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Under Familiar Fire: Making Decisions During the "Kivu Crisis" 2008 in Goma, DR Congo

Silke Oldenburg

Abstract: This paper explores the decision-making processes used by the inhabitants of Goma during the Kivu Crisis in October 2008. The paper's aim is twofold: After providing a short history of the October 2008 events, it seeks in the empirical part to distinguish and clarify the role of rumours and narratives in the setting of violent conflict as well as to analyse their impact on decision-making processes. As the epistemological interest lies more on the people who stay rather than those who flee, in the second part the paper argues that the practice of routinization indicates a conscious tactic whose purpose is to counter the non-declared state of exception in Goma. Routinization is defined as a means of establishing order in everyday life by referring to narratives based on lived experiences.

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Keywords: Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Goma, state of emergency, communication, decision-making, routinization

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Fieldwork under Fire[1]

It's Wednesday, 29 October 2008. The war in eastern Congo, which has been resurfacing since the end of August, has advanced to the gates of Goma. Laurent Nkunda, the renegade rebel general, is threatening to take over the city. The night over Goma is filled with flashes of red light which you could mistake for fireworks if you didn't know that it was live ammunition. It's 8 p.m. My host father identifies the sound of AKs and grenades and indicates where the shooting sounds are coming from. Not very comforting – at least not for me. There is no electricity; the radio reports on the latest troop movements. Despite the ongoing exchange of fire, the sonorous snoring of my host father starts – just like every evening in the living room – soon followed by the regular breathing of my host mother. I myself will face a rather sleepless night (fieldnotes, 29 October 2008, Goma).

Everyday life in a setting of violent conflict is more complex than the stereotyped view of chaos and disorder presented by the media and some international aid agencies. Life goes on, but the big question of interest is: How? Or better yet: How are people confronting situations of uncertainty, how are they interpreting and perceiving these moments of imbalance, and how are they integrating those moments into their daily lives? This paper explores the decision-making processes of Gomatraciens[2] during the "Kivu Crisis"[3] in October 2008. The aim of this paper is twofold: After providing a short history on the October 2008 events, it seeks in the empirical part to distinguish and to clarify the role of rumours and narratives in the setting of violent conflict as well as to analyse their impacts on decision-making processes. In the second part, the paper argues that the practice of routinization indicates a conscious tactic for taming the non-declared state of exception in

1 Cf. Nordstrom and Robben 1995.

2 Gomatraciens are the inhabitants of Goma. I cannot verify the term *Goméen* which Vlassenroot/Büscher (2009: 11) claim is preferred locally. While I was conducting fieldwork, *Gomatracien* was how the people of Goma referred to themselves. As Goma can be considered historically a melting pot, its population is highly ethnically and socially diverse. Ethnic backgrounds are being manipulated by different militias. Obviously, there is no "Gomatraciens' perception" but I will emphasize certain existing tendencies I was able to observe within my pool of interviewees who came from various social strata, diverse ethnic backgrounds and different age groups.

3 In this article I refer to the "Kivu Crisis" when discussing events during the period from the end of August 2008 (the relaunch of the CNDP offensive) to January 2009 (Nkunda's arrest). A special focus is on "the last week of October", when the CNDP threatened to take over the city of Goma. CNDP stands for Congrès National pour la Défense du Peuple (National Congress for the Defence of the People).

Goma.[4] Routinization is a means of establishing order in everyday life by referring to narratives based on lived experiences. In this sense, being "under familiar fire" indicates a social condition which could be addressed by reflecting on persisting narratives, ad hoc rumours and personal experiences in the complex scenario of the Congolese war. The material in this paper is based on anthropological fieldwork carried out in Goma from March to December 2008 and from June to September 2009.[5]

Goma: Tales of a Cursed City

More than a century passed between Conrad's depiction of the Congo as a "heart of darkness" (Conrad 1899) and the contemporary notion of the "First African World War" (Prunier 2009). All this time, the Congo was considered a "space of death", as Taussig indicated, referring to the time of colonization (Taussig 1992b). During the Mobutu era, Goma was known as a tourist spot, picturesquely situated on the shores of Lake Kivu, rich in ecological diversity and famous for its rare species like okapi and mountain gorillas. Today the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is excluded with warnings in the latest Lonely Planet guide for Africa.

