

# Producing Journalistic Discourse on War: A Congolese Experience

Justine Brabant

Journalist, independent researcher; [Justine.brabant@gmail.com](mailto:Justine.brabant@gmail.com)

## Abstract

Based on the author's experience as both a journalist and an independent researcher working regularly in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), this article examines the many constraints that journalists face in areas of armed conflict. It considers two unusual aspects of journalistic practice observed in the DRC: first, the reporters' *lexical* dependence – that is, how the language journalists typically use to describe war is borrowed, sometimes unconsciously, from the war-related rhetoric developed in other fields – and second, journalists' *practical* dependence on humanitarian organisations and how this might influence the articles they produce.

**Keywords:** DRC, journalism, conflict, language

## Introduction

What is the logic governing journalistic practices in armed conflict contexts?<sup>1</sup> There are obvious physical constraints that make it difficult for sociologists and anthropologists to directly observe reporters working in war zones or areas of armed conflict. And while it is no substitute for direct observation, I would like to share my own experience of the multiple constraints that journalists face in crisis zones and of the interdependencies – often invisible to the reader – that influence the accounts of such conflicts.<sup>2</sup>

Drawing on my own experience as a journalist and independent researcher who has worked regularly – though not exclusively – in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) since 2012, I considered the work of a journalist reporting on the DRC from four different perspectives based on:

- my experience as a journalist who wrote articles on armed conflict in the DRC, a *bande dessinée* on social mobilisation in North Kivu<sup>3</sup> and a non-fiction book on eastern Congolese fighters<sup>4</sup>;
- my contemporaneous work as a 'media' journalist for the *Arrêt sur images* website<sup>5</sup> for which I inventoried and examined the practices of journalists who had worked in the DRC<sup>6</sup>;
- my social science research training, where I studied how the French print media had talked about the wars in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, and more specifically about the so-called 'Mai-Mai' militias<sup>7</sup>;

- a year spent in the DRC as an independent researcher for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in North and South Kivu which gave me a better understanding of the violence playing out in the eastern Congo.<sup>8</sup>

I deal with two – to my mind – poorly understood journalistic practices in situations of extreme violence. The first is a type of *lexical* dependence – that is, how the language journalists typically use to describe war is borrowed from war-related rhetoric developed in other fields (humanitarian aid, diplomacy, or human rights advocacy), sometimes without being aware of it, and hence not always appreciating the relevance of such appropriation. The second is *practical* reliance on humanitarian organisations and why this is particularly significant when reporting on the Congolese conflicts, and what impact it might have on the articles being produced.

## Defining Journalist

I should be more specific about what the word 'journalist' is referring to in this article. In his thesis on the influence of French military communications on media coverage of the war in Afghanistan, Romain Mielcarek distinguished between the three categories of journalists who had covered France's intervention in Afghanistan: journalists that 'specialised in international reporting' (sometimes also called *grands reporters*), sent to cover different conflicts or regions depending on current events; journalists who were regional specialists (either

Paris-based or foreign correspondents); and journalists who specialised in defence issues (Mielcarek, 2018: 162–9).

The conflicts in eastern DRC have been covered by both *grands reporters* and by regional specialists (heading the ‘Africa’ section of the daily newspapers, or correspondents and freelancers based in Goma, Kinshasa, Kigali or Nairobi). However, very few of the conflicts have been covered by French defence specialists, in part due to the recent lack of French military involvement in the DRC.<sup>9</sup> So I am talking primarily about regional specialists (the category I feel closest to) and, to a lesser extent, special correspondents – whose *modus operandi* I am somewhat familiar with from having rubbed shoulders with them in the course of my research. One final detail: in large part, my observations concern journalism conducted on a ‘freelance’ basis, that is, not as a permanent employee of a media outlet, but as an independent contractor who is paid by the article and generally works with several outlets at once. This was the most common situation of the journalists I met in the Congo, with the notable exception of very news-dense periods – for example, when the first and second Congo wars started in 1996 and 1998, respectively – when sending permanent journalists is warranted.

## The Words Journalists Use to Describe War: A Series of Loans

Before going to armed conflict zones to work as a journalist, I started by reading articles that other people had written; for my master’s thesis, I chose to analyse how French print media handled conflicts in the eastern Congo (Brabant, 2011). At the time, I was struck by how often the journalists, in writing their articles, borrowed the lexicon and frames of reference from other fields (humanitarian aid, diplomacy and international criminal justice) without, it appeared, always being conscious of those origins – and thus without taking the time to think about whether those loans were apt.

