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The multiple faces of ‘Conscientisation’: exploring the links between structural inequalities, education, and violence

Cyril Brandt, Olga Kithumbu, Eustache Kuliumbwa and Gauthier Marchais

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Abstract

Education can instil conscientisation and stimulate action against injustice. The Batwa (‘pygmy’) people in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo have been severely marginalised. In 2012-13, violent conflict broke out in Tanganyika, pitting Batwa against dominant groups. Our qualitative interviews evoked a causal relationship between conscientisation – via non-formal human rights education – and violence. Our article dispels this idea. Yet it demonstrates that conscientisation can circulate beyond the confines of educational activities, and be appropriated by a range of actors, including those calling for violence. We thereby advance a critical discussion of the implications of transformative peace education in conflict-affected contexts.

Authorship in alphabetic order, not reflecting individual contributions.

Dr. Cyril Brandt (corresponding author)
Associate Researcher | Institute of Development Policy (Univ. of Antwerp)
Honorary Associate | Institute of Development Studies (Univ. of Sussex)
e-mail: cyrilowen.brandt@uantwerpen.be

Olga Kithumbu: Researcher, University of Kinshasa.
Eustache Kuliumbwa: Researcher, Marakuja Kivu Research
Dr. Gauthier Marchais: Research Fellow, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex.
Introduction

Education can instil political consciousness through ‘conscientisation’. Conscientisation is the process by which oppressed groups become aware of their oppression, and the values related to social justice, knowledge of civic engagement and political action that accompany it (Freire 1973, 29). Inspired by the work of Paulo Freire, this conception of education opposes the ideological function of education in reproducing hegemony and class oppression. Such transformative conceptions of education have been at the forefront of many liberation struggles (Romo 2021). The Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde, led by Amilcar Cabral, put education at the vanguard of their liberation movement (Vaz Borges 2019; Freire 1978). The Brazilian Landless Workers Movement has, over decades, built a system of formal and informal education to support its objective of land reform and social transformation (Tarlau 2019; Kane 2000). In Bolivia, under the first indigenous President Evo Morales, education reforms took centre stage amidst a variety of decolonising reforms (Lopes Cardozo 2011).

Interventions in the field of education in emergencies, however, rarely explicitly address underlying structural injustices. Such interventions are usually focused on establishing safe classroom environments, facilitating access to primary schools and emphasizing the links between education and other humanitarian fields. Alternative approaches, however, emphasize the importance of transformative change to address structural inequalities, echoing the conception of education embedded in the liberational struggles (Novelli, Lopes Cardozo, and Smith 2017). Magee and Pherali (2019, 44) argue that an “alternative vision of education” can “enable collaboration and engagement in socially transformative efforts to curb violent and oppressive attitudes, behaviours, knowledge paradigms and social structures, which are key to peaceful coexistence”. As Higgins and Novelli (2020) argue, peace education that draws on critical pedagogy “would enable teachers and pupils to raise awareness of, and take action against, structural injustices.” Bajaj (2015, 155) emphasizes that pedagogies of resistance can disrupt “asymmetrical power relationships and their (social, political, historical, and economic) roots”. Yet these contributions rarely question whether or not conscientisation is a peaceful or potentially violent process. Paulo Freire himself had an ambivalent conception of this relationship, at times noting that violence can be an unfortunate but necessary step toward social transformation (Freire 2005; Giuseppe and Cortez 2016). Freire’s reflection resonates with conceptions of emancipatory praxis which posit violence as a step in the process of emancipation, notably Fanon’s conception of liberating violence (Fanon 1961). Given the violent and protracted nature of many contemporary conflicts, this leads to the following questions: What are the implications of disruptive and transformative education in contexts affected by violent conflict? How does conscientisation materialize in an environment marked by protracted violence?

In this article, we speak to the debate about the “multiple faces of education in conflict-affected and fragile contexts” (Tebbe et al. 2010) by critically interrogating the multiple faces of ‘conscientisation’ in the context of violent conflict. We show that, in socially polarized and militarized contexts, conscientisation can become closely intertwined with discourses that underpin dynamics of violent conflict. To do so, we analyse the manifestations of conscientisation in the context of an exceptional historical moment in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Central Africa: The so-called Twa-Bantu conflict in the province of Tanganyika, during which the Twa (also called ‘pygmy’ 2) population took up arms in the largest uprising of Twa populations in Central Africa in recent history, a conflict that has received very little media or scholarly attention. We explore the following research question: How and to what end is ‘conscientisation’ articulated in discourses of various actors in Tanganyika? We draw from interviews collected during two months of qualitative fieldwork, follow-up

2 See following chapter on methodology and terminology.
interviews and project documents of NGOs and activist organisations in Tanganyika. We show that the formal education sector has largely served to repress the conscientisation of Twa populations, reproducing and enacting longstanding racialized discourses and prejudices against them. In contrast, parallel forms of education and awareness raising, stemming from grassroots activist organisations, and partially supported by international organisations, have spread forms of conscientisation among Twa populations, building awareness to structural marginalisation, racism, and human rights. While this conscientisation has played a central role in bolstering political activism and support for social movements, it has also become closely intertwined with discourses calling for armed mobilisation as violence erupted and spread across the province.

Our results do not challenge the importance of critical peace education and the principles embedded in conscientisation approaches to education. As we show, the violence that spread across Tanganyika results from a range of structural and proximate factors and can in no way be reduced to the role of ‘conscientisation’, which we do not consider having played a causal role in the onset of violence. However, our findings call for a nuanced and contextualized understanding of critical peace education, a critical interrogation of the role of education in line with the ‘multiple faces of education’, and an understanding of how the principles and ideas embedded within an educational approach can circulate beyond the confines of the education sector in multiple ways. Education actors operating in such spaces need to be aware of these.

**Education, social transformation and peacebuilding**

Education and violent conflict have an ambivalent relationship. On the one hand, schools can provide a protecting and nurturing environment for children in conflict-affected contexts. Conflict-sensitive education can help to prevent conflict. Education is a key entry point for peacebuilding, post-conflict reconstruction and efforts to prevent violent conflict (Winthrop and Matsui 2013). Human rights education (HRE), the subject of this paper, is also commonly regarded in a positive light. The United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training defines HRE as follows:

> “Human rights education and training comprises all educational, training, information, awareness-raising and learning activities aimed at promoting universal respect for and observance of all human rights and fundamental freedoms and thus contributing, inter alia, to the prevention of human rights violations and abuses by providing persons with knowledge, skills and understanding and developing their attitudes and behaviours, to empower them to contribute to the building and promotion of a universal culture of human rights.” (UN 2011, Article 2, Paragraph 1)

On the other hand, the literature on education and violent conflict has shown that education can be part of the ‘root causes’ of violent conflict by reinforcing structural inequalities, driving ethnic marginalisation and polarisation and diffusing exclusionary ideologies that underpin violent conflict (Bush and Saltarelli 2000; Novelli, Lopes Cardozo, and Smith 2017). Beyond its role as a root cause, education can be a proximate driver of conflict, although the limited empirical evidence suggests that education is rarely “implicated in a turn to violent conflict” (G. K. Brown 2011, 192). Moreover, the interpretation of HRE can vary in different contexts, and significantly depart from the UN-definition provided above (Bajaj 2011; Abu Moghli 2020).