Goma, a town of 600,000 inhabitants, is the capital of the North Kivu province and is situated approximately 2,000 kilometres from the Congo's capital, Kinshasa. North Kivu has always been a hub of migration and commerce – the exchange of people and goods – between the west and the east of Central Africa. The arrival of nearly two million Rwandan refugees, the overthrow of the long-lasting Mobutu system, the so-called "war of liberation" and the following RCD rebellion,[6] the transitional phase, as well as the current Third Republic under elected President Joseph Kabila, indicate a rapidly transforming socio-political environment. Furthermore, the ethnic complexity of North Kivu is a major source of misunderstandings, tensions and conflict. But what unites the populace is the perspective on

4 The analytical concept "state of exception" will be introduced in the second part of this paper. Borrowing from Agamben's philosophical approach (2004), I stay true to the English translation of his book's title while appreciating that in popular and legal contexts alike the terminology "state of emergency" is more prevalent.

5 Fieldwork was conducted for my Ph.D. project, "Growing up in Goma: War, Youth and Everyday Life." This project was supervised by the Bayreuth International Graduate School of African Studies (BIGSAS) and was funded by the Hans-Böckler Foundation.

6 RCD = Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie was the Rwandan-allied rebel movement that triggered the Second Congo War and took the stage on 2 August 1998 in Goma (for a detailed discussion see Tull 2005).

Goma as "cursed city": *la ville maudite*.[7] Interestingly, this is based not on the dangers of war but refers instead to the Nyragongo volcano, which erupted in 2002, destroying 20 per cent of the town with two massive lava flows. In consequence, the airport's runway was also damaged, causing several major plane accidents in recent years.

CNDP: *Si vis pacem, para bellum*!?[8]

After having lived the last 20 years in a climate of instability, there is a longing for a "strong man" in the Congo. By adapting Bissell's concept of "colonial nostalgia" (2005), one could nearly speak in the Congo of a "dictatorial nostalgia" displayed by those who sometimes recollect the "good old times" under Mobutu Sese Seko. For some people, Laurent Nkunda represented this hope for a new "strong man" as the territories controlled by his CNDP had the reputation of being well governed. Because of the assumed ethnic make-up of this rebel movement, there was, however, a lot of resentment in the population of Goma, a feeling mostly related to Rwanda's involvement in the Congo Wars.[9] The emic equation of Nkunda with the CNDP reveals a strong identification with the Tutsi and with Rwanda in general. For a majority of Gomatraciens, Nkunda was synonymous with the CNDP; therefore, *he* was the threat. Before founding the CNDP, Nkunda fought in several rebel movements during the different wars, and the CNDP was popularly perceived as a recycled rebel movement. In 2006 he formed the National Congress for the Defence of the People with the objectives of restoring sovereignty and good governance in the DRC and promoting security, especially for the ethnic minority of Tutsi to which he belongs. The CNDP legitimized their actions by referring to the presence of former Hutu genocide fighters in the Kivu provinces. After military strikes in 2006 and 2007 and the peace accord of Goma in January 2008, the CNDP restarted

7 "Goma: Tales of a Cursed City" alludes to de Boeck's book, "Kinshasa: Tales of the Invisible City" (2004), which points out the ambiguous character of Goma from an emic perspective.

8 "If you wish for peace, prepare for war"; the CNDP claimed that this Latin proverb was biblical in origin in order to legitimize its offensive, even though the original source is unknown (personal communication by a CNDP spokesperson, August 2008, Kitchanga). N.B. The names of my interviewees quoted in this article have been changed.

9 It would go beyond the scope of this paper to analyse the complex war setting in the Great Lakes region. For information see e.g. Mamdani 2001, Lemarchand 2009, Prunier 2009, Turner 2007.

an offensive in North Kivu in August which reached the gates of Goma in the last week of October 2008.