As it is not my aim to single out any particular colleague or media outlet, I will use a few of my own errors and questions by way of example. One of the certainties and obvious facts I took with me during my early investigations in the Congo was this: that there was a distinction between civilians and combatants. My reasoning went more or less as follows: ‘Once I’m there, I’ll start with an article on civilian victims, and after that I may meet some combatants and ask them to explain why they go after civilians.’ It didn’t take long to realise that some eastern Congolese were *both*. That was especially true of the groups I had chosen to study more specifically: the Mai-Mai.<sup>10</sup> Young people from Uvira or Baraka (South Kivu) explained to me that they were

students by day, but at night would go out and do rounds to ‘secure their neighbourhood’. Were they ‘civilians’ or ‘combatants’? And what about when some of those rounds turn into punitive expeditions? Or their vigilante group starts meeting during the daytime, too, to ‘tax’ sellers on their way to the local market?

This was when I first became aware of the borrowing – unchecked – from other fields, in that case, from international humanitarian law and international criminal justice. Is the civilian/combatant distinction, which has concrete implications for legal practitioners,<sup>11</sup> still relevant when it’s merely a question of describing with no intention to judge or characterise legally? In this particular case, I realised not only that the distinction was probably too black-and-white to adequately describe the logic of east Congolese violence, but also that it perpetuated a sort of compartmentalisation that could blind us to other types of fluidity in individual trajectories. For example, some people move back and forth between the militia world and that of development NGOs (non-governmental organisations). In South Kivu, around ten of the people I surveyed had both political or military responsibilities in Mai-Mai groups and responsibilities in local development and farm-support NGOs; in that capacity, some were also regular interlocutors with MONUSCO, the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

A second example of words and expressions imported by journalists covering armed violence is the semantic field of ‘crisis’. How many reporters accustomed to communications from emergency medical NGOs have talked about ‘countries in crisis’ or ‘humanitarian crises’ when saying ‘civil war’, while ‘land use disputes militarised by political/military entrepreneurs’ or ‘problems with access to water and healthcare facilities’ might have been more accurate and informative? Similarly, how many ‘neglected crises’ or ‘neglected conflicts’ have we, as journalists, hoped to bring to light? That expression is used a lot with regard to the DRC. But what ‘neglect’ are we talking about when, in terms of budget, the DRC has the largest UN peacekeeping mission and hundreds of active national and international NGOs? I understand how the language of emergency, crisis and neglect appeals to the communications people at emergency medical NGOs, and I make no judgements about the relevance of its use – these are debates that, I imagine, enliven general assemblies and other meetings at Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF). But I’m not sure that they stir much discussion at the editorial meeting of French media outlets. One of the causes, no doubt, is French journalists’ relative unfamiliarity with humanitarian work – something observed by both humanitarian workers who have rubbed shoulders with journalists and reporters specialising in international issues.<sup>12</sup>

A third and final example is the frames of reference imported from the fields of diplomacy and ‘peace-keeping’. Again, it took me a while to realise that talking about a ‘peace process’ was not very instructive for readers. Supposing that there is something that could be called a ‘peace process’ in the Congo, when did it start? In 1999, with the Lusaka Accord? In 2002, with the Pretoria Accord? Years later, when those commitments began to take concrete form? Or much earlier, during the initial discussions between the warring factions – most of them secret? And now, when there are even more armed actors in eastern DRC, what can be said about this ‘peace process’? Perhaps we should instead be talking about ‘negotiations between such-and-such a representative’ – who may or may not be very representative – of the Congolese government and ‘such-and-such an armed group, with the immediate objective of handing over some weapons or men to the provincial authorities in exchange for political posts or posts within the military apparatus’. While such wording is longer and no doubt more tedious, it would at least not lull our readers with magical thinking about ‘peace’ being built.

