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Extractive Orders: a political geography of public authority in Ituri, DR Congo

Peer Schouten

**(Danish Institute for International Studies
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The Editor, Justice and Security Research Programme, International Development Department, LSE, Houghton Street, London WC2A 2AE

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Extractive orders: a political geography of public authority in Ituri, Democratic Republic of Congo

Introduction

Public authority is an essentially contested concept in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Not only is the ‘state of the state’ subject to profound disagreement in academic debates, but public authority on the ground is also the focal point of heated contestation. While some argue that the DRC does not exist as a state from the perspective of normative understandings of statehood (Herbst & Mills 2013), others argue that the state as an idea tenaciously persists as a frame of reference for how the Congolese attribute responsibility in questions of public authority (Englebert 2002). Yet others contest frames of state failure by pointing out that public authority coalesces in well-oiled structures of predatory accumulation (Kuditshini 2008; Olsson & Fors 2004; Rackley 2006).

This paper wants to put the debate about public authority into perspective by arguing that public authority is not an ‘either’- ‘or’ question. Rather, manifestations of public authority differ from one site to another, unfolding in overlapping and shifting spatial patterns along geographies of economic resources and infrastructures of circulation; what, following Gabrielle Hecht (2011), I call *entangled geographies of public authority*. The paper explores how these geographies are composed of practices associated with statehood that are deployed for, and essentially infused with, what are best understood as private logics of accumulation in the DRC. Rather than an exhaustive study of how public authority is negotiated in everyday encounters, it unpacks the entangled geography of public authority in Ituri by focusing on the organization and distribution of security and justice practices in the region along pathways carved out by gold extraction and circulation.

Exploring public authority in Ituri

Ituri is one of five districts in Province Orientale, has a surface area of nearly 66,000 km² and an estimated population of over 4 million. Ituri is composed of five administrative entities called territories (Aru, Mahagi, Djugu, Irumu and Mambasa) and forty five collectives. Public authority in Ituri, when approached through a Weberian lens, is easily swept aside as a euphemism for a fragmented patchwork of formal and informal entities that exercise different forms of political ordering. Yet this essential complexity and variability does not mean that patterns of authority cannot be distinguished. Given the complexity and heterogeneity of the social fabric in Ituri, questions of public authority have been approached through many different lenses. Firstly, the fractured exercise of public authority (as elsewhere in Congo) is often invoked as an example of the failed state literature (Koddenbrock 2013; cf. Hoffmann & Vlassenroot 2014). This perspective hinges on the disjuncture that occurs if the way in which public authority is exercised does not map onto the idea of the state, i.e. what the state should look like. Secondly, questions of customary power and land issues form a formidable lens to map the exercise of public authority in Ituri. Access to land arguably forms the point of contestation most vital to livelihoods, and exploring the many formal and informal authorities that aim to adjudicate competing land claims requires an exploration of the entangled questions of property and citizenship rights that are implicated in access to land (Lund & Boone 2013). Exhaustive studies exist that map conflicts around land in the district (Van Puijenbroek & Ansoms 2011; Vircoulon & Liégois 2012), and land issues are ongoing, in light of the internal displacements due to conflict and demographic pressures in the

adjacent province of North Kivu. Thirdly, Ituri is often taken up as a case to critically study the effect of international interventions on local public authority (Hellmüller 2014; Veit 2008). From this perspective, public authority is studied as the complex interface where matters of identity, access to resources and security, and indeed the very notion of legitimate politics are reconstituted through competing agendas and interests at different scales. Finally, ethnic boundaries have formed another lens to question the intricacies of public authority in Ituri. After the war in Ituri (1999-2003), an inter-communal limbo between war and peace ensued. Simmering embers of tensions persist, and conflicts over access to land, wealth and public services are framed along lines of Hema, Lendu and Nande affiliation, resulting in a concern with shifting discourses of ethnic belonging and their effects on the politics of access to justice and security in Ituri (Fahey 2013; Pottier 2010).

In order to shed light on the entangled geographies of public authority in Ituri, this paper focuses on a third axis of analysis, given the predominance of gold mining in the political economy of the district. Ituri lies in the pathway of an Archean greenstone belt and is estimated to hold rich gold deposits, attracting, now that the conflict has largely subsided, numerous international industrial exploration companies. Additionally, while estimates vary wildly, over 100,000 *Ituriens* are considered to be directly involved in artisanal gold mining. Indirectly, an estimated 500,000 people are either employed in, or sustained by, this informal extractive economy (IKV Pax Christi 2012). Artisanal mining vies with subsistence agriculture and husbandry to form the main livelihood in the district. While the literature on resource governance in Ituri is well-developed (e.g. IKV Pax Christi 2012; Matthysen et al 2012; Spittaels et al 2010), it fails to connect to larger questions of public authority. The question that this paper aims to explore is whether and how this political economic specificity impacts on the organization of security and justice as instances of public authority. How are security and justice organized, expressed and contested in a district whose borders largely correspond to those of mining concessions? How is public authority articulated in a space whose importance and impetus to be ordered derives from its extractive economic value? The paper highlights the fact that the division between public and private is not static; what seems to matter most in Ituri is the ongoing struggle to redefine the boundary between public and private, formal and informal, along the topography of gold mining, with repercussions for who has access to security and justice (cf. Hoffmann & Kirk 2013: 13), and who, by contrast, can be subject to practices of *insecurity* and *injustice*.

Public authority and political geography

What does it mean to approach these questions through a geographical lens and what analytical advantages does that lend to our understanding of public authority in Ituri? In order to approach these questions, a brief recap of the debate on public authority and access to security and justice is required. Debates on public authority (which Lund equates with 'stateness', 2006: 686) should be seen as an attempt reach a more rigorous empirically grounded understanding of 'governance-without-government' (Menkhaus 2007) in contexts where this is not a straightforward projection by state institutions. It challenges us to decouple our understanding of significant governance from the specter of the state, or redefine the latter in light of the *de facto* organization of authority. The preoccupation with public authority in Africa derives from the seeming absence of any singular overarching public authority at the level of political territories. The lens of public authority leads one into varied, shifting and often contradictory articulations of authority, public interest, and statehood (Comaroff & Comaroff 2006; Lund 2006). In mainstream political theory, power has an inherently monolithic vocation; the exercise of public authority aims at subsuming

other complexities to state-centric binaries of belonging and exclusion. By contrast, a consensus in the public authority literature is that, while invoking associations to the state, public authority can be exercised by a myriad of actors, both within and beyond the state, that are engaged in the provision of public goods (Hoffmann & Kirk 2013: 10; Hoffmann & Vlassenroot 2014; cf. Raeymaekers, Menkhaus & Vlassenroot 2008).

