

I. An Overview of the Region, Relevant Categories and Terms

For the purposes of discussion, the region can be divided into 3 zones. The zone west of the Great Lakes was characterized by powerful kingdoms with well-entrenched hierarchies and considerable differentiation between lords, commoners, serfs and tenants. The zone east of the Great Lakes, but not including the Nande heartland in the north, can be described as “forest peoples” who have been organised into kingdoms, in which the leaders played a powerful ceremonial role in the precolonial kingdom and a political role in the colonial kingdoms. The Nande region of the north can be described as a “state within a state.” This group is highly centralized and sees itself as separate from the Kivu region.

A. The Zone West of the Great Lakes

Overall, there has been a long history of coexistence of these groups in the region. Most of the population has ties between the separate groups and most are members of clans which transcend the ethnic boundaries to which they have been categorised. Excluding the **Bwisha**, the **Banyamulenge** and the **Banyarwanda**, who have a somewhat different social organization, some general comments on political and economic organization and on kinship can be made about these societies.

Political and Economic Organization

Many of these groups were consolidated into kingdoms in the precolonial past. Some did so relatively recently, i.e. the i.e., of Ijwi. Some did so less recently, i.e., the Buhaya kingdom and Ngweshi kingdom of the Shi. Some were created by the Belgians, i.e., the **Babembe**, the **Bahunde** in South Kivu. The kings in these societies would have played a strong ceremonial role, would have raised armies in response to external threats and played a weak political role in the everyday lives of their subjects. Clans would have been far more important in the everyday lives of the peasantry. Most of these people would have followed a mixed strategy of agricultural production, livestock production and hunting and gathering.

Clans

Throughout these regions people are organised into clans. These can cut across ethnicities, and provide strong horizontal linkages between peoples in various geographic areas. In western social science, clans normally are seen as tracing kinship back to a common ancestor even if all the links are not known. In the