For weeks, the question as to whether Nkunda would take over the city was discussed on local and diplomatic levels alike. The CNDP's objective was to force the Congo's current president, Joseph Kabila, into direct negotiations, which Kabila subsequently rejected because he insisted on peace talks with all militias, not exclusively with the CNDP. In contrast to the FARDC,[10] which is associated with bad morals and lootings, the CNDP prides itself on its own tight organization, discipline and eloquence and cites international organizations and the UN peacekeeping forces, MONUC,[11] as witnesses to those qualities.[12] This, coupled with the CNDP's tendency to claim the moral high ground in its quest to provide security for the Tutsi ethnic minority,[13] enabled the CNDP to gain sympathy internationally. In April 2008 an Indian colonel of the MONUC created a scandal by decorating Nkunda and characterizing the CNDP's objectives as "noble". On 29 October 2008, the CNDP was just ten kilometres from Goma and declared a unilateral ceasefire while the FARDC fled the city. A curfew was imposed by the provincial government, and the population was on alert. On Monday, 3 November, the schools reopened. The threat was over. Attacks, counter attacks and peace talks continued in the hinterland until January 2009, when Laurent Nkunda was suddenly put under house arrest by Rwanda, which came as a great surprise to the (inter)national media, aid workers, and locals alike. After the end of the fighting, part of the CNDP was integrated into North Kivu's provincial government.

10 FARDC = Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo (Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo). The FARDC are the integrated armed forces set up in 2003 in the transitional phase when the diverse militias were integrated into the regular forces by the process of *brassage* (mixing). The FARDC are accused of being responsible for the largest share of human rights violations (Baaz/Stern 2008).

11 MONUC = United Nations Mission DR Congo. The MONUC is the largest peacekeeping mission worldwide. In Goma they have a very ambivalent position in the population, often being accused of collaborating with the CNDP. This is illustrated in the colloquial saying "No Nkunda, no money – no Nkunda, no job," referring to the assumed interests of international organizations to keep the conflict alive with the aim of not losing their jobs.

12 Personal communication of a CNDP spokesperson, August 2008, Kitchanga.

13 This is similar to Rwanda's governing RPF, which also used moral arguments to berate the international community, e.g. Ruanda: Pottier 2002: 154ff.

Nkunda ante Portas: *Il y a l'insécurité*

The situation in the last week of October 2008 was hard to grasp. My general impression from reading international newspapers and following TV reports was one of a literal state of emergency with people panicking and fleeing the city. But when I wandered around in the streets of Goma, talking with friends and acquaintances, many of them were laughing about the potential threat and were making fun of my anxiety. Nevertheless, I still believed that they were somehow downplaying the situation and disguising their true feelings. For that reason, I was impressed when the aforementioned living-room scene took place. The different forms of dealing with uncertainty[14] emerged very clearly in heated discussions spread throughout the national and international media that mentioned war or a security crisis, or even debated a potential future genocide. On the contrary, the emic view was *Il y a l'insécurité* (There is insecurity) – a popular saying referring to a threat also in other ethnographic contexts, e.g. *la violencia* in the case of the Guatemalan Civil War (Green 1999: 3) or *la época de los problemas* in the Peruvian case (Poole 2004: 57).

The anthropologist Georg Elwert stated that conflict is neither chaos nor disorder, but follows patterns of social order. He claims that while people don't know when and with what kind of intensity violent conflict will happen, they do know the setting and the way to deal with it (Elwert 2004: 29). This was also the case in Goma. While I was discussing my personal dilemma of "Should I stay or should I go?", everyone had prescriptions for how to behave and what to expect, which covered a range from "You have to close your heart" to "Just lie down under the bed and wait." However, not all people living in Goma are that accustomed to violent conflict, as the following field observation illustrates:

> One couple had a huge argument: Alain, a young banker from Kinshasa and living in Goma for a second year, was talking of "these crazy Gomatraciens with their horrible war" and fled to Rwanda. His girlfriend Mapendo, a native Gomatracien, talked about "insecurity", was not impressed by the situation at all and refused to go with Alain

14 "Uncertainty" as an anthropological concept still remains relatively vague. I use it picking up on the works of Utas (2005) and Vigh (2006) in a twofold way: first to refer to violent conflict which does not have to be situated *in* a context because it has turned into context itself (Vigh 2006), and second as a social practice shaped by the people themselves through "social navigation" and a sense of constant alertness (see Utas 2005, Vigh 2006), thereby laying the groundwork for the "normal state of exception", a term that will be discussed in the second part of this paper.