The provision of security figures prominently as a specific case of public authority in the literature, precisely because it is often considered the exclusive hallmark of the state in dominant policy and academic approaches to political order. Patterns of security governance and justice provision reveal important aspects of the broader organization of public authority in a given territory. To paraphrase a central tenet of the public authority literature, the distribution of security and justice reflects the unique patterns of control and authority over assets found in each society, patterns that hardly ever reflect the formal hierarchies of state institutions (Hoffmann & Kirk 2013: 27). Myriad are the studies that challenge us to rebuild our understanding of political order and public authority from grounded analyses of shifting and heterogeneous assemblages of actors that are in practice engaged in the provision of security and justice (cf. Abrahamsen & Williams 2011; Comaroff & Comaroff 2006; Meagher 2012).

DRCongo is a case in point. The country's security sector is composed of the Armed Forces (*Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo*, or FARDC) and the Police (*Police Nationale Congolaise*, or PNC), but these executive branches of the Congolese state have long been complemented by dozens of rebel movements, militia¹, and private security companies. Rather than discrete hierarchies existing in parallel, however, lines of command and cooperation are in practice entangled in what can be called, following Abrahamsen and Williams (2011), competing and overlapping 'security assemblages'. For decades, the army and police have been so badly paid, and pay reaches individual agents so sparsely, that everyday practices of extortion and corruption have become a standard feature of the Congolese security sector (Baaz & Olsson 2011). This does not mean that these public forces do not adjudicate incidents but that performing their tasks comes at unofficial and negotiated, though often rather standardized, prices. Following integration efforts, pursued only partially for political reasons, different units of the FARDC obey individual commanders who are following their own private agendas, and who in turn sometimes cooperate and sometimes clash with rebel movements (Baaz & Verweijen 2013). While rebel movements are often framed as the largest threat to public authority in Congo, this antagonism is a political statement rather than a practical reality. Popular resistance movements in Congo such as the *Mayi-Mayi* (or Mai-Mai) have emerged, and continue to thrive, on political claims from local communities that vindicate forms of justice not attainable by other means. The Mayi-Mayi Simba group in the southwest of Ituri, for instance, was started by a local park guard-turned-poacher named Morgan, and the movement contests the borders of a UNESCO-recognized nature reserve that limits popular access to land. Although local communities distance themselves from the group's methods, their agenda finds a widespread and deep resonance in discontent with the park among local communities, who would prefer to circumscribe the park's limits to allow artisanal mining. Moreover, rebel movements mimic governance strategies associated with the state in their claims to public authority. They tax economic activity, control border posts, and provide mechanisms of justice within the zones they purport to control—including the everyday extortion and corruption practices associated with the Congolese '*forces de l'ordre*' (Hoffmann & Vlassenroot 2014; Mampilly 2011). Finally,

¹ See [Christopher Vogel's](#) work

private security companies are a widespread phenomenon in Congo. While the term ‘private’ positions them explicitly in opposition to ‘public’ authority, they are only able to provide ‘protection’ because they are often owned by high-profile political figures. Additionally, private security companies are thoroughly entangled with the Congolese Police in practice, with armed police agents working under the command of private security units, who are further embedded in the hierarchies of their clients (Schouten 2014). Thus, to speak of the exercise of public authority in the provision of security in DRC is to speak of a patchwork of sometimes overlapping, sometimes competing, security assemblages.

The point of departure for this paper is a political geography approach, which holds that the exercise of public authority in Ituri can be analyzed as being distributed in the form of ‘entangled geographies’ (Hecht 2011). Despite the de-territorialized veil in which discussions over public authority as usually shrouded, it is possible to discern specific spatial patterns in the distribution of different articulations of security and justice in Ituri—what we can call a political geography of public authority. Adopting a political geography approach to political authority does not mean buying into the ‘territorial trap’ (Agnew 1994) that reduces governance patterns to static spatial containers. Rather, contemporary political geography challenges us to take the production of secure spaces, economic corridors, global connections and scales as political acts; carving out stable, spatially articulated, patterns of governance irrevocably entails the exercise of political authority. For instance, it is a well-reported fact that the ‘river of gold’ (Fahey 2008) i.e. the geography of gold extraction and trade in Ituri, is articulated in corridors that follow specific spatial patterns, concentrating in, and connecting to, certain places rather than others (cf. Spittaels et al 2010). The argument this paper aims to advance is that a political geography of security and justice coalesces around the geographies carved out by different modes of resource extraction, shaping the overall fabric of public authority in Ituri in important ways. More specifically, modes of security governance and the exercise of public authority entangle with specific, spatially confined, modes of extraction that correlate with the constructed distinction between the formal and informal, state-endorsed and illicit (cf. Verweijen & Van Meeteren 2014: 4). These patterns, rather than being static, shift in accordance with evolutions in the mining sector, such as the productivity of different artisanal mining sites, the development of industrial mining projects and infrastructures, and competition between gold traders.

Order in the mines of Kilo-Moto

The Congolese Mining Law (2002) distinguishes between three modes of extraction: industrial, semi-industrial and artisanal, based on the extent to which technologies mediate the extraction process. The Mining Law establishes an apparatus of regulation that comprises different legal regimes and entitlements for actors associated to each mode of extraction. This legal apparatus forms the basis for an institutional superstructure in mining zones. It is composed of state-endorsed public authority in mining zones. In Ituri, this role has historically been fulfilled by what is now called *la Société d’Or de Kilo-Moto* (SOKIMO), that, as concession holder, mediates between the organization of gold extraction and central state authority. In order to understand contemporary questions of public authority in Ituri’s gold sector, it is necessary to understand its history.

Public authority in colonial Ituri

The first Belgian state agents to arrive in Ituri were King Léopold's *Force Publique*, allegedly there to suppress the Arab slave trade (Fahey 2011: 47). Even if security agents preceded other forms of public authority in the colonization of Ituri, the discovery of gold in the Ituri River near Kilo, a decade later, gave the impetus to assert control over the area and feed forced labor into a rudimentary form of labor-intensive alluvial mining.² In general, the Belgians had great difficulty in stabilizing the labor force for the gold mines and were faced with revolts and desertions.

