika province with limited hindrances.

Besiegement, impoverishment and persecution

Late 2018 and early 2019 saw the erection of Minembwe as a rural municipality hugely contested. The contestation clearly meant that a rural municipality cannot be erected in an area where the Banyamulenge constitute the majority (Ntanyoma & Hintjens, 2022). Reasons to contest Minembwe municipality include the 1999 experience when the RCD decided to create a distinct territory called 'Territoire de Minembwe' (Verweijen & Vlassenroot, 2015, pp. 1–3). Contrary to Minembwe, other entities created by rebel groups, like Butembo City, were later approved by President Joseph Kabila (Republica, 2021). The rejection of Minembwe was largely linked to how the Banyamulenge are perceived as not being entitled to manage local entities. Such social status broadly explains the contestation of Bijombo *groupement* (Muchukiwa, 2006, p. 112). In 2017, a move to contest

the Banyamulenge's entitlement to lead Bijombo contributed to local armed and self-defence groups' mobilisation, with groups claiming to be protecting their communities.

Early May 2019, Kawaza Nyakwana was killed by Gumino, a Banyamulenge-affiliated armed group (Muchukiwa & Kasagwe, 2019). Following Kawaza's death, attacks against the Banyamulenge were justified as self-defence mechanisms to revenge him. There was already a huge mobilisation of armed combatants to contest Minembwe rural municipality and Kawaza's death triggered the Mai-Mai's widespread attacks in different areas inhabited by the Banyamulenge. Meanwhile, Banyamulenge-affiliated combatants attacked their neighbouring communities leading to what can be narrowly seen as tit-for-tat violence. First, there has been evidence that the Congolese national army stood by or at least backed local militias attacking the Banyamulenge. Second, Mai-Mai combatants were supported by foreign militias, namely the Burundian Red-Tabara. Third, while all armed groups commit violence, there is net distinction in terms of what they intend to achieve. Contrary to Mai-Mai groups, the Banyamulenge may broadly commit violence without intending to expel other communities outside of DRC.[38]

Mai-Mai groups comprise combatants from the four largest communities in this region, sharing common beliefs of being native. Between May and September 2019, almost all Banyamulenge villages were burned down. Many were forced to live in tiny localities such as Minembwe under constant attack. Between mid-May 2019 and September 2020, there were more than 50 Mai-Mai-coordinated attacks to displace the Banyamulenge in Minembwe.[39] These coordinated attacks were launched from different directions onto Minembwe (north, east, south-east, south-west, and westward). Illustratively, on 8–9 September 2020, Minembwe was attacked for the 40th time from four directions.[40] Several attacks took more than five successive days and reached within two miles of Minembwe's airstrip. Outnumbered by local armed groups and foreign groups, the Banyamulenge armed (self-defence) groups tried to attack (counterattack) villages of neighbouring communities. Nonetheless, the Mai-Mai's attacks have left Minembwe besieged and mostly starved as access to farming fields within a short distance has practically been impossible.

Those who have tried to access their farming fields have been attacked, killed and some even decapitated. For instance, on 18 April 2020, two women and a man were decapitated in Kivumu village, within a short distance of where thousands of Banyamulenge were confined. The victims were escorted by FARDC's soldiers who did not intervene to protect civilians. Attacks were coupled with public declarations of militias and armed group leaders who vowed to expel 'foreigners'.[41] The coordination and intensity of the attacks revealed that they intended to get rid of the Banyamulenge in South Kivu. FARDC's stance was very detrimental. In many cases, military officers have provided ammunitions and covered Mai-Mai combatants when they are destroying villages and/or cattle. Between May and September 2019, Minembwe and Itombwe had, respectively, 12 and 15 military deployments. FARDC units never intervened when much of the destruction of villages took place.

The destruction systematically targeted cattle raiding, looting and theft. More than 450,000 cows were looted or died to impose harsh conditions. Similar destruction of cattle happened once back in the 1960s when many cows died due to harsh conditions when owners fled to the shores of Lake Tanganyika or the Ruzizi plain. Cattle raiding

continued up to the 1980s as Simba rebels were still active in this region. The practice of impoverishing the Banyamulenge intensified once again during the First and Second Congo Wars. Verweijen and Brabant have remarked that between 1996 and 1998, around 7,000 cows were looted by the Mai-Mai groups (Verweijen & Brabant, 2017, p. 11).