Recent and more critical approaches contend that, for education to play a role in peacebuilding, it needs to foster social transformation which can address the root causes of violence, notably structural inequalities and forms of exclusion and marginalisation, while promoting cultures of peace and reconciliation. This is not necessarily a complete departure from conventional peace education approaches (Lopes Cardozo and Hoeks 2015; Bajaj 2015). Rather, the idea is to
depart from the problematic assumption that education necessarily fosters peace and to instead focus on the transformative capacity of education, often taking inspiration from pedagogies forged outside of the formal education sector, such as those formed within social movements. Novelli and colleagues propose to understand ‘transformation’ “in terms of the extent to which education policies, individual and institutional agency, and development programmes promote” social justice (Novelli, Lopes Cardozo, and Smith 2015). Extending critical peace education to ‘pedagogies of resistance’, Bajaj (2015, 155) argues that “asymmetrical power relationships and their (social, political, historical, and economic) roots create unequal forms of citizenship that education, and corresponding social action, must seek to disrupt.” Accessing “information that colonial and unequal socioeconomic processes have denied” becomes part of “larger social movements” with a vision and “plan of action towards, greater equity and social justice” (Bajaj 2015, 157). Choudry and Kapoor argue that

“many powerful critiques and understandings of dominant ideologies and power structures, visions of social change, and the politics of domination and resistance in general emerge from these spaces and subsequently emphasize the significance of the knowledge-production dimensions of movement activism” (Choudry and Kapoor 2010 abstract)

Such conceptions of education as praxis resonate with Paulo Freire’s concepts of critical consciousness and conscientisation, which “does not stop at the level of mere subjective perception of a situation, but through action prepares men for the struggle against the obstacles to their humanization” (Freire 2005, 119). Freire’s constructivist pedagogy invites us “to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation” (Freire 2005, 83). This often implies disrupting the reproductive role of the (formal) education system, which is considered to reinforce hegemonic ideologies, misrecognize the history of suppressed populations and mystify structures of domination (Giroux 1983, 258; Bourdieu 1971).

Given that violent conflict is often partially the result of structural inequalities, approaches that seek to address inequalities and injustices are understandably promising in relation to violent conflict. Magee and Pherali (2019, 44) suggest that an “alternative vision of education […] can offer a useful tool to engage in educational research, policy making and practice in conflict-affected contexts.” Abu Moghli argues that HRE practice needs to stem from bottom-up dynamics and integrate critical thinking so that it can “dismantle structures of oppression” (Abu Moghli 2020). The operationalization of such conceptions in conflict-affected contexts, however, raises a series of questions about the relationship between conscientisation and violence. First, although the objective of conscientisation is to arrive at a state of peace in which historical injustices have been redressed, the process leading to such a state is not necessarily conceived as non-violent. In his writings, Paulo Freire does not exclude the use of violence as a possible means to achieve the ends of social transformation (Giuseppe and Cortez 2016). In Pedagogy of the Oppressed he writes that “the act of rebellion by the oppressed […] is always, or nearly always, as violent as the initial act of the oppressors” (Freire 2005, 56). This resonates with longstanding debates in revolutionary traditions on whether or not recourse to violence is justified to achieve social transformation. Frantz Fanon, who inspired Freire, famously posited that, because of the inherently violent nature of the colonial system, violence is necessary to achieve emancipation from that system (Frazer and Hutchings 2008; Fanon 1961). Second, the process of conscientisation can have specific effects in conflict affected contexts and articulate with dynamics of violence. Indeed, by unveiling and challenging inequalities, conscientisation processes can inadvertently create tensions between groups, and potentially reinforce the polarization generated by the violent conflict. To stick with the dichotomy, the oppressed yearn for change while the oppressors punish anyone who questions the “‘sacredness’ of the social order” (Freire 1985, 116). Conscientisation and tentative acts of resistance, or the rumours thereof, create “nervousness” among the oppressing class (Hunt 2015), and can lead to various forms of retaliation or repression, which can be violent. This can explain the general reluctance
of educational actors to engage frontally with politics and injustices in tense and polarized contexts. When conscientisation activities take place in environments marked by protracted violence, we believe it is relevant to explore the relationship between conscientisation and violence.

**Methodology**

Between October 2017 and October 2021, Save the Children and World Vision implemented the REALISE³ project in six provinces of the DRC, funded by the UK’s Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office as part of the Girl’s Education Challenge. This paper is based on data collected in the province of Tanganyika as part of REALISE’s research component, led by the Institute of Development Studies, in partnership with Marakuja Kivu Research. We first analysed published, administrative, and online sources on the Twa-Bantu conflict, social and political organisation in Tanganyika, the formal education sector, and the history of Twa populations. Fieldwork took place in March, April and May 2019 in the territories of Kalemie, Nyunzu and Kongolo. We carried out 74 semi-structured interviews and four focus group discussions. Key Informants were chosen for their specialist knowledge of the study’s topics: administrators, head teachers, teachers, civilian and military authorities, parents, and schoolchildren. We then translated, transcribed and coded the interviews. After the initial research in 2019, we carried out 9 additional key informant interviews. These were carried out online, given the on-going COVID-19 pandemic. When quoting respondents, we refer to their ethnocultural background (Bantu or Batwa, see below) if we consider it to be relevant.