In order to increase profitability and political stability, the colonial administration decided in 1919 to create a company to run extraction from the gold belts of Kilo and Moto (Fahey 2011: 53). In order to do so, the company aimed at replacing dispersed and rudimentary alluvial mining with underground reef mining. This first meant a replacement of labor-intensive artisanal extraction with extraction based on industrialization, which required the rolling out of a large technical system comprising advanced transport and energy infrastructures. Second, this infrastructure-intense mode of governing extraction also required forms of control and violence that deeply impinged on the local social fabric.³ This company was named the *Société des Mines d'Or de Kilo-Moto* (SOKIMO) in 1926, and formed a 'state within a state' in the province Kibali-Ituri, comprising concessions 38, 39 and 40 (roughly corresponding to today's districts Haut Uele, Aru and Ituri respectively). Almost the entire territorial surface of these districts became zones of exclusion, within which the central colonial administration found their authority relatively truncated.⁴ SOKIMO constituted a state within a state because it was relatively autonomous from the colonial administration on contriving a disciplinary apparatus which, from roughly the 1930s onward, strictly regulated every aspect of life of inhabitants that was relevant to the needs of the extractive project.⁵ Within its zones of exclusion, SOKIMO not only provided transport and power infrastructure and housing, but also influenced the location and policies of health centers and education provided by the Catholic Church. Even today, *Ituriens* invest industrial mining projects—rather than the government—with high expectations in the provision of public goods such as health, employment, infrastructure and education.

The mining company shaped security governance in important ways. It translated its monopoly over gold extraction into an exclusive spatial claim, enforced by a security apparatus it largely controlled. The colonial monopoly over violence was officially vested exclusively in the *Force Publique*. Meanwhile, SOKIMO—as with mining companies in Katanga (see Hönke 2013)—had charge of detachments of colonial security forces, a number of its own administrative offices, and its own, private, security forces. The zones of exclusion

² In the process, the Belgians struggled to establish control over the local Hema and Lendu populations by imposing tribal hierarchies and new administrative structures, which led to the earliest recorded violence between Hema and Lendu populations (Vlassenroot & Reaymaekers 2004: 390).

³ This reflects the insight that large technical systems such as industrialized gold mining cannot function without governance arrangements that regulate social and political issues on the same scale as the extension of the extractive infrastructure, begetting specific articulations of public authority (Schouten 2014).

⁴ This was largely due to the fact that in terms of infrastructure the mines of Kilo Moto formed part of the hinterland of Mombasa, linked to the East African British infrastructure grid rather than to the Belgian export grid that relayed mineral exports through Léopoldville (contemporary Kinshasa) and Matadi. Transport costs to Léopoldville from this remote corner, even when heavily subsidized, were too high to make its relay financially attractive (Bakonzi 1982).

⁵ This relative autonomy in terms of the exercise of public authority was allowed by the colonial administration because SOKIMO alone supplied nearly 10% of the colonial budget at a certain moment, and supplied the cover for the Congolese and Belgian Francs (Bakonzi 1982: 266; Fahey 2011: 53).

were demarcated by checkpoints on main roads, fences and other material infrastructures intended to bar entry to anyone who did not hold an *ordre de mission* relevant for purposes related to extraction. A large, low cost workforce was necessary to make gold mining attractive at prevailing gold prices. This meant that SOKIMO—and the colonial administration before it—took a strong interest from the outset in controlling labor and protecting gold extraction. The transition from forced labor to industrialized mining created an interest in political stability and regulation of the populations that entailed a shift from military rationality to a rationality closer to policing. To provide stability for the extractive process, the Belgians drastically rearranged Hema and Lendu settlement patterns and pre-existing hierarchies in Ituri according to Hema-dominance. This led to tensions between them and among the Lendu (Bakonzi 1982: 175-176) and contributed to the formation of ethnic tensions that have persisted long after political independence. In connivance with colonial authorities, surrounding territories were earmarked and organized to supply livestock and other foodstuffs to the gold mines at fixed prices, in order to keep extraction costs from labor artificially and forcedly low (Wolfe 1966). Due to SOKIMO's historical local dominance as a 'state within a state', whereas civil administration in other parts of the country developed throughout colonial rule, it remained relatively underdeveloped in Ituri. Underscoring how gold extraction shaped public authority, Dan Fahey notes how in Ituri the colonial administration 'only intervened in social issues as they related to its ability to maximize gold production' (2011: 55).⁶

Dispersion of order in Mobutu's gold mine

After decolonization, SOKIMO became a nationalized entity renamed OKIMO that kept this colonial style of rule. However, for a number of interlocking reasons both external and internal to Zairian dynamics of public authority, the order premised on industrial exploitation would falter and grind to a halt. One reason was that political independence meant the repressive and authoritarian organization of public authority, on which low-cost labor to feed into industrial gold mining rested, was not sustainable (cf. Depelchin 1992; Wolfe 1966). Belgian technical staff left and were replaced by Congolese cadres with little experience, who exploited known reserves while conducting little or no further exploration. From Mobutu's Zairianization onward this process took hold and both public infrastructure and industrial mining equipment deteriorated, causing production to fall steeply (Fahey 2013: 24).

In part to ensure political stability and in part because the industrial mining enclaves stopped producing gold, Mobutu liberalized mining in 1982. OKIMO had seen its authority as a 'state within a state' crumble and so it gradually shifted its role from an industrial gold exploitation company to a passive concession holder, relinquishing exploitation rights to a multitude of individual—artisanal—'sub-contractors'. In practice, increasing numbers of people inside the concession turned from subsistence agriculture to artisanal mining, and fortune seekers from adjacent territories and provinces invaded the area. Furthermore, OKIMO's un(der)paid employees now converted their affiliation to this public authority into a mechanism to tax artisanal mining. As a rule, OKIMO levied a tax of 30% on production.