> because in her opinion, he was exaggerating and not behaving like a real man (fieldnotes, 25 October 2008, Goma).

So, what was the basis for the different perceptions and interpretations of the situation? Obviously, it was experience. During the last 15 years of instability and two major war incidents in Goma itself in 1996 and 2000, the inhabitants of Goma saw a lot, as demonstrated by the popular saying *On a tout vu*. This confirms Elwert's observation that people might not be familiar with the intensity of violent conflict but what they are aware of is the setting and the way of dealing with it. This became especially visible in the different reactions of Mapendo and Alain: Alain, as a non-local, was not familiar with the setting and was fearing for his life; Mapendo, on the other hand, was experienced, thereby judging his behaviour to be exaggerated. Like many Gomatraciens, she used verbal tactics[15] of de-escalation frequently heard in Goma like *Il faut fermer le coeur* (You have to close your heart) or *Il faut devenir dur d'abord* (First of all, you have to become hard), and she demonstrated her indifference by saying *Bien ça passe ou ça se casse* (Either it passes or it bursts). This perception of conflict indicates a conscious way of dealing with situations of uncertainty and refers directly to one's experience/non-experience as the case may be. Between "knowing" and "not knowing", "not wanting to know" is a crucial factor, as indicated earlier: Referring to Goma as a "cursed city", solely focusing on the menace of natural disasters, dilutes any conflict-related threat: *Bien ça passe ou ça se casse.*

"No Nkunda, no money – no Nkunda, no job": Narratives of a State of Emergency

In the evaluation of my empirical data, I recognized two dimensions when talking about war and conflict: rumours and narratives. I begin by presenting different examples of rumours and narratives before going into a deeper discussion concerning their function in times of uncertainty. As an initial definition, I want to designate persistent accounts as narratives, whereas the ones of ephemeral character will be called rumours. I subsequently argue that rumours lead more often towards the choice "flight", whereas narratives are proof of an experienced way of dealing with situations of uncertainty.

15 For a discussion of tactics and strategies see de Certeau 1990: 57ff.

Example Narrative: "Balkanization"/*Pays des Volcans*

To most Gomatraciens, the CNDP seemed to be manipulated by Rwanda, with Laurent Nkunda being merely a puppet. This view can be attributed to the role of Rwanda in the two Congo wars. Most people see the CNDP as a group of Tutsi rebels, even though the political-military operations staff is ethnically very heterogeneous. Gomatraciens very often reject this argument by saying: "The Tutsi is primarily *malin*, very smart." Many, like Daniel, the leader of a local NGO, are convinced that this heterogeneity is a ruse to conceal the fact that only Rwandan interests are behind the CNDP, and that Rwanda in turn is being backed by the US. Daniel's perspective on the conflict and the role of Rwanda in it is the following:

> What is the CNDP up to? They say they provide security and order and hunt down the FDLR.[16] But what are they really doing? Apparently, they're emptying the territory. Have you ever seen a war where they try to wipe out everything? Masisi: empty! Rutshuru: empty! All these refugees are not FDLR militias, they are civilians. The objective of the CNDP is clear: In Rwanda, there are too many people and no land; in North Kivu, there are few people and very fertile soil. They have tried it in every war: The Tutsi of Rwanda want to make a 'Balkanization' – they want to proclaim the *Pays des Volcans* [Land of Volcanoes] (Daniel, 18 October 2008, Goma).

As in many other contexts of violent conflict, the question about access to fertile land is central to the understanding of conflict in eastern Congo, as it says a lot about political power, profit and control. Competition for territory has existed since colonial times and has led, since the 1990s, to violent clashes between the autochthonous ethnic groups (Bahunde, Banyanga and Banande) and the Banyarwanda, the latter of whom constitute the population's majority in North Kivu because of migration. They are claiming the right to political representation as well as to land ownership. During the years of conflict, the distinction between autochthonous communities and the so-called "Rwandophones" (Congolese Hutu and Tutsi) sharpened. A constant accusation against Rwanda is that they are trying to destroy the DR Congo. The most threatening scenario is that of "Balkanization", the probable falling apart of this huge country from which Rwanda would profit by taking the eastern parts of the Congo to form a new state, the *Pays des Volcans*.[17]

16 FDLR = Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Rwanda.

17 I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer who pointed out the historical roots of this narrative that go back to 1962 when autochthonous groups were requesting the

Example Rumour: "Intoxication"

"We already know," says 50-year-old housewife Marie on the morning of 30 October, when the governor of North Kivu insisted on the radio that everything was under control.