We applied focused and open coding in our data analysis. Regarding focused coding, we followed the idea of “sensitizing concepts” (Bowen 2006) which means that theory guided coding. We then connected these findings to the wider literature. We began by situating the Twa’s educational marginalisation within wider patterns of exclusion and discrimination, and explored how these horizontal inequalities and grievances are connected to violence. Through open coding we were able to detect an unexpected narrative around Batwa’s conscientisation. Respondents, both Twa and non-Twa, repeatedly argued that human rights workshops facilitated the Twa’s conscientisation with regards to their structural marginalisation, and that this conscientisation process was a fundamental driver of the armed conflict. Our knowledge of other structural and proximate causes of the violent conflict, however, allowed us to keep a critical distance from such allegations, and to approach these data as narratives. Narratives about causes of conflict, like any oral knowledge, are “heterogeneous, fluctuating, and even ‘fragmented’ [...] unequally distributed, variously structured, relatively un-systematized, strategically uttered, and politically manipulated” (Olivier De Sardan 2015). We embarked on “questioning heterogeneities, contradictions, and differences” rather than “flattening them out” (ibid., 12). As Verweijen notes, especially in contexts of conflict, “the referents of knowledge are essentially contested” (Verweijen 2015). Verweijen also proposes Nordstrom’s (Nordstrom 1997) notion of “factx”, “highlighting the ‘x-factor’, or the uncertainty and indefinability surrounding the information that the researcher obtains in war zones” (Verweijen 2015). Rumours abound and “representations can become the paramount field of battle, turning rumours into a powerful weapon of war.” (ibid). Furthermore, we decided to explore the history of Twa emancipation and conscientisation in the DRC, in order to embed the prise de conscience narrative in a wider story of resistance.

In addition to rumours, we also detected widespread prejudice against Twa populations. These permeated the interviews we carried out, revealing a range of pre-conceived, derogatory and

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³ Réussite et Epanouissement via l’Apprentissage et L’Insertion au Système Educatif (Success and Fulfilment through Learning and Integration into the Education System).
often essentialist ideas and discourses that are prevalent at all levels of Congolese society. They derive in part from colonial discourses on race and ethnicity, reproduced and entrenched by the post-colonial Congolese political authorities and majority Bantu populations. They also stem from longstanding prejudice of Bantu societies toward Twa populations that pre-date the colonial era (Klieman 2003). During our data collection and analysis, the research team sought to ‘work and read against’ these discourses, using a research praxis similar to those used to read against prejudiced discourse in colonial archives (Roque and Wagner 2012). Within this field of deep racial stereotypes, rumours and variegated facts, we explore the genealogy of the Twa’s prise de conscience, its alleged role as a driver of armed conflict and use this analysis to discuss the heterogeneous implications of critical education praxis (conscientisation) in an area affected by violent conflict for almost thirty years.

A note on the terminology that we use is warranted. While the term ‘pygmy’ is used by some indigenous people’s rights groups to underline the cross-national experience of exclusion and discrimination (Lewis 2000), most of the Batwa – a ‘pygmy’ group from Eastern DRC – respondents rejected the term ‘pygmy’ due to its negative connotation. Even the name (Ba)Twa is etymologically charged with derogatory notions, such as small, servants, slaves, outsiders and inferiors (Jeffreys 1953, 51). Nonetheless, following our respondents, we use the terms ‘Twa’ or ‘Batwa’ in the article. When abstracting from the DRC, we also use ‘Indigenous population’. We only spell out ‘pygmies’ in direct quotes when we refer to the self-chosen emancipatory label or the imagined racialized group. The majority ‘ethnic’ groups in the DRC are often referred to under the umbrella term ‘Bantu’. Vansina (2004, 494) criticizes the designation of ‘Bantu’ as an “ethnic group or a nation”, and instead recommends speaking of ‘Bantu-speaking groups’. We either specifically refer to a particular ‘ethnic’ group – e.g. Luba – or follow our respondents in speaking of ‘Bantu’, recognizing that the use of these terms is somewhat problematic.

The Batwa of the DRC: exclusion and emancipation
The indigenous populations of central Africa are among the most marginalised populations in the world (Minahan 2002). Reductionist, essentialist and racially charged depictions of these populations have abounded since the times of Ancient Egypt (Bahuchet 1993; Ballard 2006). The longstanding prejudice they have faced is tied to the subaltern position they have historically occupied vis-à-vis the Bantu societies of central Africa, as well as the influence of colonial racial ideologies and classifications, in which they occupied the lowest rank (Klieman 2003). Historically, Twa societies were hunter-gatherer or ‘forest’ societies, with distinct forms of social organisation, although they were intimately connected, linguistically and socially, to Bantu societies (Jeffreys 1953; Klieman 2003). The expansion of Bantu agricultural societies, and the momentous effects of the slave trade and colonial expansion in central Africa, which hardened social hierarchies and led to violent and exclusionary forms of political organisation, increased the marginalisation of the Batwa (Klieman 2003). Deforestation and expulsion resulting from farming, herding, mining and conservation during the colonial and post-colonial eras have also progressively reduced their access to the forest. Today, most Batwa in Tanganyika are (semi-)sedentary, and work as day labourers. In the customary land tenure regimes that prevail in large parts of Tanganyika, they are excluded from the ownership of land as a result of their exclusion from Bantu lineage systems. The Twa usually live on the outskirts of villages and towns, at a distance from services and markets. As in other central African countries, the Batwa face profound negative prejudices and discriminatory social practices. In many areas, for example, they are not allowed to drink from the same source of water, people

4 We use quotes for the term ‘ethnic’, as it also has problematic connotations and a colonial genealogy.
will throw away cups that have been used by them, and Twa men are not allowed to approach Bantu women.

Estimates of the number of Twa in the DRC vary starkly due to insufficient data (Ramsay 2010): between 100,000 and 660,000 according to the World Bank (World Bank 2009), and up to 2 million according to indigenous people rights organisations (IWGIA 2016). Batwa live in nine of the eleven former provinces of the DRC (World Bank 2009). Reportedly, almost half of all Batwa in the DRC live in Tanganyika, where they are highly concentrated in a few territories (World Bank 2009). Despite these numbers, Batwa are not represented in Tanganyika’s provincial assembly, let alone the national parliament (Englebert, Calderon, and Jené 2018).

Marginalisation from education

The Congolese missionary colonial education system functioned largely as a “tool of political and social control” (Depaepe and Hulstaert 2015, 21), and was hardly emancipatory. Depaepe points out that “the fostering of critical consciousness by missionary education continued to be avoided based on fear of the social ramifications” (Depaepe 2017, 20). Situated at the bottom of the colonial racial hierarchy (Ballard 2006; Bahuchet 1993; Klieman 2003), very few Batwa went to colonial schools. Although they were not the only ethnocultural group to be marginalised from colonial schools (H. Vinck 1995), the exclusion of the Twa became particularly pronounced and persistent. Privileged access to missionary education also conditioned access to positions in the administration and education sector in the post-independence era. Exclusion from the state administration often intersects with exclusion from customary authority, which conditions access to key resources, in particular land. As Batwa interviewed in the South Kivu province explain, the lack of agricultural land is central to their difficulty in accessing schools (Matabishi Namashunju 2016). “It has always suited villagers to keep Pygmies ignorant of their rights and entirely dependent upon them for any contact with outsiders” (Beauchlerk 1993, 34). Furthermore, schools were a key institution in the propagation of racialised discourses about ‘Pygmies’ (Warrilow 2008). For example, a textbook used in schools in 1929 stated that “The Pygmies […] exceed all the people of Central Africa in the refusal of developing their own knowledge” (H. Vinck 1998, translation from: Vinck n.d., section 4.3).