The role of infrastructure and its absence cannot be emphasised enough in this context (Schouten 2014b). As in the Moto mining districts, infrastructure in Ituri has been gradually dissolving in the post-independence era, making it impossible to sustain either industrial

⁶ It did, however, allow the Catholic church—more closely aligned to the colonial administration than other confessions—into the Ituri belt (Bakonzi 1982: 709ff.).

mining activities or the centralized exercise of public authority. Because industrial exploitation concentrated gold in narrow circuits of extraction and chemical treatment, labor requirements were concentrated along these circuits too, as was, by extension, security governance. As artisanal mining became the mainstay of Ituri, extraction dispersed geographically, entailing a matching dispersion of public authorities concerned with the *encadrement* of mining. This not only meant that employees of those authorities responsible for mining often had to make trips of many days on foot, bicycle and canoe to reach remote mining sites, but infrastructural dilapidation in Ituri also meant that the exercise of public authority became physically disconnected from central authority. It has become progressively more decentralized and fragmented, following—in the case of OKIMO's concession—the shifting geographies of productive artisanal mining sites. For instance, disintegration of the road infrastructure that connected Ituri to Kisangani and the Congo River (part of the *voie nationale*) not only truncated provincial authority in Ituri but also reoriented Ituri's economic ties towards Uganda (Fahey 2011: 59). Since state representatives—including OKIMO staff—received either no salary or an insignificant one that was not corrected for (hyper)inflation illicit taxation became an everyday survival strategy. Petty extortion by local representatives of a proliferation of state authorities became a primary characteristic of public authority (Fairhead 1992: 20). During this process, state agencies that had been functionally separate started to merge and overlap at the local level. For instance, OKIMO's private security guards, the Zairian *gendarmerie*, and secret services would often accompany agents affiliated to a branch of government with a taxation mandate, to assist in taxation and share in its fruits.⁷ The concentration of representatives of the state around productive mining areas in Ituri meant that the common *Iturien*—as elsewhere in Zaire—adopted coping strategies of evasion and withdrawal from areas where state agents concentrated (ibid., cf. Schatzberg 2012: 119). In sum, under Mobutu, the geography of public authority adapted to the demise of infrastructurally-mediated industrial gold extraction and the proliferation of spatially dispersed artisanal mining in Ituri.

OKIMO's Janus face

As Dan Fahey (2013: 8) observes, the artisanal mode of extraction lent itself much better to predation by armed groups than the expat-led industrial form of gold extraction that had dominated in the past. Due to the lack of infrastructure, the relative geographical isolation of Ituri also fed into the subsequent war economy, making possible enclaved modes of territorial control that would have been inhibited at least partially by widespread infrastructure. During the war in Ituri (1999-2004), the pre-existing artisanal mining economy provided fertile soil that domestic and foreign armed groups cultivated to finance their violence, fighting for exclusive territorial control over productive mining sites concentrated in Ituri, most notably around Mongbwalu (cf. Cuvelier & Marysse 2004).⁸ Interestingly enough, the Ituri War did not mean a complete break in the exercise of public authority in the mining zones. The

⁷ Source: interviews in Ituri, December 2014

⁸ Indeed, the complex entanglements between artisanal gold mining and violence in Ituri have formed a key case to substantiate theoretical arguments on 'conflict minerals, or perverted forms of public authority built on the linkages between mineral resource extraction and conflict. After over a decade of debate and empirical research, the emerging consensus is that artisanal mining was not a factor in the onset of civil conflict in Ituri, but that control of armed groups over artisanal gold production did sustain conflict prolongation and eventually (in 2003/4) even turned into a key rationale for movements to reject political settlement and continue armed struggle (cf. Cuvelier & Marysse 2004; Fahey 2011a; Vircoulon 2005; Vlassenroot & Raeymaekers 2004). With the end of the war, rebel movements have been folded into state structures of public authority, with some groups, for instance, now dominating certain factions of the FARDC.

specter of OKIMO continued to haunt public authority in three ways: first, the board of OKIMO was used by the central government to make claims of legal control over areas in Ituri that it did in fact not control; second, OKIMO staff in Ituri were involved in the legitimation of rebel control over mining areas; and finally, rebel movements mimicked OKIMO's earlier practices in efforts to legitimize their control over mines. For example, in 2002 the Lendu-based UPC rebel movement negotiated access for the South African mining company Ashanti Goldfields with the district's director of OKIMO when it controlled the area around Mongbwalu that the mining company was interested in (HRW 2005: 66). When control over that area shifted to the Hema-dominated FNI rebel movement a year later, the FNI established elaborate mechanisms of access control over the roads close to the productive areas of concession 40 around Mongbwalu in 2003, where they applied OKIMO's 30% taxation scheme to artisanal gold production, most likely because these practices were seen as an expression of state authority and could thus function as a claim to local legitimacy and authority. Again, the mining company—now called AngloGold Ashanti—negotiated access with the rebel movement in charge. Despite the lack of government control, the government in Kinshasa had authorized—through the board of OKIMO—the mining company AngloGold Ashanti to start exploration in the rebel-held concession, leading to a situation where claims to public authority over mining in Ituri based on *de jure* sovereignty clashed and entangled with the *de facto* exercise of public authority on the ground. During the period of the Ituri War, OKIMO was reinvented in Kinshasa as an 'institutional lubricant' between the central government and foreign mining companies that aimed at obtaining concessions cheaply; yet on the ground OKIMO's role changed little.

At no point since the liberalization of mining did the exercise of public authority by OKIMO shrink in line with its drastic reduction in economic productivity. OKIMO was still invested with a wide mandate to engage in exploration and administer mining activities. It retained most of its employees from earlier eras but their role has remained limited to that of 'fiscal parasites' (Kalonji 1995: 15), levying taxes on artisanal gold production. From 2003 onwards, the interim government had great difficulty in establishing control over enclaved parts of Congo such as Ituri. Neither agreements with armed groups nor the Ituri Interim Assembly succeeded in establishing centralized control over the mining district (HRW 2005: 61). More recently in the post-war period, the presence of state authorities in the OKIMO concessions has increased. In part, this proliferation has followed the unfolding and *mise en scene* of international policies targeting the perceived conflict-minerals linkage. International pressure and donor funds have translated into the reinforcement of the Mining Ministry and the creation, in 2003, of a special service called SAESSCAM (*Service d'assistance et d'encadrement du Small mining ou de la petite mine*), which was to provide guidance and technical support to artisanal mining in order to lift it out of ungovernable informality and include it within the regulatory apparatus of the Congolese state. On the ground, however, SAESSCAM is simply yet another state representative without infrastructural power to fulfill its mandate, nevertheless translating its public authority mandate into a claim to legitimate taxation. It enters the succession of state representatives—with or without a formal mandate—that follows the periodical shifts of gold production concentrated in one site or another. In this way, it becomes a mobile but constant feature of the public authority 'superstructure' of the migratory gold mining economy in Ituri. Locally reinforcing the ongoing unbundling of the Congolese state, each claims to be a public authority of essential value to allow or disallow artisanal exploitation, all in an effort to complement non-existent salaries, or to placate the institutionalized 'politics of the belly' of entrepreneurial superiors. In turn, artisanal miners and other economic operators in the mines live in fiscal and legal insecurity. They are uncertain about which legal regime applies to them, which authorities

are mandated to regulate and tax their activities, and even whether their activity is legal at all. Artisanal miners often reiterate that they simply need to be '*en ordre avec*' the state agents that present themselves. For artisanal miners, paying officials is a never-ending strategy to legitimize their unstable claim to confirmation from public authorities, while this process also reinforces agents of the state engaged in extortion *as* public authorities.