The fact that journalists draw liberally from the diplomatic well when it comes to war contexts was confirmed by a *Le Monde* veteran who had done some reporting in Goma in 1996, whom I interviewed for a study (Brabant, 2011). As he explained it:

When we arrive in a country that we’re not familiar with, and one with such a weighty past, what’s crucial to us as journalists is to find credible, reliable people, interlocutors who have some memory of the place. It’s standard practice for journalists to go to the embassy. At the time [1996], there was a fairly effective French embassy in Kigali [where he stopped on his way to the DRC]. I got briefed on the political situation, as perceived by the embassy. That didn’t mean that it was the absolute truth, but it was a form of analysis.

The frames of reference offered by diplomatic actors – like the ones imported from the humanitarian and international criminal justice fields – are even more likely to find an enduring place in journalistic reporting, because for many reporters some of the favourite sources for gathering information before leaving for a country or region they are unfamiliar with are previous articles on the subject by their media outlet. The same *Le Monde* journalist explained how he would gather information before leaving on assignment:

Even if it was an emergency, we would ask the archives to prepare a file. (...) I would ask the archives to prepare – it might take an hour – as complete a file as possible: the longest articles we had done, a sheet with most recent population/ethnicity data, the latest credible, reliable quantitative data, and then the most recent major articles we were able to do.

And while the internet spelled the end of archive departments at French newspapers, looking to what their colleagues had written previously was a reflex shared by all reporters preparing to be sent abroad, in general, and to conflict areas, in particular.

These observations do not mean that journalism is just a passive vessel for war accounts produced in other fields, or that it is the only profession that imports jargon from others. Certain tics of journalistic language are picked up by other producers of discourse on armed conflict and extreme violence. Journalists’ expectations – whether real or presumed – shape the work of many of their interlocutors, humanitarian workers included. But what is distinct about the borrowing I am talking about is that it involves describing war in ways that are produced by actors who, unlike journalists, have a prescriptive agenda – one that aims to influence reality, not just describe it.

## Journalists’ Dependence on Humanitarian Organisations, and Its Consequences

Lexical dependence – or in any case the relative lack of independently created language on conflict – is in my view explained, in large part, by journalists’ material dependence on other actors. For journalists working in eastern DRC, this dependence is especially pronounced when it comes to humanitarian organisations – international NGOs working in emergency medical assistance, logistics, protection and education, in particular.

There is a high degree of dependence in the Congo due to the logistical difficulties in accessing North Kivu, South Kivu, Ituri, Maniema and Tanganyika provinces. The lack of paved roads over much of the territory, the vast size of these provinces, and the constraints imposed by banditry and armed activism make travel quite expensive. Yet journalists who come to write about or film an armed conflict generally have two primary obligations: to produce a piece that contains the main elements we expect from war reporting (‘news’, analysis and above all ‘reportage’, i.e. ‘things seen’ by the reporter which embody the subject and at the same time prove that he or she was actually there), while limiting the cost and risks. Taking advantage of NGO jeeps addresses both the need to be ‘where it’s happening’ (whether a refugee camp, the scene of killings or an Ebola treatment centre) and the need to limit the financial cost of such travel.

Access problems are not unique to the DRC. ‘If, as a journalist, I want to know more of what is going on inside Angola or Sudan – because I smell a good story – I have no alternative but to draw on the resources of an aid

organisation involved,’ noted William F. (Bill) Deedes, a *Telegraph* reporter and a regular in conflict zones (Deedes, 2004). But another aspect of the Congolese context heightens this dependency: the number of armed groups in North and South Kivu and their fragmentation. The Kivu Security Tracker database, a website curated by researchers from the Congo Research Group (affiliated with the New York University Center on International Cooperation) and Human Rights Watch, lists 160 armed groups active in North and South Kivu provinces.<sup>13</sup> And though some of these groups have only a few dozen fighters, knowing their geographic sphere of influence, who their leaders are, and what actions they engage in is still important for reducing the risk of kidnapping or attack as they move about. Their fragmentation makes this analysis even more costly (in both resources and time). Being able to rely on the know-how of a network of humanitarian professionals is, once again, an invaluable asset for reporters.