Today, numerous obstacles still prevent the Batwa from accessing education, including financial barriers and widespread prejudices against them (Warrilow 2008; World Bank 2009). As a result, the Batwa remain severely marginalised from education (Mukito and Piokoro 1987; G. Mokonzi, Vitamara, and Kakule 2000; Ziulu, Mokonzi, and Zamoy 2017; Warrilow 2008). This marginalisation is testified by their illiteracy rates: over 80 percent and nearly 100 percent for women according to the World Bank (World Bank 2009), 98 % according to a more recent study (Loyombo and Sinafasi 2017, 102). These are much higher than the illiteracy rates of other groups in the DRC. In the study of education in Tanganyika that we carried out in relation to this paper, we found strong quantitative empirical evidence that Twa children have lower enrolment rates, and lower levels of performance across a range of education outcomes (Marchais et al. 2021). Racialised tropes inherited from the colonial era continue to permeate quotidian discourse in Congolese schools, and discriminatory practices abound in and outside of schools (Lewis 2000; Warrilow 2008; Minahan 2002). Respondents described education as a marker of difference: “Because Bantu study they disdain us.” (Focus Group, Twa [Int. 5]). Asked why the Twa do not possess land, one respondent answered that “It is because the Bantu are superior to the Twa. Bantu have been to school, Twa haven’t been to school.” (Int. 51). He added: “The Twa is a human being with their own inferior culture. We have evolved (évolué) thanks to education. The Batwa are inferior because they haven’t gone to school” (Int. 51). The marginalisation of the Batwa from education reflects their broader marginalisation in Congolese society, but it has played a particular role in supressing their understanding of their political rights and thus played a role in perpetuating their exclusion. Although an increasing number of
Twa have gone to school and even gained academic titles, especially among those who became Twa rights activists (Int. 78), the formal education sector has persistently been a site of exclusion and has offered little opportunities for conscientisation. In light of this exclusion, we now discuss how Batwa’s conscientisation has been kindled in alternative spaces over the last three decades.

A brief history of Twa conscientisation

While explicitly Freirean conscientisation activities have taken place in the DRC (Mokonzi 2008; Ewert 1977), the populations of the DRC have also developed other channels of emancipation and conscientisation. The Congo has a long history of social movements, from the rebel movements of the colonial era and early independence era (such as the anti-colonial Pende rebellion of the 1930s, or the post-independence Mulele and Simba rebellions in the 1960s), to the religious and millenarist liberation movements that have flourished throughout the country’s history (such as the Kimbanguist or the Kitawala movements). The Catholic Church of the DRC, which has been one of the main sites of opposition to Mobutu’s regime, was partially influenced by South American liberation theology, which promotes the conscientisation of the oppressed classes (Van Reybrouck 2010, 430). However, given the persistent exclusion of autochthonous populations from Congolese society, the Batwa have not – to our knowledge – been represented in these social movements. A turning point and reference in the Twa’s struggle for the recognition of their rights was the eviction of the Batwa from the Kahuzi Biega National Park in South Kivu in the 1970s, whose consequences are still felt today, with on-going demands for indemnities and recent violent clashes in the area (Simpson and Geenen 2021). The movement for the recognition of the rights of autochthonous populations became more organised in the 1990s, partly in partnership with the global movement for the rights of indigenous populations. The annual yearbooks of the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs suggest an increasing level of advocacy, human rights sensitization, cross-provincial and transnational activities of Congolese indigenous people. In 1991, the first organisation of Batwa people was set up (Lewis 2000), in the wake of the (pursued) post-cold war liberalisation of politics and civil society activities when “civic movements […] helped to awake and shape a strong political consciousness.” (Hoebeke, Nyenyezi, and Vlassenroot 2020, 3). In 1998, representatives of the Congolese Batwa community joined the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations (Lewis 2000). Documents from the year 2000 attest to a growing awareness of political marginalisation and social exclusion and the formulation of demands (L’Observateur, n°998 du 22 au 24 septembre 2000, p.3; quoted in Congo Fraternité et Paix 2002, 42), situating the Batwa’s struggle within a wider frame of decolonization, this time not from Europeans but from the Bantu (Lewis 2000). We must be careful not to impute that a coherent and homogeneous Batwa movement existed on the basis of these sources. In any case, Batwa rights groups gained traction in the early 2000s with the creation of regional, national and international umbrella networks and support groups (Lewis 2000). One preeminent Batwa leaders told us that “I learned a lot from Latin America, from many countries where I went. No one told me what to do” (Int. 78). While older documents located “pygmies” only in the Ituri forests, when “pygmy rights groups” came together in the early 2000s, they were surprised to see “pygmies” from all over the country joining them (Int. 78). Individuals from Tanganyika province, our case study, also got involved (Int. 78). One Twa leader in Tanganyika was recruited and mentored by a Twa leader from the province of South Kivu. Arguably, formal education was an enabling factor, as these activists had been educated in the formal education system (Int. 78, 81).

A pivotal step of the emancipation process began to unfold in 2005. Indigenous’ people’s organisations submitted a complaint to the World Bank Inspection Panel, arguing that the World Bank’s projects on private sector exploitation of forest resources excluded autochthonous people from the processes, thereby neglecting the Bank’s internal safeguarding policy. The
inspection panel emphasized various shortcomings in the Bank’s procedures (World Bank Inspection Panel 2008), which garnered international media attention (e.g. Independent 2011; Reuters 2007), culminating in the design of the 2009 Strategic Framework for the Preparation of a Pygmy Development Program (World Bank 2009). Over the years 2005-09, the Congolese government began to officially use the term “autochthonous people”. Indigenous people’s organisations gained a better understanding of global and national policy processes. The Bank promised to take the rights of indigenous people into account when setting up and implementing projects (Loyombo and Sinafasi 2017). This process coincided with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, passed in 2007, to which the DRC was signatory. Emphasizing the importance of global accords for marginalised groups, a Batwa leader stated that the “Universal Declaration of Human Rights or the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples are always with me, they are my Old and New Testament, my Coran” (Int. 78). The creation of an advocacy network for indigenous populations’ rights in forest systems and the drafting of a law on autochthonous populations’ rights ensued. The draft law was introduced to Parliament in 2014, the parliament signed the law in April 2021 and it now lies with the Senate. Abstracting from the DRC, Epelboin (2012, 77, translation by authors) states that “a conscientisation of their own value, an ethnic pride, here a pygmy pride, a right to resistance, not only passive, but also active” has gained more traction. In the case of Tanganyika, we cannot take this narrative at face value. It can nonetheless provide pieces of the Twa’s conscientisation mosaic. This outline of the longer history of Twa emancipation underlines that the narrative around human rights workshops, conscientisation and violence – which we now discuss – needs to be put in a larger picture of historical struggles against subjugation, from bottom-up demands to global normative frameworks concerning the rights of indigenous populations.