Interestingly, if OKIMO and its joint venture partners are criticized for their shortcomings from all sides, this criticism invokes the specter of the state and the expectations invested in it. On the one hand, for most artisanal miners being taxed provides a rationale to structurally understate their production figures, but paying this tax also constitutes a mechanism to ensure some claim to formal justice and state legitimacy for the blossoming informal economy they are part of (see Hoffmann & Kirk 2013: 9 for discussion of legitimacy). However, while industrial mining companies have slowly started to return to Ituri, to date none of the joint ventures with OKIMO has moved into an actual exploitation phase. Instead, junior gold mining companies on the ground engage in prospecting and exploration, hoping to sell off concessions with a profit to larger companies. Compared to the historical role that gold mining assumed in the broad-based exercise of public authority in Ituri, contemporary mining companies have a much more modest and bunkered physical and public presence, limiting themselves to small-footprint exploration camps, the development of the necessary infrastructure for the feeding in and out of industrial machinery and samples, and limited social corporate responsibility projects. Interestingly, because of the projection of infrastructural power from border posts to sites of exploration, mining companies do allow for the de-enclavization of their areas of operation in terms of the projection of public authority. However, as we will see below, this also leads to the skewed provision of security and justice.

From encadrement to criminalization

In recent years, OKIMO has undergone vast changes and its role as an institutional lubricant has become further entrenched. In 2010, the *Office* of OKIMO was privatized and became the *Société* SOKIMO. Nevertheless, this state of affairs is contested and invokes the idea of the historical state. SOKIMO's many unpaid employees make claims to the stable employment that SOKIMO provided from colonial times to the mid-1970s; local populations inside industrial concessions appeal to SOKIMO's past as a core provider of infrastructure in criticizing the current configuration of joint ventures with foreign industrial mining firms as lacking positive developmental impact beyond macro-economic growth figures. Thus, through its shortcomings, the idea of SOKIMO as a public authority is a core site of contestation through which Congolese statehood is upheld as the locus of responsibility *vis-a-vis* those affected by the externalities in current neoliberal modes of governance of the mining sector (cf. Lund 2006: 688-9; Englebert 2002).

A recent development in concession 40 is that SOKIMO has officially relinquished its role as the public authority responsible for the regulation and taxation of artisanal gold mining. SOKIMO was subsequently mandated to abandon the taxation and regulation of artisanal mining activities in industrial concessions. This decision, taken in 2011, fits within a larger struggle about access to gold mining in Ituri. It emanated from Anglo Kilo Gold's intention to progress towards exploitation of gold reserves within its permits, which led it to require that the Mining Law be followed and its exclusive rights to its permits enforced. This required SOKIMO to abandon its role as regulatory authority of artisanal mining. In a

perhaps symbolic physical move, SOKIMO agents have now left the artisanal mining pits and some hold office inside the largest gold mining companies.

Yet rather than falling into a governance void, artisanal mining is now subject to a variety of more fragmented and localized public authority structures where traditional authorities (*chefs de chefferie* and *chefs de secteur*) and a host of local state services (both mining services and the Territorial Administrators) play a pivotal role. Customary authorities and regional businessmen quickly emerged as the managers of individual mining sites (*Administrateur de Foyer Minier*, AFM or *Président-Directeur Général*, PDG), occupying gatekeeper positions between state agents and artisanal miners. In Ituri, as elsewhere in the Congo, access to land for artisanal miners always involved transacting with traditional local authorities, who mediate allocation of land use among their communities and themselves now often figure as the *de facto* manager of artisanal mines. Since SOKIMO relinquished its role as the key authority in the networked governance of artisanal mining, chiefs have taken over this role. In effect making artisanal mining a customary entitlement and potentially enhancing their public authority and their ability to contribute to public goods such as dispute settlement in that economy. Within the often relatively enclaved mining camps and attached settlements, these individuals lead institutional hierarchies and significantly shape public authority. This can include the collection of taxes, the division of gold production, the adjudication of conflicts and relations to ‘external’ authorities.

Thus, the dissolution of SOKIMO as an apparatus of public authority entwined with artisanal mining, delegitimized the claims that artisanal mining communities could make for access to core public services such as protection, justice, and security *vis-a-vis* international industrial mining companies. Moreover, the move to informalise artisanal mining risks pushing it into illicitness, further adding to the likelihood of predation by conflict networks. Illegal taxation by civil state agents and security forces has proliferated in many mining zones; the FARDC and PNC run networks in some sites that govern the political economy of artisanal gold mining, and in others can even be found digging with their uniforms still on. The political elites in Kinshasa, who benefit from providing subcontracting services to industrial mining firms, seem little interested in the effects of the illicit taxation practices engaged in by state agents in Ituri that impact on the poorest sections of society who depend on artisanal mining for their livelihoods.