> It's always the same, we stand between war and peace and everything will be OK, and then the next moment, someone is standing in front of your door with a Kalash [Kalashnikov rifle]. It was like that with the AFDL,[18] with the RCD, and even when the volcano erupted. Do you think they will warn us? No! They are playing their games with us. In reality, they have already sold us (Marie, 30 October 2008, Goma).

For some days, the rumour persisted that five to six million USD had changed hands from Rwanda to the North Kivu provincial government to take Goma without a fight. "That is intoxication! That is a betrayal of the Congolese people! How can they sell us?" asks Michel, an unemployed representative of Goma's *Société Civile,* who speculates:

> They have already stopped bargaining. This morning I saw FARDC soldiers fleeing towards Sake. The soldiers are all running away because they are afraid of Nkunda's army. They know that they have no chance, and now they are fleeing. Surely they've had orders from the very top (Michel, 28 October 2008, Goma).

Example Combination of Narrative and Rumour: "Infiltration"

> While chatting with members of my host family, two men dropped in and stated that the CNDP had arrived at the airport. Twenty minutes later there was a phone call that *des infiltrés* had been seen in Katindo. This news was followed by a sudden commotion in town; shops were closing and people were trying to get home immediately (fieldnotes, 28 October 2008, Goma).

"Infiltration" is both narrative and rumour. On the one hand, it is a tactic of war the Gomatraciens refer to when remembering former war incidents. In this instance, infiltration is something people experienced and which was

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creation of the North Kivu province, a proposal subsequently rejected by Banyarwanda deputies.

18 AFDL = Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Congo/Zaïre was the name acquired by the rebellion in 1996, which was created by Rwanda and Uganda and given a "Zairian" face by Laurent-Désiré Kabila (for a detailed discussion see Willame 1999). These forces entered Goma on 1 November 1996.

quite persistent in social perception. Even the German embassy warned that the CNDP rebels were crossing the front lines in disguise, mixing with the refugees in order to destabilize Goma. On the other hand, "infiltration" can also be a rumour. The information that infiltrators were showing up in different places in town was circulated repeatedly via phone calls. Here its depiction as a rumour is appropriate because the verification or falsification of the details happens relatively quickly.

The narrative of "Balkanization" and the rumours of "intoxication" and "infiltration" provide a picture of the political and emotional atmosphere in Goma at the end of October 2008. As indicated above, I want to differentiate between narratives and rumours. The longevity of "Balkanization" as a way of explaining the genesis of war, particularly by many autochthonous groups, might be perceived as a conspiracy or, alternatively, as a way of assigning meaning to a persistently unstable and potentially threatening environment. Therefore, I suggest referring to long-term representations as narratives because of their *relational* character, being constitutive as sites of identity construction. "Intoxication" might belong to the narrative category because it is repetitive and connected to experience, but it becomes acute and circulates in the form of rumour mostly in times of uncertainty. The commonly held belief of "intoxication" and the observation of soldiers fleeing the city intensifies a feeling of general panic. In contrast to narratives, this rumour is highly *situational*. Whereas a large group of research partners would rely on narratives like "Balkanization" to make sense of their larger context in everyday situations, the trope of intoxication is not dominant in everyday explanations and can be read rather as a comment or response to extraordinary situations.