The multiple faces of conscientisation in the Twa-Bantu Conflict
We now turn to our analysis of Twa’s conscientisation during the so-called ‘Twa Bantu’ violent conflict, which started in 2012. We believe that ‘conscientisation’ is an adequate term to designate many of the discourses and practices which respondents referred to. Conscientisation, defined as the process by which marginalized groups become aware of their (historical) subjugation and take action to redress grievances (Freire 1973, 29), is seldom a uniform or homogenous process. Paulo Freire conceived it more as an ideal than a neat and readily operationalizable analytical category. Nevertheless, we use this notion because key terms that came up in our interviews seem to find the most literal translation in conscientisation. Indeed, the respondents repeatedly used the related notions of “sensitisation” (e.g., Int. 8), “lumière” (Int. 5) and “prise de conscience” (e.g., Int. 32, 74). Sensibilisation (english: sensitisation) is a term commonly used in grassroots activism and development projects to describe the dissemination of information to encourage people to change a specific aspect of their behaviour, such as sending girls to school. It also has a colloquial meaning in Congolese society, related to discussing a particular issue and coming to a common understanding of it. Lumière is a reference to Les Lumières, the French term for the Enlightenment. Prise de conscience can be translated as the process of becoming aware, or conscientisation. Such terms had also been used by politicians in relation to the Twa-Bantu conflict (‘emancipation’, Katanga’s provincial minister of the interior, see Human Rights Watch 2015), researchers (Irenge and Mulinganya 2016) and civil society organisations (Groleau 2017 [IRC]; Irenge and Kasindi 2017 [Search for Common Ground]; D. Rogers 2019 [Initiative for Equality]; Human Rights Watch 2015; Jobbins 2017 [Search for Common Ground]).

We first present prevalent narratives concerning the alleged link between conscientisation and the origins of the violent conflict. Second, we show the fundamental limitations of this narrative by discussing the structural and proximate drivers of conflict. Third, we nuance side narratives which appeared in interviews. Finally, we analyse how conscientisation discourses circulated
in the province and articulated with the dynamics of violence. Our objective is not to establish whether or not conscientisation was a causal factor in the onset or continuation of the violent conflict. In reality, a range of factors intersected to ignite the violent conflict that has continued to this day. Furthermore, our methodology, which as noted focuses on the narratives in the interviews, does not allow us to assess causality.

**Prevalent narratives of the conscientisation-violence intersection**

Three interlinked narratives were prevalent in our interviews: first, the claim that the conscientisation of the Batwa through the actions of NGOs incited violence; second, that the Twa misunderstood rights as entitlements that they could reap immediately; third, that the United Nation’s Peacekeeping Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO: Mission de l’Organisation des Nations Unies pour la Stabilisation en République Démocratique du Congo) supported the NGO workshops, and therefore also played a role in initiating violence.

First, numerous respondents claimed that it was the non-formal human rights education activities carried out by grassroots organisations, in particular the Voix des Minorites Indigenes⁵ (VMI, see next section), that caused the violent conflict. According to this narrative, the workshops allowed the Batwa communities to come to a better understanding of their oppression and to become aware of their civil, political, human, and economic rights. These processes allegedly caused outrage and sparked the Batwa’s alleged natural proclivity to violence (Int. 5, 8, 32, 74).⁶

“There are articles that aggravated the Twa, because they didn’t know that these articles existed in the constitution. The Twa considered the domination of the Bantu as normal […]. We need to be honest, the Twa didn’t have any rights.” (Int. 5, Bantu).

In the interviews in Tanganyika, and secondary sources, a causal link between political conscientisation and violent uprising was recurringly drawn:

“It is said that an NGO is the reason for this conflict.” (Int. 3)

the “NGOs who frequently come here are the reason for the conflict in Tanganyika.” (Int. 31, Bantu; also Int. 5, Bantu)

“the sensitization of Twa by the human rights activists is at the root of our conflict.” (Irenge and Kasindi 2017).

“The respect of human rights is the main reason; we were sensitized about human rights. When we became conscious, we began to fight for human rights, also demanding our land.” (Int. 8, Batwa leader)

“‘Sensibilisation’ started in Manono, and that is why the conflict started there […]. Information about human rights were like a knife in the heart of the Twa.” (Int. 5, Bantu)

Second, the NGOs were accused of making false promises to the Twa during their human rights workshops: “I will enable you to leave the bush, you’ll come towards the big agglomerations to live like the Bantu.” (Int. 28, Bantu) or “I will give you power, you’ll be able to marry Bantu women, we’ll build schools, and nice houses for you” (Int. 31, Bantu). This respondent then argued that the Twa misinterpreted these promises because they haven’t been to school. Again, the respondent displays a form of contempt for the Twa, and suggests that a combination of false promises and misinterpretations – in combination with Twa’s impulsiveness – mystified rather than demystified reality. A senior state education official (Int. 3, Bantu) told us the

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⁵ ‘The voice of indigenous minorities’.

⁶ Interestingly, similar accusations have been formulated in the context of Batwa’s return to the Kahuzi-Biega National Park in South Kivu (Simpson and Geenen 2021).
following: the NGO “propagated Twa emancipation, an emancipation that was misunderstood and that developed badly.” Another quote suggests that the Twa wanted to take direct action: “the Twa asked customary leaders to give them a piece of land that they can control and direct […]. That’s how it is with our Twa brothers. The Twa didn’t want to go through a long procedure. They wanted to directly act on it.” (Int. 5, Bantu). A report from a Twa rights organisation also suggests a link between the misunderstanding of key messages and the outbreak of violence (DGPA 2014).

Third, the following quote is emblematic of the alleged link between the MONUSCO and VMI: “In 2017, due to the anger and sensitization through MONUSCO’s VMI, the Twa decided that it was time to liberate themselves from Bantu exploitation. […] The real reason for the conflict is the prise de conscience thanks to MONUSCO’s sensitization.” (Int. 32). Blaming “outside agitation” (Jobbins 2017), respondents shared the rumour, or truth in their viewpoint, that Twa pleaded to the MONUSCO who then founded VMI (Int. 5, Int. 28).

