



## **Master's Thesis**

### **The political geography of (social) media and conflict in Eastern Congo**

Eastern DRC has experienced continuous cycles of violence and armed conflict across the past 25 years, following upon an even longer history of exploitative colonial and post-colonial rule. Ever since, framing and representation of the Congolese battle-space in the media, but also general patterns politics and society are marred by misunderstanding, cultural imperialism, and eurocentrism.

The image of DRC (formerly Zaire and Belgian Congo) – be it through historical misreading as with Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness' or through paternalist analysis as with Herbst's and Mills's 'Invisible State' – usually remains constructed outside the very same country and with little participation of its people. Particularly successful DRC narratives include the construction of the Congolese woman as a victim, the uniformed Congolese man as perpetrator, the non-existence of the state, or the equation of artisanal mining with looting and crime. This help reifying Africa's second largest country as a potpourri of greedy warlords and suffering displaced populations.

But post-colonial bigotry and subsequent misrepresentation is not the only bias in DRC's media representation. Actual conflict becomes increasingly reproduced online, rendering both the conflict and its representation ubiquitous. Mushrooming news sites and epic verbal confrontations on social media mark the onset of a parallel struggle over interpretational supremacy in the social web but also trigger stereotypes 2.0, both in the global North and among Africans opposing each others' views and opinions. During the M23 rebellion, these parallel conflicts became particularly salient. Social networks became the locus of competition and clashes between pro- and anti-M23 advocates, between Congolese and Rwandans (these two 'frontlines' not necessarily being identical).

This Master thesis will start from social media analysis (twitter, facebook, instagram, but also press releases etc.) to identify and locate the main fault lines and types of protagonists. In a second step, these observations shall be embedded into the general political and geographical development of the conflict to identify key similarities and differences between the actual and the virtual war. The thesis will do so by analysing the synchronous and non-synchronous features of the fall of Goma and the concomitant social media warfare across November and December 2012 as an example for a modified type of 'everywhere war' that takes place in the virtual space where it develops a dynamics of its own.

- The methods include a literature review, media analysis, and online desk research.
- Literature suggestions and methodological support will be provided during supervision.
- Theses can be written in either English or German.

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