Should I stay or should I go? – The Ingredients of Decision-Making

Decision-making depends on the formation of, and reflection on, certain narratives which can be reinforced by rumours, both narratives and rumours being socially constructed and locally meaningful. The combination of a narrative which highlights the evil character of one armed party and its former atrocities linked to the rumour that this group had just infiltrated Goma's airport triggers a different set of decisions. People might panic and flee even if they are accustomed to the setting reflected in the narratives. The rumour alone would not be sufficient to provoke such a strong reaction without it being placed in a larger narrative context of experience. Carolyn Nordstrom observed that "narratives domesticate experience" (Nordstrom 1997: 22), indicating that narratives contain or delete elements that "[make]

living in danger bearable". In my opinion it can also be the other way round: *Experience domesticates narratives*. By using euphemistic labels such as *l'insécurité* (insecurity) or *l'événement* (event) while simultaneously more official sources talk of "war", people tend to reassure themselves by playing down any potentially hostile situation. Prerequisites for this tendency to play down a situation can be one or more of the following: a particular experience about conflict dynamics; persisting narratives and ad hoc rumours; and the personal background of the socially and ethnically diverse population. The decision-making of three interviewees (below) will illustrate this argument.

- Case 1: A wealthy trader and native of Goma consciously appraised the situation as follows: He was assessing the usefulness of his existing networks in town, rethinking his ideological relationship with the CNDP, and weighing how his social status and reputation might help him to bribe the FARDC should they eventually come looting. The behaviour of this man was, in short, very much related to his experiences during the First Congo War, when, while he was fleeing, he was attacked because of his close relationship with Mobutu. He considered the existing narratives and his personal experiences and distilled them into a set of possible scenarios, finally determining that staying at home was the lesser risk, eventually concluding that for him, the situation was not so dangerous that he should flee (fieldnotes, 25 October 2008, Goma).
- Case 2: Bahati, a 32-year-old man from North Kivu's hinterland involved in Goma's Société Civile was even surprised when I asked him about what he would do in case of an attack. He argued: "Why should I flee? I didn't harm anyone. If you stay at home it is safer. There are so many houses, why should they come to yours? And when they arrive you could beg for your life, just give them all your money, that's what they want. On the run you are more vulnerable. It's on the run that people get robbed, women get raped, and others get killed" (fieldnotes, 26 October 2008, Goma).

These two examples of men choosing to stay in Goma resemble each other as both decided to stay due to the anticipated dangers of fleeing. The trader is referring to his personal experience but decides to stay because of his politically secure position, being "in" with one group and having the possibility of bribing the other. Bahati, coming to the same conclusion, assigns some kind of rationality to the CNDP. Considering himself innocent ("I didn't harm anyone"), he comforts himself with the thought that his house is one among many, so why should he be targeted? Drawing a parallel between the experiences of many Gomatraciens during the two Congo Wars and his own reading of events coupled with narratives and rumours, he uses

these experiences as a template for upcoming events. This same attitude was adopted by, for instance, my host mother, who told me frequently in this last week of October: *On est entre la guerre et la paix* (We are between war and peace). This statement reflects a highly analytical element combined with her personal experience that the situation could suddenly change. Nevertheless, she found a technique in order not to panic during an artillery barrage and continued her daily habits as usual, concluding the day with a nap in the living room before finally going to bed.

The majority of my acquaintances stayed in Goma during the last week of October, convinced that Nkunda would not attack, that the MONUC would provide security in the end, that there would be more security in one's own home, or they stayed because, ultimately, there was no better alternative, no place of refuge.

However, many did flee. At the Congolese–Rwandan border, I observed many Rwandophone people fearing possible acts of vengeance, and middle-class people fearing looting soldiers. A huge number of temporal refugees can be categorized as "non-locals", including people from Kinshasa or other DR Congo cities working in the Kivus – not to mention the international expat community. Safi, a 25-year-old student explained:

> They are not used to war and insecurity like we are – the slightest alarm causes them to panic and they flee without thinking (Safi, 7 November 2008, Goma).

The third example is one of flight:

- Case 3: Alphonse, a kiosk owner of Nande descent who had been living in Goma for two years, decided to flee directly when he heard that the CNDP had taken control of the military basis of Rumangabo. He referred to narratives of Bukavu, the capital of the South Kivu province where Nkunda is accused of having committed severe human rights abuses in 2004. He told me in a phone call: "It doesn't matter if they take my kiosk, I will restart from scratch. But these people, these Tutsi, they are really cruel; I don't want to take the risk. They don't like us" (Alphonse, 24 October 2008, Goma).