**Nuancing the main narrative: Intersecting causes of the Twa Bantu Conflict**

As stated above, the main Twa rights organisation active in Tanganyika was VMI. VMI was founded in 1999 and has been led by Georges Mbuyu, an activist for Twa rights, who isn’t Twa himself. VMI has been a member of the umbrella organisation Dynamique des Groupes des Peuples Autochtones (DGPA) since 2009. Throughout the 2000s and early 2010s, in the province of Tanganyika, VMI relied on a network of local relays to organise workshops on Twa rights, both their rights guaranteed in the Congolese Constitution and those of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Int. 75, 79, 80), for both Twa non-Twa audiences.

The argument according to which VMI’s conscientisation activities caused the violent conflict is reductive and problematic. In reality, a range of intersecting factors explain the Twa Bantu conflict. As most of the country’s eastern provinces, the province of Tanganyika has undergone successive waves of violent conflict since the 1990s. Violent conflicts have led to a militarisation of the province and deep shifts in the balance of power, which have played a key role in transforming a latent socio-political conflict into a violent conflict. The successful rebellion by Laurent Désiré Kabila in 1996-1997 (First Congo War), initiated and backed by Rwanda and Uganda, and the subsequent conflict between Kabila and his former allies (Second Congo War, 1998-2003) led to the constitution of numerous armed factions in the eastern provinces. These military factions recruited among the Batwa (Spittaels and Meynen 2007), leading to the emergence of a generation of experienced Twa military leaders and combatants. Initially, the Batwa often served as informants and scouts because of their knowledge of the terrain. Given the central place that the Batwa hold in Bantu societies with regards to ritualistic intercession with the spirit world (Klieman 2003), the Twa were also sought for their ritualistic powers and protective amulets, which play an important role in armed groups, notably among the Mai Mai factions (Verhaegen 1969; Shaw 2018). Following the formation of militias to confront Rwandan troops in and around Southern Tanganyika during the second Congo War, Gédéon Kyungu emerged as the main regional warlord in Katanga. After 2011 he adopted a secessionist narrative and his armed group became known as Bakata Katanga (cutting/separating Katanga). The group reportedly included Batwa commanders and fighters. In 2012-13, the Bakata Katanga instigated several attacks in the areas where the Twa-Bantu conflict would break out soon after, notably the territory of Manono in Tanganyika. Some sources state that the FARDC relied on Twa informants for its counter-insurgency campaign against the Bakata Katanga (UCDP, n.d.; Rogers 2019; Groleau 2017). This led to retaliatory attacks by the Bakata Katanga against Twa communities, which sparked outrage in a community already marked by a deep sense of vulnerability and exposure to violence. The Twa commander Nyumbayisha eventually broke away from Gédéon and set up his own militia, called PERCI (a French acronym for “civilian personnel”), who confronted the Bakata Katanga
in Manono territory. A recurring story among Twa communities holds that Gédéon’s cannibalistic practices – in particular his wife, who was accused of eating Twa flesh, which is reportedly believed to produce supernatural effects (Rogers 2019) – sparked Nyumbayisha’s outrage.

A series of events further contributed to an escalation of violence. In 2012-13, Twa merchants refused to pay taxes on the sale of caterpillars and were beaten by Luba tax collectors as a result, sparking further outrage among the Twa and retaliatory violence by Twa associated to the PERCI militia. The caterpillar tax symbolised the unequal and violent regime of oppression upheld by the Bantu majority against the Twa minority. Another frequently mentioned event is a Twa man who found out about an intimate relationship between his wife and a male Bantu. He reportedly reacted by following and attacking the man, leading to retaliatory violence and his murder by a group of Bantu. The beatings and attacks had deep symbolic value, crystallising the resentment of Twa populations and channelling longstanding grievances relating to social marginalisation, access to natural resources and exclusion from land rights toward violent mobilisation (Rogers 2019).

Violence spread throughout Manono territory in 2012-2013, and progressively into the neighbouring territories of Nyunzu, Kalemie and Moba. Several interviewees noted that demographics played a role, particularly in those territories where the Twa constitute a majority of the population, notably Nyunzu territory. Attacks by militias on both sides sparked the formation of auto-defence forces, who engaged in retaliatory attacks. Several state and customary authorities supported the formation of Luba self-defence militia, often referred to as Elements, to repress the Twa movement, in certain cases using extremist rhetoric, hate speech and calling for the “annihilation of pygmy tribes” (EU 2014, 3; see also Bachelet 2020; also Int. 51 and 77).

The data collected for the REALISE project suggests that, in the territory of Kalemie, the Twa populations experienced higher levels of violence than non-Twa populations (Marchais et al. 2021), suggesting an asymmetric conflict. Interviews and reports allege that the Twa fighters were armed mainly with bows and arrows, while opposing forces had access to guns. According to our interviews, the Twa armed groups who spearheaded the violent mobilisation enjoyed considerable popular support in the first years of the conflict. “The Twa from other territories learned that their brothers were being killed in Manono, Nyunzu and Kabalo because they had dared to request their rights. That mobilized all the Twa and that is how the Twa-Bantu conflict flared up in the province” (Int. 5). Recruitment took place “within families” (Int. 1; see also Int. 6), youths were “sensitised by their parents” (Int. 10, young girl, 06.04.19), young people adhered voluntarily to “defend their families” or to “seek revenge for a close one” (Int. 6; see also Int. 31). Most, but not all (Int. 43), families were “proud” (Int. 30, 31), “the population considered them as saviours” (Int. 31). A series of mediations involving MONUSCO, state and customary authorities and Twa leaders led to a ceasefire and the temporary reduction of violence in 2015, but the violence flared up again in 2016-2017, with the epicentre moving to the territories of Nyunzu and Kalemie. Although we do not have confirmatory evidence on the issue, several of our interviewees attributed the resurgence of violence to the political agenda, with some politicians connected to armed groups allegedly stirring up the violence in order to delay the national elections of 2016 and prevent the Twa population from voting in Nyunzu, where they are a majority (Int. 77). As in other provinces of eastern DRC, the armed groups also became enmeshed in illegal activities, competition over mining resources and illegal taxation, further entrenching violent political economies in the province. This also led to new

Alternative versions of Nyumbaisha’s background and the origins of PERCI exist (Kivu Security Tracker 2021, 42).
alliances between armed groups, with Batwa militias reportedly cooperating with Mayi Mayi groups, such as the Apa Na Pale and the Mayi Mayi Yakutumba (Congo Research Group 2019, 6).

In sum, the interplay between structural factors (demographics, horizontal inequalities, marginalisation, discrimination), intermediate factors (past militarisation, available weapons, protection of particular groups) and proximate drivers (symbolic events, retaliatory violence, opportunism of military leaders and politicians) contributed to the outbreak and sustenance of the Twa-Bantu violent conflict. This background strongly nuances respondents’ narratives that the sensitisation of Twa through human rights groups was the central cause of the violent conflict. Nevertheless, further data, to which we return in the last section of the analysis, allows us to dive deeper into the relationship between conscientisation and violence.