The Janus face of public authority in Ituri’s gold mines

Relations between public authority, SOKIMO and industrial mining have shifted over the last few years to the detriment of those who depend on artisanal mining. This is an example of the broader tendency in the DRC whereby public authority is both ubiquitously politicized (cf. Elatra 2013) and privatized (Raeymaekers 2011). The shift back towards industrial mining in the former mines of Kilo Moto renders negotiations over public authority and access to security and justice more unequal. By granting large permits to mining firms, Kinshasa automatically renders artisanal mining in these spaces illegal, reducing the assets and legal resources available to artisanal mining populations (cf. Hoffmann & Kirk 2013: 15). As such, seemingly top-down efforts to formalize the mining sector in the name of development, might be underpinned by private logics of accumulation, i.e. efforts to establish a ‘limited access order’ that benefits only small factions of Congolese and international stakeholders (Kaiser & Wolters 2012; cf. North, Wallis & Weingast 2009). Indeed, Congolese elites in Kinshasa and Kisangani are quick to put the weight of their legal monopoly and security

forces behind the interests of industrial mining firms, since those constitute a direct link to a steady source of taxation (Kuditshini 2008). By discharging the exercise of public authority—both effective security governance and the provision of other ‘public’ goods such as infrastructure—to industrial mining companies, Congolese elites are able to capture resource rents while shunning broad-based development of public authorities and goods that resource rents could generate (cf. Hibou 2004; Hönke 2013; Meagher 2012), for instance to compensate for the formal elimination of artisanal mining. In effect, mining camps in Congo are examples of ‘pockets of productivity’ (Leonard 2008) where, as during colonial times, public and private logics dilute and blend, and elements of the Congolese state are selectively effective, enmeshed in complex agentic networks with corporations (cf. Kawu 2013: 40).

While industrial gold mining companies such as AngloGold Ashanti and Kilo Goldmines have always explicitly claimed to be its opposite (Schouten 2014; cf. Lund 2006: 689), they have appropriated the specter of the state in invoking the (otherwise absent) application of the law to drive local shifts in the balance of power between competing modes of gold extraction. With mining companies driving the skewed application of the law in Ituri, the boundaries between the international, national and local shift in the articulation of public authority, if that is considered as defining and enforcing ‘collectively binding decisions on members of society’ (Lund 2006: 685) within its area of operation.

However, the entanglement of gold mining companies with the Congolese state goes still further. In the geographic spaces of mining zones, the exercise of public order necessarily gravitates towards what makes orderly extraction possible. In terms of its role as a security actor, SOKIMO has completely relinquished its power. Private security guards wearing faded OKIMO uniforms still patrol old access gates to outdated mining infrastructure, while the security of the industrial mining companies is exercised by private security groups completely outside SOKIMO’s control. Industrial mining companies such as AngloGold Ashanti have developed an effective security apparatus that compromises state security forces. The ‘political topography of private security’ (Schouten 2011), or the spatialization of private security assemblages around the industrial mode of extraction of gold in Ituri, is articulated in two main corridors. The N4 road connects the industrial gold concessions of Mongbwalu and Mambasa to Bunia and the Ugandan hinterland. Private security assemblages can be found predominantly along the north side of this axis, where a number of internationally registered gold exploration companies operate.⁹ Private security assemblages involve a mix of private guards and feature armed Congolese police, mainly deployed in territorial strategies aimed at securing ‘zones of exclusion’ around the capital-intensive technical installations that mark the key difference between artisanal and industrial mining. The center of gravity long hovered around Mongbwalu, where the South African mining giant AngloGold Ashanti has been operating since 2004. This venture comprised a small zone of exclusion on the border of Mongbwalu town, guarded by over 200 private security guards and a contingent of Congolese police, trained by and paid by the company. Other industrial mining companies also deploy security governance strategies that lead local populations to talk of the mushrooming of ‘Guantanamos’ in Ituri.

⁹ If Mongbwalu has formed the focal point of studies on security and human rights (CAFOD 2010; Prosansky 2007), it seems likely that the center of gravity in the political topography of private security is shifting towards the area around Nia-Nia, which lies at the midpoint between Bunia and Kisangani and marks the western border of the Ituri district along the N4 road. North of Nia-Nia on the (nearly impassable) road towards Isiro, the exploration company Kilo Goldmines has just partnered up with the larger Randgold in an accelerated exploration program, while AngloGold Ashanti seems ready to relinquish its concession because of disappointing global gold prices and the size of deposits mapped.

As indicated earlier, while *private* security companies seem explicitly to defy any association with *public* authority, in practice many private security companies guarding industrial mines in Ituri are assisted by paid police officers. Furthermore, they are often owned or operated by high-ranking political or army figures in regional centers of power such as Kinshasa, Beni and Kampala (Schouten 2014). This seems to function both as a way to establish lines of accumulation and redistribute profits among political elites, and as an informal way to establish political control and patronage over extractive pockets of productivity—in other words, the localized reproduction of the *rentier* state.

Roadblock topographies: access to insecurity and injustice

On the one hand, then, public authority manifests itself around the economic infrastructures of industrial gold mining in the form of a mix of private security companies, elite interests and disciplined state security forces. But there is another way in which the political geography of public authority in Ituri is entangled with gold mining pertinent to access to security and justice, or rather, in this case, access to *insecurity* and *injustice*. On one level, informal security and justice arrangements of public authority in Ituri are articulated as an unstable choreography of state agents that coalesces around shifting topographies of economic resources. Whether around artisanal gold mining sites, concentrations of NGOs or movements to and from local markets, the agents of public authorities present themselves. For instance, the Congolese Police force can frequently be found in difficult to access mining sites where they adjudicate conflicts and report on safety incidents, whereas they are nearly absent in predominantly agricultural zones. On another level, a clear political geography of public authority can be identified. It comprises an institutionalized practice of ‘stationary banditism’ (Olson 1993), adopted by actors both within the formal fold of the state and outside it, of taxing economic circulation. It manifests itself geographically in the form of what might be termed ‘roadblock topographies’. By roadblock topographies I refer to the aggregate landscape composed of checkpoints where security governance—i.e. the threat of the use of force—is deployed to regulate and tax the circulation of people, goods and capital.

The premise is that by identifying the concentration of roadblocks in places such as Congo, one can get a good idea of where the circulation of economic activity is concentrated. The topography of checkpoints in Ituri seems to converge on the infrastructural pathways carved out by industrial mining. As all-weather transport infrastructure is rare in Ituri, the artisanally mined ‘river of gold’ (Fahey 2008) flows through pathways carved out in the district by mining ventures and by the UN. These formal economic infrastructures also become the conduits for predominantly informal economies and thus a key locus where illicit political economies of conflict and extortion also develop.

This configuration might be explained as a reaction to the ongoing transformation of industrial gold mining. While industrial mining attracts intense security assemblages of Congolese Police and private security companies, there are many state agents in Ituri that are not folded into this limited access order. Instead of protecting the formal sources of taxation that flow to the national capital, they engage in direct taxation of economic activities. Yet the informal structures of public authority, security and justice emerging around artisanal mining in Ituri are also rooted in longstanding patterns of rule and ordering in the district. As discussed above, while the use of roadblocks and checkpoints in Ituri dates back to at least colonial times, it proliferated during the Ituri War when different rebel groups deployed roadblocks to control access to the territories they held (Pottier 2006). Roadblock topographies differ from strategies of territorial control that are often considered the hallmark function of security as an expression of public authority (cf. Mampilly 2011; Olson 1993). As

highlighted above, where private security assemblages are predominantly an effort to establish an extractive order based on a spatially bounded exclusion zone, roadblock topographies do not make the same exclusive claim to space but rather impose themselves on the processes of circulation that flow through narrow circuits.