There is a third and final element making journalists more dependent on humanitarian organisations: the weakness of the data produced by Congolese institutions – mapping and demographic data, in particular. The DRC has not conducted a general population census since 1984.<sup>14</sup> In contrast, the NGOs’ data collection capacities – combined with the rapidly growing number of collaborative mapping tools – has made it possible to produce maps and numbers invaluable to reporters. Consider a practical example: let’s say that I’m a journalist who has one week in South Kivu to write an article on the most recent political and security developments in the province. The media outlet has given me a 300-euro budget to spend in the field (a situation I personally experienced just a few months ago, in 2019). At every stage of preparing for and doing my reporting, humanitarian logistics appear to be the simplest, if not only, solution. In preparing for my trip, the most up-to-date maps come from Missing Maps,<sup>15</sup> the Kivu Security Tracker (see earlier), and the Logistics Cluster – the group of humanitarian organisations working on logistics and headed up, in the Congo, by the UN’s World Food Programme. In order to best assess where I can go in the province, I will probably also need the most recent security analyses produced by NGOs – preferably those with a reputation for detailed, up-to-date analysis fed by a solid network, such as MSF. When it is time to set off, I will probably turn to the humanitarian organisation’s jeeps, which are considered safer and faster than public transport, or even to a MONUSCO flight if I want to get to hard-to-reach places quickly – for example, the high plateaus of Minembwe. If, finally, I have the misfortune to be a freelance journalist and have no media outlet placing a satellite telephone at my disposal, my usual response

would probably be to go to the International Rescue Committee (IRC) base or another international organisation’s local office to ask for Wi-Fi access, or any other way to file my piece with my editors.

Such dependency leaves its mark on the articles produced by reporters. Of the 58 pieces written by journalists sent to the DRC between 1996 and 2010 and analysed as part of my master’s thesis, 52 per cent (30 of 58 articles) mentioned at least one humanitarian organisation, international NGO or UN agency. The tendency to mention such organisations increased over time: 45 per cent of the pieces published from 1996 to 2002 mentioned at least one NGO, and this figure rose to 62 per cent for the period 2003 to 2010 (Brabant, 2011).

Humanitarian organisations are not just a logistical resource for reporters; they also provide them with ‘angles’, analysis and frames of reference. Yet producing more profound interpretations than ‘I heard shots in the distance’ or ‘three people were killed by gunfire’ also takes financial and physical resources. Unlike journalists – who often set off on their own with just their backpacks, phones and laptops – humanitarian workers, diplomats and even intelligence agencies have the physical resources needed to more systematically analyse events that, if merely reported, don’t ‘say’ much at all.

Suppose that the day after tomorrow I arrive in Kitchanga, North Kivu as a journalist and I hear heavy weapons fire not far from the entrance to town. What information am I going to be able to gather – say, in two hours – about those shots, and how can I interpret and report it to my readers? In that amount of time, if I am not particularly familiar with the context, I will most likely get a brief statement from the police or the Congolese army telling me that an investigation is underway, and then I will contact two or three more or less first-hand witnesses who may say: ‘We were woken up by the shots, we were scared, there was a lot of confusion.’ Now imagine that I’m an MSF employee. I am in the same location, hearing the gunfire. What am I going to learn in two hours? Something substantially different. If things go well, I will know who fired the shots and why; I will have contacted the armed groups who will have confirmed or denied their involvement in the shooting; I will know as much, in my opinion, as the intelligence services and the Congolese army, or even more. Why? Because I have information at my disposal from a large number of MSF employees in North Kivu who can go out into the province, thanks to experienced drivers and well-equipped and maintained vehicles; because those employees have brothers, sisters, uncles, or cousins who are members of, or are at least connected to, the armed groups and who speak all the province’s languages. In addition, I can rely on the organisation’s memory – in particular, networks forged by years of

being there on the ground. As a journalist I am alone, and in the best-case scenario I have a vehicle and three phone numbers that a colleague held onto from a previous assignment. Creative use of these limited resources and, above all, the war reporter's isolation – which allows a more independent, yet fragile, view of the violence – are mentioned by Adrien Jaulmes, a *Le Figaro* reporter and ex-soldier (he was a lieutenant in the Foreign Legion) when describing war zone journalism as a kind of 'craft', a 'highly individualistic' exercise often beset by 'logistical problems' and problems with 'access to the fighting' (Raspiengeas, 2018).