**Discussing the prevalent side narratives**

Two important sub-narratives introduced above warrant further discussion (‘misunderstanding’ and ‘MONUSCO’). The claim that Twa’s misunderstanding of human rights led to violence must be seen in the light of deeply ingrained prejudice against the Twa. This prejudice has the effect of making the conscientisation-violence narrative seem plausible, as it draws from the prejudice that Twa are uneducated, unable to grasp complex ideas, and naturally predisposed to irrational violence. The ‘misunderstanding’ narrative reconciles the otherwise contradictory notions of ‘conscientisation’ and the rampant belief that Batwa lack an interest in education and that they are still mainly hunter-gatherers who love the forest more than ‘civilised’ life. Moreover, it is important to bear in mind that the narratives seeking to establish a causal link between conscientisation and violence are likely to be influenced by efforts to delegitimise the Twa rights movement, both before and during the conflict, by attributing the blame for the violence to the activism of the Twa rights associations and the Twa themselves. They therefore need to be considered with ample critical distance.

Finally, with regard to the MONUSCO’s alleged involvement, data from large-scale studies in other conflict-affected provinces attest that levels of trust in the MONUSCO’s ability to provide security to the Congolese populations in Eastern DRC is very low (P Vinck et al. 2019). Another explanation for the salience of this narrative is that the MONUSCO did support the reconciliation processes from 2016 onwards (Int. 15), and respondents might have telescoped different years and episodes of the conflict when attributing the outbreak of the conflict in 2012-13 to the MONUSCO. Here again, these narratives might have been influenced by political agendas and rumours seeking to delegitimise the MONUSCO by blaming it for the violence, which is also visible in another widespread rumour according to which the MONUSCO provided weapons—particularly, modern arrows—to the Twa.

Taken together, the sub-narratives about misunderstanding and the MONUSCO strengthen the overarching narrative on the direct link between human rights workshops and the outbreak of violence. In what follows, we analyse this alleged link more carefully by looking at the articulation of conscientisation activities with dynamics of violence.

**“Prise de conscience”: a case of radical conscientisation?**

We now look more closely at the tense and polarized social context in which non-formal educational activities took place in Tanganyika. This analysis seeks to elucidate the relationship between conscientisation and the onset of violence, without, however, seeking to establish causality. We first investigate Twa’s changed attitude regarding the fallibility of Bantu and the viability of violence as an option; second, we emphasize how the increased need for protection became entangled with the conscientisation discourse. Third, we look at the violent repression of Twa’s conscientisation through Bantu communities and authorities.
VMI’s non-formal human rights and civic education activities took place in a context marked by deep tensions and rampant violence, a legacy of the Congolese wars intensified by the ongoing Bakata Katanga rebellion and counterinsurgency operations in the province. The legacy of the Congo Wars and resulting militarisation of the province first entailed that, for some Twa of Tanganyika, armed revolt had increasingly become a viable option. Harassment, physical violence and even outright murder of indigenous people in the DRC/Zaire occurred in the past, but did not lead to large-scale violence (Beauclerk 1993). Past conflicts had somehow been managed and suppressed, but the Twa had reportedly “retained their resentment” (Int. 13, 32, 74). One respondent argued that “the Bantu chiefs and other Bantu continued to mistreat Twa, not knowing that it’s not the same Twa as in the past” (Int. 51). The emergence of a generation of Twa soldiers and military leaders who had often fought alongside or against Bantu combatants in the province had changed the perception of the ‘rapport de force’ between Twa and Bantu. Indeed, beyond the military socialisation of Batwa, the wars of the 1960s and the Congo Wars had gradually revealed that the Bantu were fallible, physically, and militarily. A form of demystification happened among the Batwa, who realised that the long-standing myth of the physical superiority of the Bantu was an illusion: “Being armed, the Pygmies felt they now should be taken seriously. They no longer accepted the authority of […] representatives of the Congolese state over the territories that traditionally had been ruled by their forefathers […] A sort of ‘political awakening’ occurred.” (Spittaels and Meynen 2007). This erosion of the myth of physical infallibility of the Bantu is reminiscent of other configurations of domination, notably the colonial era. In the Belgian Congo, as in other colonies throughout the continent, the conscription of Congolese soldiers during the First and Second World Wars contributed to erode the myth of European physical and military infallibility on which colonial domination partially relied. Moreover, again reminiscent of the postwar grievances of the African soldiers enlisted in European armies, the “end of the Congo wars has left the Pygmies as frustrated as before” (Spittaels and Meynen 2007), as they received no military grades and were reportedly excluded from processes of disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (ibid.). Importantly, the rebellions to which the Twa had participated were also sites of conscientisation, notably through the leftwing revolutionary ideologies that had been present since the 1960s. Increasingly, therefore, there was a realisation among some Twa of Tanganyika that military resistance constituted a viable option for addressing historical injustices.

The second aspect we need to address is the entanglement of conscientisation and protection. As in other conflict affected provinces of eastern DRC, notably Ituri where large scale massacres of indigenous populations occurred during the Second Congo War in the early 2000s (Minority Rights Group and Réseau des Associations Autochtones Pygmées 2004), the marginalisation of Twa populations and their deprivation of rights was accompanied by their exposure to violent forms of extortion and repression. This meant that the protection of Twa communities, both from exploitative practices which often had a coercive character and from attacks by armed factions, was a prevalent concern among the Twa communities. In 2012-2013, the security threat posed by retaliatory attacks by the Bakata Katanga heightened the need for protection of Batwa communities and raised the profile of the newly formed militia, that would play a key role in spearheading the conflict and embodied a new threat that could weight into political negotiations. The Batwa militia leaders, and most prominently Nyumbayisha,

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8 These dynamics are reminiscent of the “political awakening” of Congolese subjects in the 1950s (Lemarchand 1964; Ndaywel è Nziem 2006). In the late 1950s, an increasing number of subtle and straightaway attacks eroded Belgium authority, opening up a space where “any incident would be immediately magnified” (Weiss 1967). Quarrels “which previously would have been stopped by a stern word from a European nun now would mushroom” (Weiss 1967). “Refusal to pay taxes was widespread.” (Renton, Seddon, and Zeilig 2007, 79, drawing from Legum 1961, 61).
reportedly framed their movement as a struggle for the emancipation of the Twa, thereby appropriating and redeploying the conscientisation narratives that had been prevalent in the province and adopting a ‘direct action’ radical stance (Int. 75).