Roadblock topographies comprise three different kinds of articulations in Ituri. The first and most stable roadblock topography is concentrated most visibly along the axis of the Bunia-Kisangani axis and on the road from Bunia to Mongbwalu. The flow of goods, capital and people between the Ugandan border at Bunia and the interior forms a magnet for the parasitic practices of temporarily blocking these flows for the purposes of taxation by using the threat of force. Roadblock entrepreneurs often invoke insecurity in their claim to legitimize their omnipresence as an expression of public authority, arguing that either the ongoing presence of armed groups, ambushes or porous borders¹⁰ necessitate frequent inland checkpoints to maintain territorial integrity and domestic security.

To illustrate the proliferation of roadblocks, on the road between Bunia and Niania (halfway to Kisangani) alone, well over 30 roadblocks—some permanent, others temporary—exist.¹¹ This means they reappear at an average of roughly one roadblock each ten kilometres. They are manned by a variety of state services (provincial, national and local), and often by both civil agents and security forces. In 2004, AGK together with the UN refurbished the Bunia-Mongbwalu road, thereby reducing a trip that took several days to around four hours at best. Since then, the locality of Iga Barrière has exploded in size, becoming a main artisanal gold trading hub for the mines in the area. As a result of this, formal authorities have clustered in Iga Barrière for the purpose of informal and illicit taxation of gold-related economic flows, operating roadblocks and making the rounds of gold traders on market days.

Given the circulation of money along these central corridors in Ituri, control over strategic border and inland checkpoints frequently contributes to conflicts between armed factions, since they form a core mode of accumulation that can vie with control over mining sites in the ease and scope of accumulation. While some constitute strategic sites of mass accumulation for security entrepreneurs, most do not but rather form the stage for a theater of bargaining over very small quantities, illustrating the banality of extortive conflict economies in everyday practice. A whole vocabulary has emerged for these negotiations, invoking either documents that might have expired, or for instance *madesu ya bana* (beans for the kids) or *mayi* (water). In these negotiations, as Pottier (2006) has noted for the war period in Ituri, ethnicity, recognition and other identity-based forms of belonging form central mechanisms of attenuation that can smooth the financial cost of roadblock encounters. From a Weberian perspective, it is the voluntary compliance of wealthy Congolese, aid workers, and transport enterprises, who do not hesitate to hand over FC5,000 or less in return for speedy circulation, that confirms roadblocks in their role as a public authority and as an effective strategy (cf. Hoffmann & Kirk 2013: 9; Lund 2006: 674).

Besides roadblocks on the main transport arteries of Ituri, a second type of roadblock is strategically positioned at the end of lines of circulation, mediating between artisanal mining sites and access to the feeder roads that lead to these sites. In remote areas, the governing committee of the artisanal mining site will erect complex access and exit controls to avoid

¹⁰ Uganda's influence on public authority is pervasive and still ostensibly reaches far within Ituri, with the Ugandan Shilling, Ugandan beer, entrepreneurs and trucks dominating the gold trade, logging and merchandise as far as Djalasiga (cf. Titeca & Kimakuna 2012).

¹¹ Source: field observations in Ituri, December 2014

grains of gold slipping untaxed from their control. In some territories, the FARDC mirrors this structure with an additional layer of checkpoints, adding to the illicit taxation of gold. In the Mambasa territory, this practice is often justified by pointing to the pervasive insecurity emanating from the (remnants of) the Mai-Mai Morgan rebel group who migrate between artisanal mining sites in the Okapi Reserve, the adjacent Bafwasende territory and the jungles of Bakaeko to the south of Mambasa. Due to the deteriorating security situation in western Mambasa around and in the Reserve, different units of the FARDC have established checkpoints and roadblocks everywhere, allegedly for security purposes but also constituting an elaborate system of predation on illegal gold mining.¹² Here, the FARDC and Congolese park guard hierarchies are interwoven with the governance of illicit artisanal mining and poaching. In Irumu, the FARDC engages in the same practice, justifying its presence by the FPRI rebel group. It seems that in Ituri this second type of roadblock, which moves towards making a predatory territorial claim, becomes more pervasive as gold mining sites are enclaved, i.e. further removed from popular centers due to deteriorating transport infrastructure or heightened insecurity (Van Puijenbroek & Schouten 2013). In such enclaved sites, the roadblock topography dissolves into more opaque structures of control and manipulation, in which armed groups act in connivance with military entrepreneurs in the governance of artisanal gold mining. Thus, paradoxically, the profits associated with the praxis of securing rebel-infested zones might lead to entrenched interests for the agents of public authority to prolong the sense of insecurity and enclavization that allows monopolizing such patterns of accumulation. For artisanal miners, or even local people going to market, security entrepreneurs operating roadblocks have come to be seen as the main source of suffering making up their predicament of poverty, *injustice* and *insecurity*.

Third and finally, these stationary types of roadblocks are complemented by the common phenomenon of the ‘pop-up roadblock’ that local chiefs, youngsters, or state security forces provisionally and temporarily erect to profit from access to bi-weekly local markets. This type of roadblock is often ephemeral—a simple rope or some stones across a dusty path—and fades in and out of existence according to the perceived economic needs of the roadblock entrepreneurs and the opportunities provided by flourishing local markets. Again, this type of roadblock economy is curbed in its ambition by the fact that overtaxing market-goers will ultimately destroy the very circulation on which the roadblock depends for its future feasibility. Additionally, as roadblock entrepreneurs are often linked to, or mandated by, local traditional authorities, some pretense of delivering public goods (for example securing local markets from raids) needs to be provided as an explanation during the process of negotiating fees. These most ephemeral of roadblocks reflect particularly well the observation of Hoffmann & Kirk (2013: 39) that ‘the difference between the provision of public goods and organised crime is sometimes razor-thin and the legitimacy of the supposedly ‘local’ or ‘traditional’ cannot be assumed’. Indeed, whereas the focus of this paper has been on security provision and public authority, it seems that security entrepreneurs deploy their—official or self-assumed—mandate for purposes of accumulation, leading to the widespread recognition of them as agents of *insecurity* and *injustice* in the political economy of gold mining.