Cattle raiding is always coupled with killing herders. It mobilises combatants and increases armed groups' military capabilities. Contrary to the case of African tribal massacres in Darfur (Reeves, 2005), as an economic asset, source of income and cultural pride, looting impoverishes and traumatises owners. The 2017 violent events had entirely affected almost all Banyamulenge in the Hauts Plateaux who have become impoverished. Though other communities, like the Banyindu and Bafuliro, also have their own cattle, looting has particularly singled out those of the Banyamulenge (Reeves, 2005, p. 9). Even accusations of cattle trampling agricultural farms are unlikely directed at Banyindu and Bafuliro.[42] Recent violence against the Banyamulenge has again resorted to impoverishment strategies, targeting mostly cattle. Though yet undocumented, forced displacement, widespread impoverishment, destruction of villages and starvation are extremely traumatising. There are reports of those who have become hopeless and no longer see the sense of living in DRC.[43]

Thousands of children suffered from malnutrition while elders were reported to be experiencing hardships and dying possibly due to these imposed conditions. A community's impoverishment undermines its future as students are forced to drop out of schools and universities. Their parents are no longer able to provide the necessary financial support for their schooling. This long-term experience and consequences remind us how slow genocide 'perpetuates grave socio-economic disparities, [and] territorial dispossession' (Wakeham, 2022, p. 13).

Conclusion

Genocide prevention requires us to historically and meaningfully analyse the patterns of violent events (Rosenberg & Silina, 2013). Colonial misrepresentations and the aftermath of the 1960s violence set wheels in motion for a strongly grounded ideology to get rid of the Banyamulenge 'invaders' (Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2002, p. 243). The outbreak of the 1990s violence and the regionalisation of warfare that followed the genocide in Rwanda have worsened their security situation leading to countless massacres. Meanwhile, the Banyamulenge youth have engaged in these rebellions, waged sometimes to protect members of this community. Rebel combatants from diverse ethnic groups including the Banyamulenge have committed violence and massacres against civilians. While the Banyamulenge are collectively portrayed as the main perpetrators, individuals' and groups' responsibilities have not yet been established.

Understanding this complex violent setting requires disentangling widespread violence from violence that targets ethnic groups portrayed as 'foreigners'. This article connects key events in which the Banyamulenge were specifically targeted across space and time. Borrowing from Rosenberg and Silina, it uses case study methodology to fill the gap around the Banyamulenge whose decades of experience have been treated in a disconnected fashion (Rosenberg & Silina, 2013, p. 109). This article argues that the Banyamulenge are mostly targeted because they are viewed as 'invaders'. Killing members of this

community has been preceded by mobilisation of public officials such as the former South Kivu Governor Lwabanji Lwabishi, Abdloulaye Yerodia Ndombasi, Catholic prelates, the Zairean Army Chief of Staff … all calling for their elimination.[44]

Across time and space, killings and eliminations resorted to a similar modus operandi. Banyamulenge civilians and the unarmed military rank-and-file and officers were systematically rounded up and killed. The outbreak of rebellions served to justify the killings while there are indications that killings were planned in advance. Perpetrators targeted men and boys first.[45] Women and girls were killed after watching traumatic scenes including (un)documented rape.[46] In some cases, women and girls were openly told they would be allotted among their killers. Rape and trauma inflicted on women and girls brings shame and disgrace, making them live with wounds for a long time; it destroys social vitality, mostly when they keep experiencing similar recurring events (Wing & Merchan, 1993, p. 23; Card, 2003, p. 76). Patterns of forced displacements and cattle-looting to impoverish an entire ethnic group have been part of indirect methods to eliminate the Banyamulenge. Throughout this experience, there have been hate campaigns conducted to collectively demonise and dehumanise members of this community (Turner, 2007, p. 92; see also Ntanyoma, 2021). Influential figures have likened the Banyamulenge to snakes or cockroaches (Turner, 2007, p. 92). There have been manoeuvres to hide and erase the evidence of killings.

Recent experience shows that the Banyamulenge community in their Hauts Plateaux homeland are besieged and starved in tiny areas. They have been dramatically impoverished and lost their main source of income and cultural pride. Across time and space, the Banyamulenge are targeted because of ideological beliefs that they are not Congolese. Such ideology has been embraced by local militias and publicly been endorsed by some prominent members of the Congolese elite. Armed combatants and political figures have publicly expressed their intention to see the Banyamulenge wiped out of DRC. The Congolese elite class has consistently claimed that the Banyamulenge are not Congolese, a stance that supports the Mai-Mai's willingness to expel invaders. Congolese security services have played a major role in these attacks and killings.

To find excuses and justifications for the killings, the Banyamulenge are portrayed as the source of all messes in DRC. Regardless of how their grievances served instrumentally for countries willing to wage war in DRC, the Banyamulenge can be accused of anything (KST, 2019, January). Whilst other Congolese from hundreds of its tribes have participated in rebellions and insurgencies, other Congolese actors are viewed as a 'smokescreen and puppet'. Simultaneously, the Banyamulenge are now facing the consequences of both the colonial legacy and their decisions to (in)voluntarily join rebellions after Congo's independence up to 1996.