The process of conscientisation of the Twa populations of Tanganyika, spearheaded by the activism of pro-Twa NGOs, therefore took place in a highly polarized and militarized social context, where violence was a viable option. This does not mean, however, that the activist organisations who operated in the province were responsible for the violent uprising, as the narratives we previously analysed would lead us to think. Follow up interviews carried out with a range of close witnesses to the activities of VMI stressed that the NGO did not promote violence (Int. 75, 79, 80, 81). Some pointed to aspects of VMI’s approach that might have played a role in stoking up the tensions, notably the insufficient consultation of customary authorities and populations during the workshops, and the radical stance that VMI adopted on Twa rights, advocating for the immediate addressing of political injustices, while others strongly opposed such accusations.

The same interviewees, however, stressed that it was the repression of conscientisation, and the increasing tension, that sparked the violence that spread through the province. Taking a literal stance on the messages of conscientisation, it appears that some Twa in Manono demanded an immediate application of their rights, requesting land from the customary authorities who controlled the land, refusing to accept the highly unequal working conditions that prevailed, and opposing resistance to the myriad quotidian forms of discrimination that prevailed in the region. These were opposed by customary leaders and state authorities seeking to maintain the status quo. “Bantu chiefs were not happy that the Twa discovered the constitution, which showed him his rights and obligations.” (Int. 5 ; see also Jobbins 2017). The Twa claim that the Bantu do not want them to receive a high quality education for the very reason that they do not want them to evolve politically (Irenge and Mulinganya 2016). As one respondent said: “the Bantu are unhappy when a Twa is trying to make progress” (Int. 51). Similarly, an expert on indigenous people’s rights told us that “the increasing awareness and claims of Batwa made Bantu nervous” (DGPA 2017, 14). Conscientisation for some seems to be radicalisation for others. In fact, the supposed link between the Twa’s increased activism and the increase in violence made the court of Kalemie indict Georges Mbuyu, head of VMI, for incitement for tribal/ethnic hatred in 2014. Georges was later completely acquitted. The court accused him of disseminating the draft Indigenous People’s Rights Law and thereby inciting violence. As a report by a Twa rights group argues, this accusation was instrumentalised to “destabilise the efforts of organisations protecting the rights of indigenous populations.” (DGPA 2014, 4; authors’ translation). A well-known advocate for Batwa rights cited all of the human rights agreements that Congolese governments have signed, and rhetorically asked “Why would Georges be wrong to teach the Batwa about their rights?” (Int. 78). In contrast with the prevalent narrative according to which conscientisation drove Batwa’s violent behaviour, these findings suggest that violence, and the repression of educational activities, was the response of some Bantu authorities to Batwa’s conscientisation. Indeed, after several attempts for political mediation were curtailed and violently repressed, the violent option embodied by the Twa militias, who also promoted direct action, gained traction. As tit-for-tat retaliatory violence spread, and the Bantu state and customary authorities intensified the

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9 Another interpretation is that personal grudge by the district commissioner, Jean-Félix Illunga Mpfau, against Georges Mbuyu encouraged Illunga Mpfau to demand Mbuyu’s imprisonment (DGPA 2014).

10 Similarly, the Banyamulenge’s emancipation in South Kivu went hand in hand with deteriorating relations with neighbouring ethnic groups “who feared the Banyamulenge’s empowerment would harm their interests.” (Stearns and Anon. 2013)
repression of the movement, the movement increasingly took a violent turn, and conscientisation became increasingly articulated with a call to arms.

**Conclusion**

In order to investigate the relationships between conscientisation and violence, we explored how and to what end ‘conscientisation’ is articulated in discourses of various actors in Tanganyika in the period before and during the Twa-Bantu conflict. We demonstrated that several actors pursued, instrumentalised or opposed the conscientisation of the Batwa. First, national and local Human Rights Organisations, who had been carrying out awareness raising work since the 1990s. In the 2000s, some of these adopted a more militant stance, and evolved within a context marked by increasing polarisation before and during the Twa Bantu conflict in Tanganyika. Second, Batwa armed groups, who garnered considerable popular support in the early stages of the violent conflict in Tanganyika. They used a discourse revolving around conscientisation to legitimise a violent challenge to the established political and social order. Third, networks of family and community who played a key role in spreading the messages of conscientisation and in some cases the associated call to arms. Finally, state and customary authorities, many of whom opposed the militant conscientisation of the Batwa and sought to either curtail or de-legitimise it.

Conscientisation therefore had multiple faces with regard to the Twa Bantu armed conflict. Consequently, our analysis dispels the idea, prevalent in primary and secondary data, that NGOs’ human rights education activities were the main cause of the violent conflict. Rather, several structural and proximate factors articulated to ignite the violence. Yet our analysis also demonstrates that, as a discourse and praxis, conscientisation can circulate beyond the confines of educational activities and be appropriated by a range of actors, including those calling for violence. It can mobilise people, but it can also be mobilised against people. In certain cases, it can reinforce social polarisation, which accompanies violent conflict, and it can become entangled with discourses that underpin violence. Albeit stemming from educational activities, conscientisation is not purely ‘educational’. Conscientisation is strongly entangled with cultural, political, economic, and military struggles (see Robertson and Dale 2015 for a discussion of the Cultural Political Economy of Education), the construction of memories and imaginations, and the emergence of a collective self (Sanal Mohan 2015).

Our results do not challenge the importance of critical peace education / conscientisation, but they do raise questions about the promotion of transformative educational approaches in contexts marked by protracted violence. Education actors cannot ‘control the narrative’ with regards to conscientisation, or prevent certain actors from using the language of conscientisation to justify violence. This is in many senses inevitable, given that all concepts and notions are up for interpretation and appropriation, and given that, in certain configurations, violence can be a coherent strategy to achieve change, as Freire himself had noted. Yet there seems to be a general reluctance and hesitancy to discuss the entanglement of conscientisation and violence, which key EiE policy documents do not address (INEE 2013). This hesitancy is also visible in the gap that exists between peacebuilding approaches that prescribe a focus on addressing the root causes of conflict (UNICEF 2016), and the actual project activities which often turn out to be much less ‘radical’ (Patrick Vinck, Pham, and Balthazard 2017). From a ‘do-no-harm’ perspective, this hesitancy is largely understandable, and in many senses warranted. NGOs, which are often much more attuned to context-specific complexities than is assumed, can have sound reasons to seek to remain apolitical in their activities. Our analysis both warrants caution and emphasises the importance of transformative approaches to education in conflict-affected contexts. The impact of radical educational praxis can be unpredictable in contexts of utmost inequality and protracted violence. Hence, critical peace education and
transformative peacebuilding approaches might gain from discussing the question of violence more openly and critically.
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Interviews

Interviews in Tanganyika province

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**Follow-up interviews (online)**

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