This last quote refers to the events of Bukavu in 2004, which are, like most narratives, shaped and shared by a particular group of people who don't always have the same opinion about what is going on. As this narrative was coupled with the rumour that the CNDP was approaching fast, it triggered Alphonse's decision to flee. Implicit in this quote is the popular notion of "tribalism", an ethnically motivated antagonism between different local communities, which is widespread in Goma. Tribalism thus reinforces the narrative's interpretational strength and affords a point of orientation for

many people in this specific situation. As the first two examples have demonstrated, the individual practice of decision-making is closely intertwined with collectively held narratives and rumours, reflecting continuous and integrated experiences in the light of narrational certainties like "corruption" and narrational advice on how to behave and stay out of trouble.

Meaning Between Fact and Fiction

As orientation is of utmost importance in times of uncertainty, it is not surprising that some Gomatraciens developed a certain kind of nostalgia for the Mobutu era by praising elements like "sovereignty", "unity" and particularly "stability". Even though Mobutu was unpopular at the end of his rule, today there is a constant sense of lament. This longing for stability is not only indicative of economic crisis, as Ferguson demonstrated in the Copperbelt (1999), but it also illustrates a general "crisis of meaning", as Filip de Boeck shows in the case of the DRC (1996: 92). There is a constant blurring of fact and fiction. In the Western imagination, war and violent conflict are mostly synonymous with destruction and misery, but war and violent conflict are also fundamental in the quest for meaning and explanations (e.g. Ferguson 1999: 12; Finnström 2008: 167). In particular, by using narratives, people are trying to regain control over their daily lives, to interpret events and experiences and organize and imbue them with sense (Maček 2005: 62). Reading the present into the past and turning experiences into narratives (Malkki 1995), leads to the formation of social worlds that open up a space for action, thus creating the possibility of confronting and handling violence. The act of anticipating a violent situation before it actually rears its head allows people to deal with violence on a routine basis (Vigh 2006: 151). By verbally reclassifying the potential war situation to one of *insécurité,* room to manoeuvre is retained.

Rumours are mostly seen as symptoms of societal crisis, and they hint at a complex interplay between the addressed audience, the "public opinion" and the state's view (Zitelmann 1998: 206). The discrepancy between the "information provided" and the "information needed" is a potent breeding-ground for the emergence of rumours (Shibutani 1966: 62), which are closely linked to contexts of political violence (e.g. Bazenguissa-Ganga 1996) and war (e.g. Feldman 1995; Simons 1995). Anna Simons, in her essay on the beginning of the Somali civil war, characterized rumours as fluid, elusive and changeable, closely connected to the flux of human emotions (Simons 1995: 57). Interestingly, Elwert argued that conflicts are not motivated by emotions but are rather based on "cool calculations" (Elwert 2004: 32). This is not only the case for the perpetrator(s) of conflict but is also implied in

the behaviour of the "ordinary" Gomatracien, as already mentioned: "You have to close your heart" is, in this case, evidence in favour of this argument.

An overall expression for narratives and rumours could be "Radio Trottoir", pavement radio, which is seen by Stephen Ellis as the "modern equivalent" of oral history, providing a political function and serving as a means of self-defence for the "poor and powerless" (Ellis 1989: 329). Furthermore, Peter Geschiere refers to Radio Trottoir as a social-levelling mechanism which provides an egalitarian effect (Geschiere 1982) among particular groups and enhances a distinction between others (Olujic 1995: 193; Emcke 2004: 207ff).

Thus, talking creates reality, whether this reality is "true" or not. Talking, naming, labelling and classifying assign meaning to apparently meaningless incidents. Therefore, the repetitive use of narratives and ad hoc rumours is a tactic useful for the interpretation of a hostile context – a context that can be tamed by "talking about it". This raises the methodological problem of how everyday experiences, especially in situations of warfare (Maček 2005: 64; Taussig 1992a: 10; Green 1999), may be communicated in interview situations. While speaking and forming phrases, one aligns and orders one's thoughts, conferring rationality to one's own actions. The subsequent legitimization of events in the form of talking produces legitimization for decision-making processes. Again, the dimension of time becomes relevant in a context of uncertainty. If a decision is to be taken ad hoc, there is no space to ponder extensively about possible consequences or to take the time to connect events to personal experiences: The reaction is more instinctive, despite the fact that a certain logical explanation will be suggested and conveyed subsequently to relate to the present or even the future. However, in a situation like the Kivu Crisis in October 2008, people were observing the upcoming events for several weeks, making decisions based on the interpretation of the murky complexity of rumours and narratives.