In early 1998, some Banyamulenge elite and military officers expressed reluctance vis-à-vis the RPA's influence (Verweijen et al., 2021, p. 22; Verweijen & Vlassenroot, 2015, p. 10). It became very obvious during RCD campaigns and during CNDP (Congrès National pour la Défense du Peuple) and Mouvement du 23 Mars (M23) (2012–2013) (Vogel & Stearns, 2018, p. 3). The decision to distance themselves vis-à-vis the RPA's influence or (in)voluntarily join the Rwandan army's campaigns in DRC have had their own costs including in how recently Burundian rebels supported by Rwanda allied with local militias in South Kivu to attack the Banyamulenge (Ntanyoma &

Hintjens, 2022, pp. 391–392). Countering historical persecution and constant Mai-Mai attacks has largely pushed Banyamulenge youth to join rebel insurgencies or organise armed (self-defence) groups resulting in them being accused of committing atrocities (Verweijen & Brabant, 2017, p. 18). Even though individual Banyamulenge's responsibilities still need to be determined, there are reasons to believe that civilians have been targeted by a slow genocide intending to expel 'invaders'.

The 'native' versus 'immigrants' dichotomy unfolded into a recent and unprecedented mass murder that targeted the Tutsi in Rwanda (Mamdani, 2020). The Rwanda and Bosnia experiences have shown that genocide can occur when experts are trying 'to distance from it',[47] or are misinterpreting the genocidal process in terms of intercommunal violence (Zarni & Cowley, 2014; UNJHRO, 2020). The Banyamulenge experience reflects other similar cases where entire communities are targeted as 'non-native'. Their vulnerability echoes what is happening to the Congolese Tutsi in North Kivu and the Hema in Ituri. Since the three cases are experiencing genocidal killings, I argue that the international community should pay attention to prevent further atrocities.

Notes

1. This article differentiates combatants and their ideology to get rid of those they see as 'invaders' from communities they mostly recruit from. See the criminalisation debate in: Moses (2021, p. 11); and the genocide ideology debate in: Jackson (2006); Verweijen and Vlassenroot (2015); Murray (2014).
2. Ntanyoma and Hintjens (2022). This article uses 'expressive violence' to posit that violence complexity in Eastern DRC has led to criminalisation that obscures the specifics of the Banyamulenge targeted because they are viewed as 'invaders' (see details on p. 393).
3. UNOHCHR (2010, pp. 74–75, 157, 163). The report indicates killings of the Banyamulenge in localities and cities such as Mboko/Baraka, Kasai Occidental and Kinshasa.
4. This article is a revised version of a Working Paper (No 682) titled 'Under the shadow of violence: Slow genocide of the Banyamulenge in Eastern DRC' that was previously published by the Institute of Social Studies/Erasmus University Rotterdam, May 2021. It is accessible on the following link: https://pure.eur.nl/ws/portalfiles/portal/46296094/wp682.pdf.
5. See some details in the following reports and articles: Musamba et al. (2022); Verweijen et al. (2021); Ntanyoma and Hintjens (2022, pp. 391–2).
6. Bashi (2019); KST, 'Atrocities, Populations Under Siege (2019).'
7. Nteziryayo Innocent (2023). These data may not be entirely accurate for several reasons, including how they were collected; however, the report gives a broad picture of the destruction.
8. The UNJHRO's report covers the period of February 2019 to June 2020.
9. Stearns (2011); Jackson, Of 'Doubtful Nationality' (2007).
10. Loons (1933); Weis (1959); Hiernaux (1965).
11. Weis (1959).
12. See Muchukiwa (2006); Muzuri, 'L'évolution des Conflits Ethniques' (1983). Mahina Mukogabwe is one of the traditional chiefs of the Bafuliro community whose customary chieftaincy was reinforced by merging with other political entities, including that of Kayira (Banyamulenge).
13. Verweijen, 'From Autochthony to Violence' (2015); Yogolelo (1990).
14. Edmond (online interview), 5 November 2020. Edmond is a grandson of Byambu Yeremiya, the Banyamulenge traditional chief who was killed in June 1964.
15. Jean-Baptiste (interview), 5 January 2017, Kinshasa; Vincent (online interview), 5 January 2018; Eliyah (interview), 10 October 2018, Kinshasa; Butoyi (online interview), 1 April 2021. Butoyi is researching the post-independence violence against the Banyamulenge.
16. Butoyi (online interview), 1 April 2021.