The relative myopia of journalists sent to armed conflict zones can be explained in part by their isolation and lack of sophisticated resources, and in part by the fact that sometimes, in the midst of a war, not much is comprehensible.<sup>16</sup> The greatest reporters have experienced this, and some have dared to describe this blindness. One was Jack London, the famous American writer sent to Korea to cover the Russo-Japanese war in 1904, who wrote, confused, of 'black moving specks', the 'hubbub', in short, 'a war of ghosts' (quoted in Audouin-Rouzeau, 2008: 244). And when *Le Figaro* sent special correspondent Tanguy Berthemet to Sévaré (Mali) as France began its 2013 military operation (Operation Serval), he reported: 'There is a war in Mali but it is almost unseen. There is a war in Mali but no one understands it,' before explaining that 'the media is having a lot of trouble getting close to the affected areas.' From where he was, he commented, 'the rare pieces of information are often only rumours, almost unverifiable because the phone lines have been cut in the part of the country that is still in rebel hands' (Berthemet, 2013). He added that the only people who had better information for understanding what was happening at the time were the journalists 'embedded' with the French troops. In addition to being physically closer to the front, those reporters also had access – though certainly controlled – to means of communication made available by the French soldiers, and to their analysis of the situation. And while journalism has shown itself to be self-reflective – and in some cases self-critical – about the implications of being embedded with the military,<sup>17</sup> it seems to have barely begun to do so regarding the implications of being embedded with humanitarian organisations.<sup>18</sup>

This type of embedded journalism, and reporters' practical dependence on humanitarian organisations are not, however, without consequences. One of the most important is how it affects the 'angles' that journalists choose. I noticed while examining how the French press described the Mai-Mai, that it very rarely talked about the Mai-Mai with a view to tracing their history or their demands, or to explain the power relationships between the different groups and the logic behind the violence

they were engaged in. Two of the most common 'hooks' I found were the rapes they were suspected of committing and the child soldiers they were reported to have among their ranks. Twenty-eight per cent (16/58) of the pieces by special correspondents to eastern DRC that I examined for my thesis on the Mai-Mai mentioned rape. The issues of wartime rape and child recruitment by armed groups are obviously legitimate topics for both researchers and journalists. What I wonder, however, is how and why they became the preferred hook for talking about an armed movement whose existence *also* raises other issues. The answer lies, in part, in humanitarian activism. Both of these issues have historically been the purview of international NGOs; Médecins Sans Frontières helped make rape a public health issue in the late 1990s when, after widespread sexual violence in the second Republic of the Congo civil war, an internal discussion led to the creation of specific mechanisms for treating female rape victims.<sup>19</sup> As for the child soldier issue, as historian Jean-Hervé Jézéquel has noted, it was long 'the preserve of humanitarian organisations' (Human Rights Watch and Save the Children, in particular) before the prohibition of this phenomenon was incorporated into a number of legal texts (Jézéquel, 2006).

Another consequence of journalists' practical dependence, in my opinion, is that the press under-investigates the humanitarian field. Is this out of gratitude for their service? Out of ignorance of the debates and power struggles that traverse the humanitarian emergency and development worlds? Out of a lack of public health training – as hypothesised by Christophe Ayad?<sup>20</sup> I don't know the answer, but it seems to me that the generalist French press gives the work of these good Samaritans its automatic blessing, a knee-jerk endorsement that contrasts sharply with some of the practices of the English-language press, for example. In 2010, the British daily *The Guardian* launched a 'Global Development' section that, although funded in part by an important player in the field (the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation), regularly presents content that is critical.<sup>21</sup>

## The Paradox of the Journalist vis-à-vis War: A Kind of Helpless Fascination?

It seems to me – and I will end here – that there is an inherent paradox to the journalism practiced in situations of armed violence. While some professional journalists feel – consciously or not – a kind of attraction to war, they have fairly limited logistical and conceptual means for analysing war.

Is attraction the right word? Morbid fascination? A 'torment', as reporter Jean-Claude Guillebaud puts it?

(2016). Or more simply a desire to see the tangible signs of a big, serious event that's unfolding – war? I am in no position to say. But I can attest to the fact that when I arrived in the Congo for the first time, in Bukavu in January 2012, I saw nothing for the first few hours that resembled war as I had imagined it. To be honest, I was a little disappointed. While the first time that I saw a MONUSCO tank on a street corner I said to myself, 'This is it, I'm in the war!' – although objectively, very little about the situation had changed. The demands of a journalist's job, and perhaps, in part, their fascination with the subject, create a kind of anticipation that the armed conflict will manifest itself in the most visible ways – not necessarily the most violent, but those that best match the representations of war that our society is fed: the soldier in camouflage, the weapon, the tank, the gunshot.