Conclusion

This paper has explored the tangled geographies of public authority and gold extraction in Ituri by discussing ways in which the organization of security entwines with different modes of extracting gold. These geographies cluster around and co-constitute centers and corridors

¹² Source: interviews, December 2014

of economic activity in ways that structure access to economic resources and security. On the one hand, particular articulations of public authority tend to coalesce in security assemblages around the industrial mode gold extraction, which hinges on the projection of infrastructural power by transnational networks. These are the ‘securitized policy spaces’ (Luckham & Kirk 2013) where private forms of security governance are bundled and entangled in broader assemblages of formal public authority that merge around specific capital-intensive, transnationalized and infrastructure-mediated processes, such as mineral extraction or humanitarian governance. On the other hand, within Ituri, informalized modes of security governance concentrate around the competing, artisanal, mode of extraction.

In its diversity, the exercise of security in Ituri might seem contradictory or dualistic from the perspective of homogeneous state theory. On the one hand, it can be argued that state agents bring about an effectively organized *rentier* state (felicitously protecting local industrial gold exploration whose profits are channeled back to Kinshasa). On the other hand, they seem typical of the auto-cannibalization of predatory failed states, lacking centralized control and constraint over state agents that prey on local economies—formal and informal—for their own economic survival and accumulation (Elatre 2013: 35; cf. Bayart, Ellis & Hibou 1999; Verweijen 2013). Rather than approaching the exercise of public authority from singular assumptions about the nature of the Congolese state, it can be argued that the organization of security and justice is fundamentally heterogeneous, ambiguous and contingent on the spatial dispersion and clustering of taxable economic action, and the way it will be exercised depends on the momentary opportunities for any one agent. Rather than focusing on a single of these co-existing and entangled political geographies as central ways of organizing public authority (and analytically conflating public authority with this singular focus), this paper proposes that understanding security and public authority in Ituri requires understanding the complex entanglements of different modes of governing security with competing modes of extraction.

There are a number of points to be made regarding the larger entangled geography of security and public authority in Ituri. Firstly, and pivotally, all the articulations of security discussed above call into question whether security provision in Ituri is in fact a matter of public goods provision, when its articulation is parasitic on principal economic activities. Loosely following Serres (1982), the overall distribution of security according to this logic can be termed ‘parasitic governance’. This form of governance needs to use the threat of force as a means to accumulate by leaching on economic circulation, but cannot extract so much as to destroy the very flows of circulation on which it depends, since that would also kill the parasite. This form of governance is also parasitic on the symbolic capital of the state: practices of accumulation and survival by private security companies and roadblock entrepreneurs are contingent on the capacity to advantageously invoke the idea of the state in authoritatively structuring encounters.¹³

A second observation is what, invoking Weber, might perhaps be called dedifferentiation of public authority: the merging and bundling in institutional assemblages of functionally different powers—political and military, technical, economic, social—around central, often transnational, flows of capital. In Ituri, as Verweijen and Van Meeteren put it, we witness the ‘reterritorialization of political authority to non-national scales’ (2014: 3) in patterns that are

¹³ Non-state actors in fragile environments have been shown to consistently use state nomenclature in order to evoke the legitimacy of statehood in their claims to authority (e.g. Lund 2006: 687).

correlated with industrial modes of extraction and accumulation. In order to study the imbrications of security and justice with public authority in such a context, then, we need to move away from a focus on actors and their formal institutional affiliations in order to focus on the issues around which actor-networks, alliances and institutionalized arrangements coalesce. From a similar perspective, the vast inequality in the distribution of access to security and justice, economic accumulation and predictability combined with the absence of an impartial overarching regulatory framework to mediate conflicts between different modes of extraction instills insecurity and might induce self-help strategies of protection in Ituri.

Thirdly, I would propose that we take seriously the proliferation of modes of governance around artisanal gold extraction as constituting a self-help strategy for those disfranchised by the ‘limited access order’. Such actors deploy the threat of violence to call into question the legitimacy of the extractive order surrounding gold mining in Ituri, comprising even the surplus of those associated by formal affiliation to the state (for a broader related argument, see Hoffmann & Kirk 2013: 39).¹⁴ Thus, in Ituri, the unbundling of the Congolese state takes the form of an ‘extractive order’. This is characterized by a dedifferentiation and convergence of state representatives of different plumage around the practice of surviving on different modes of gold extraction.

Fourth, following a general point by Lund (2006: 700), the real battle over public authority in Ituri concerns the politics of assigning categories such as formal/informal, public/private and legal/criminal to different, competing actors and modes of extraction. Disentangling the image and idea of the state from artisanal mining can move resources out of the realm of political contestation and accountability, via both privatization and informalization. Artisanal mining was a more formal and publicly recognized practice before 2011, and it would be ironic that as an effect of the formalization efforts resulting from the conflict mineral discourse, it might increasingly become actively criminalized and entangled with conflict economies.

In sum, the question needs to be asked why we should continue to refer to the authorities involved in governing security and justice in Ituri as *public* authorities at all. In much of the literature the problem of the public, or the question of what makes a public, is a black box left unopened. Yet it is difficult to ascertain what makes the exercise of authority in the areas of security and justice—structurally skewed as they are in practice—a public affair, if private logics seem to better explain the dynamics and patterns distributions of accumulation and (in)security resulting from them (cf. Eriksson Baaz & Verweijen 2014). In Ituri, many of the examples discussed above might actually comprise the exercise of *private* authority, whilst at the same time deploying practices that are usually associated with the state in the dominant Weberian approach to public authority (cf. Hoffmann & Kirk 2013 for discussion). It is possible to speculate whether indeed private security and unequal accumulation are deeply embedded norms in Ituri, since from Belgian colonialism through the Mobutu era and up to the present day, this logic consistently underpins the specter of public authority.

¹⁴ This kind of self-help is nothing new but rather forms the reinvention of earlier modes of coping with state decline under Mobutu (cf. Tull 2003; MacGaffey 1991).

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Contact details:

email: Intdev.jsrp@lse.ac.uk

Web: lse.ac.uk/internationalDevelopment/research/JSRP/jsrp.aspx

Tel: +44 (0)20 7849 4631