The arrival of the traders in these regions, not unexpectedly, led to tensions with the local populations and to significant, long-term hardships for those populations.

As one historian notes, “[i]n the three decades between 1865 and 1895, the peoples of eastrn [Congo] lost their autonomy, first to Afro-Arab traders in the service of the Sultan of Zanzibar and then to the Congo Free State in the service of King Leopold II of Belgium” (Northrup 1988:13).

Before the arrival of the traders, global trade had reached Manyema only indirectly with cultural and economic forces from such ethnic groups as the Tetela to the southwest and Lega to the north exerting the greatest regional influence.

As a result, the peoples of the savanna that lies south of the Congo rainforest evolved complex relationships between themselves and the local geography, including the practices of mixed agriculture and cattle-keeping, and among themselves and the hunter-gatherer populations of the forest, with whom they engaged in vibrant exchange.

Ethnic identity was, to a degree, quite fluid, more so towards the Lega populations of the north – a circumstance that persists to the present day in, what one authority calls, the “bewildering diversity of ethnic units” that serve as “cultural buffer groups” between the Lega and their more distant neighbors (Northrop 1988:13-18; Wisnicki 2013:218ff.; Biebuyck 1973:5, 17).