Reporters are not alone in feeling this attraction. Some of the social science researchers I've worked with can't resist – any more than the journalists (myself included) – taking a few selfies with the combatants that (though not usually published) are kept as tangible proof that 'we were there'. But in journalism, the strength of that attraction to war seems inversely proportional to the resources we have as a group to analyse and understand it. Even worse: sometimes we so eagerly await the signs, the marks of a conflict – especially in the case of the Congo, where there are no demarcated fronts and the wait for such irruptions can be long – that when violence finally becomes perceptible, it is automatically connected to 'the war' and presented as some nebulous evidence. Such was the case when the media linked the attacks on the Ebola response teams in late 2018 to the armed conflict rocking the eastern Congo, when in fact they were carried out not by armed groups but by the families of victims, who were throwing stones at vehicles out of mistrust of the medical teams.<sup>22</sup>

How can journalists escape this paradox? How can we take a new and better approach to armed conflict, so that we aren't just echoing someone else's analysis or simply reporting what the humanitarian workers choose to give us access to? The first way might be to rely more on social science researchers; instead of automatically picking up the phone to call an NGO, call a university research centre. Academics are probably harder to identify and get in touch with than the communications departments at humanitarian organisations, but they are an invaluable asset once their trust is gained. In an ideal world, journalism schools would teach students how to construct a story like a mini sociology survey. If I have succeeded in producing a few instructive articles and books on the Congolese fighters, it is first and foremost because someone gave me Florence Weber and Stéphane Béaud's *Guide de l'enquête de terrain* (1997) and Howard S. Becker's *Tricks of the Trade: How to Think about Your Research while Doing It* (1998).

Another way would be to try to look at war indirectly – from a different angle – more often. I learned a lot about war in the Central African Republic by interviewing two categories of Central Africans: prostitutes who worked at clubs frequented by soldiers, and street children (whom the soldiers used to run small errands). Their accounts gave me a new window into the daily lives of the international contingents stationed in Bangui during the 2013–14 war: how much the soldiers were being paid, what they were concerned about, their relationship to the violence, what they ate and the drugs they were taking (Brabant and Minano, 2019).

Consulting the social sciences and looking at things from a different angle are two approaches that I am attempting to explore; both seem promising, but will have little impact if not accompanied by reflexivity.

## Notes

- 1 This text is drawn from my presentation at the 22 March 2019 symposium entitled *Violences extrêmes: enquêter, secourir, juger Syrie, Rwanda, RDC* [Extreme violence: investigate, rescue, judge. Syria, Rwanda, and DRC], put on by MSF and the FMSH in Paris; it has been reworked for publication in written form. My special thanks to Marc Le Pape for his help and suggestions in this transcription effort.
- 2 Using the programme sketched out by Dauvin (2006).
- 3 Brabant and Kamgang (2018) recounts the early years of La Lucha, a group of Congolese social justice activists created in Goma in 2012.
- 4 Brabant (2016). My press articles on the DRC have also been published by *Mediapart*, *Arrêt sur images* and *La Croix*.
- 5 *Arretsurlimages.net* is a French website devoted to the analysis and criticism of journalistic practices. It airs the weekly TV programme *Arrêt sur images*, presented by journalist Daniel Schneidermann. Prior to the website's creation, *Arrêt sur images* was aired on French public television from 1995 to 2007.
- 6 For example: "*Les femmes violées du Kivu, c'est un marronnier*". *Médias, guerres et humanitaire en débat* ['Women raped in the Kivu became a seasonal article': A debate about media, war and aid organisations], *arretsurlimages.net*, a programme that aired on 5 August 2011 (with Christophe Ayad and Jean-Hervé Bradol); Justine Brabant, '*Bon baisers du Kivu, trou noir de l'information*' [Love from the Kivu, a news blackhole], *arretsurlimages.net*, 4 June 2012; Justine Brabant, '*Drôle d'air de guerre à Goma*' [Odd-looking war in Goma], *arretsurlimages.net*, 21 July 2012.
- 7 Brabant (2011, 2013a).
- 8 See, in particular, Brabant and Verweijen (2017). I spent a total of six months at the Life & Peace Institute (LPI), a conflict transformation NGO based in Bukavu, and