17. Muzuri, L'évolution des Conflits Ethniques, 102.
18. Turner (2007, p. 91). Though AFDL was publicly announced on 25 October 1996, evidence shows its groundwork started a bit earlier.
19. This article does not entirely endorse the mapping report, but the report illustrates the modus operandi and targeted violence against the Banyamulenge.
20. Nyamahirwe (interview testimony), 21 December 2018, Bukavu.
21. Lucie Nyamwiza (testimony), 6 October 2020. The story was published in Nyamwiza (2020).
22. Nyamahirwe (testimony), 21 December 2018, Bukavu.
23. Jones (2002) provides insights that genocide victims were harmed based on their gender in Rwanda, which is largely similar to this case.
24. WGEID, 'Communications Transmitted, Cases Examined, Observations Made, and other Activities conducted by the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (WGEID)', 119th session (16–20 September 2019). *Human Rights Council.* Geneva, 2 December 2019, https://undocs.org/A/HRC/WGEID/119/1.
25. Semahoro (online interview), 19 December 2018.
26. Jackson (testimony), 22 February 2018, Goma/North Kivu.
27. Samson (interview), 11 January 2017, Kinshasa.
28. Imbole (2018). In his speech, Catholic Bishop Bodika Timothé called the Banyamulenge dangerous 'invaders with dubious morphology'. Similarly, the Congolese former Prime Minister Adolphe Muzito called for an investigation to determine who these cattle vendors were (see: https://www.radiookapi.net/2018/02/13/actualite/societe/affaire-des-zebus-adolphe-muzito-appelledes-mesures-dapaisement-pour).
29. Conversations and interviews with people who have been involved in the search for the missing children: Joseph (online interview), 10 October 2018; Mulumba who is a witness of the event (different online interviews including the deep one held on 3 November 2018); Martin (online interview), 5 January 2018; Joseph (online interview), 3 January 2018.
30. Victor, a survivor of the Kamina killing (interview), 23 February 2019, Goma.
31. Lippman, *Darfur: The Politics of Genocide*, 210 (2007).
32. Information gathered during informal discussions with local communities in Minembwe, 22 March 2019.
33. Mutambo-Jondwe (1997), *Les Banyamulenge: Qui Sont-Ils?*
34. Muganuzi (online interview), 10 November 2020.
35. Matthew (online interview), 9 November 2020. Matthew was a former primary school headmaster and was appointed a territorial administrator of the Vyura since 1997. He was 45 years old in 1997. His accounts and that of Muganuzi (online interview), 10 November 2020, serve to summarise the climate in Vyura in 1998.
36. Matthew (online interview), 9 November 2020.
37. Jean Paul (online interview), 27 October 2018. Jean Paul is one of two survivor soldiers of the Kalemie killing. He managed to escape by running away the night they were being rounded up and walked towards Vyura.
38. For details of the socio-security context that prevailed in 2017, see Verweijen et al. (2021); Ntanyoma and Hintjens (2022).
39. The discussion stresses Minembwe because its villages were constantly attacked while sheltering thousands of Banyamulenge who had fled their localities.
40. Information gathered regularly as I kept monitoring the crisis in Minembwe.
41. For instance, one of the key influential armed group's commanders in Fizi and Uvira territories and involved in attacking the Banyamulenge consistently repeats that the latter community must leave the Congo because they are recent refugees. See self-proclaimed General William Amuri Yakutumba's 2020 declaration: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aicag-ZKqFE; self-proclaimed Generals John Kasimbila Makanaki and Réné Itongwa: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WQhSt8Yccv8&t=127s; and self-proclaimed Kibukila Tresor wa Seba Mtetezi: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CShiibl-Tww.
42. ADEPAE, Arche-d'Alliance, and RIO, 'Au-Delà Des Groupes Armes : Conflits Locaux et Connexions Sous-Régionales [L'exemple de Fizi et Uvira (Sud-Kivu, RDC)]', *Life and*

Peace Institute. Uppsala, Sweden, 2011, https://assets.ctfassets.net/jzxyrkiixcim/6Eaz1Te5UjWdGVvoGm2jLQ/bae90570fcb8c56187821ce0e7afbe86/LPI_2011_Au-dela_des_groupes_armes__Uvira__Fizi.pdf; Verweijen and Brabant (2017).

43. There have been reports of people who have been psychologically traumatised and been sick for months during this recent wave of violence.
44. On 11 October 1996, General Eluki Monga Aundu, the Army Chief of Staff, called on the youth to join the army in hunting down the Banyamulenge; UNOHCHR (2010, p. 76); Turner (2007); Stearns (2011, p. 94).
45. United Nations General Assembly, Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to General Assembly resolution 53/35: The fall of Srebrenica (A/54/549 of 15 November 1999), 79.
46. I captured cases of rape in victims' testimonies. I understood it was very sensitive to disclose and would require appropriate settings and approaches and methodologies to research it. However, there is emerging evidence of ethnically motivated rape (see the following links: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Gm91l_bbC8; and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E5LhYJS4N_Q).
47. Cushman (2003), 'Is Genocide Preventable?', 538.

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