- three months as a consultant for the International NGO Safety Organisation (INSO) based in Goma (for which I co-wrote a report on the perception of humanitarian organisations by the armed groups in eastern DRC (Brabant and Vogel, 2014). A propos of my time at the LPI, see also Brabant (2013b).
- 9 With the exception of French soldiers involved in the European Union's Operation Artemis in 2003 in Bunia, Ituri (DRC).
  - 10 From 'mayi', which means 'water' in Swahili. Militia groups active in eastern DRC who recruit locally, claim the right to armed self-defence, and are reputed to use fetishes that make them invisible to bullets.
  - 11 Article 48 of Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions, introduced in 1977, states that '[i]n order to ensure respect for and protection of the civilian population and civilian objects, the Parties to the conflict shall at all times distinguish between the civilian population and combatants (...)'.  
12 In an interview he gave to *Arrêt sur images* in 2011 (see note 6), Jean-Hervé Bradol, former MSF president and communications director, observed: 'While I've met plenty of good journalists, to my mind, the vast majority of them don't understand and aren't familiar with our work or our problems.' Former *Libération* journalist (now employed at *Le Monde*) Christophe Ayad also brought up, in 2010, 'the lack of journalism tools for covering humanitarian subjects' and ticked off two types of knowledge that are generally lacking at media outlets: the 'public health concepts' and 'technical knowledge on aid actors' practices'. See the full interview: 'Les lacunes du journalisme font le bonheur des ONG', *Issues de secours* (blog moderated by three MSF members and hosted by Liberation.fr), 12 July 2010, <http://humanitaire.blogs liberation.fr/2010/07/12/-les-lacunes-du-journalisme-font-le-bonheur-des-ong/> (accessed 10 October 2019).
  - 13 Kivu Security Tracker website, last visited on 24 September 2019, <https://kivusecurity.org/about/armedGroups>. For the factors explaining this proliferation, see in particular: Stearns and Vogel (2015); Verweijen and Iguma Wakenge (2015).
  - 14 For the reasons why the Congolese government keeps promising a new census but has failed to conduct one, see Brandt and De Herdt (2019).
  - 15 See, for example, the work done by the Missing Maps project (started by several NGOs, including Médecins Sans Frontières) on the cities of Lubumbashi and Goma.
  - 16 I recount how I myself got the sense that one generally can't understand much in the midst of events, in an article for *Arrêt sur images*: 'Bons baisers du Kivu, trou noir de l'information', [arretsimages.net](http://arretsimages.net), 4 June 2012, [www.arretsimages.net/articles/bons-baisers-du-kivu-trou-noir-de-linformation](http://arretsimages.net/articles/bons-baisers-du-kivu-trou-noir-de-linformation) (accessed 10 October 2019).
  - 17 Cf. the accounts by embedded journalists in Afghanistan, collected by Romain Mielcarek (himself a PhD in media studies and a journalist) in his thesis (Mielcarek, 2018: 361–8). This debate is also happening in more direct and public forms; see, for example, Proust (2018).
  - 18 Among the few texts that explicitly examine this issue, I cite this post from Andrew Green, an independent journalist based in East Africa: 'The Thorny Ethics of Embedding with Do-Gooders', *Columbia Journalism Review* [online], 8 February 2016, [www.cjr.org/first-person/the\\_ethics\\_of\\_embedding\\_with\\_do-gooders.php](http://www.cjr.org/first-person/the_ethics_of_embedding_with_do-gooders.php) (accessed 10 October 2019).
  - 19 Interview with Jean-Hervé Bradol, cited in Brabant (2011: 92–3).
  - 20 Cf. above-mentioned interview (note 12): 'Les lacunes du journalisme font le bonheur des ONG'.
  - 21 See, for example, the collection of articles entitled 'Secret Aid Worker' (formerly 'Confessions of a Humanitarian'), where professionals speak anonymously about subjects like poor management, positive discrimination, sexual harassment, the anti-union positions taken by some NGO leadership, and the failure to protect the personal data of emergency aid recipients.
  - 22 Beginning in 2019, attacks against the Ebola response teams were indeed committed or sponsored by armed groups, but the attacks at issue occurred earlier.

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