Conclusion: Taming the State of Exception by Routinization

> "Routinizations are the last to be destroyed and the first to emerge in the onset of war" (Vigh 2006: 151).

I have demonstrated in the empirical part of this paper how the practice of decision-making is linked to socially constructed rumours and narratives in general, and how these are linked to people's perceptions and experiences. Finally, in my conclusion, I want to discuss some theoretical thoughts about

the general context, which I want to define with the oxymoron "the normal state of exception". Borrowing Vigh's use of "routinization" I want to emphasize that a conscious falling back to routine helps the Gomatraciens improvise within a state of exception and tame it by routinizing it.

Recent anthropological work has done much to illuminate the contexts in which war and other forms of collective violence are experienced as states of crisis and how these contexts shape people's identities. Even if in the Congolese case there was no declared state of exception (yet a curfew was ordered during the last week of October), I would like to draw on the approach articulated prominently by Walter Benjamin, Carl Schmitt and, most recently, Giorgio Agamben.

The controversial German political theorist, philosopher and jurist for the Nazi regime, Carl Schmitt, was a mastermind of German authoritarianism. In the early 1920s, he legitimized the state of exception as a legal form and stated in his work, "Political Theology", that the ordinary rule of law becomes most evident in its exception. He claimed: "Sovereign is he who decides on the state of exception" – in other words, a sovereign with power to suspend the rule of law can transform a weak into a strong state by declaring a state of exception (Schmitt 2004: 13).[19]

Walter Benjamin, one of Germany's great intellectuals of the early twentieth century, a literary critic and philosopher, was a contemporary of Schmitt with whom he corresponded about this topic. Although Benjamin acknowledged, like Schmitt, that the state of exception is not the exception but the rule, he, in contrast, was hoping for the "real state of exception", which for him meant overcoming the Nazi regime by means of rebellion (Benjamin 1974: 697).[20] His provocative allusion was also designed to encourage rethinking notions of order and disorder; as Michael Taussig claims, "our very forms and means of representation are under siege" (Taussig 1992a: 9). The state of exception as a concept regained prominence when the Italian philosopher, Giorgio Agamben, declared in 2004 that with the "war on terror" the state of exception became the governing paradigm of rule. His famous example is Guantanamo, an institution governed by a state but located outside that state's territory and possessing no valid laws for detainees (Agamben 2004: 10).

19 While the notion of *Ausnahmezustand* is translated as "state of emergency" in Benjamin's works "Trauerspiel" and "Über den Begriff der Geschichte", Schmitt's elaboration on *Ausnahmezustand* is translated as "state of exception", as is the title of Agamben's essay ("Ausnahmezustand").

20 Often neglected in the exegesis of Schmitt and Benjamin's correspondence is the esteem Benjamin expressed for the latter (Weber 1992: 5ff).

A state like the Democratic Republic of the Congo, often characterized by political scientists as a weak (Englebert 2003), predatory (Reno 1998) or rhizomatic state (Bayart 1989), has not been able to control the different armed groups in the Kivus, and worse, the government is not even in control of its own regular forces, the FARDC. In this way, people connect the Kivu Crisis with the quest for sovereignty – something regularly reflected on, and included in, discussions about the "good old" peaceful days under dictator Mobutu. While I was chatting informally with a member of Nkunda's medical staff, he argued that the Congo needed a dictator. He said "You know, the Congolese, they are suffering from brain leprosy. They accept everything as normal." On the other hand, there is some power of the post-colonial state in contemporary DR Congo which manifested itself not only during the dictatorship of Mobutu, who seized power by declaring a state of emergency in 1965, but also in the periodic declaration of emergency curfews. These were most recently justified by the government's provision of security in the context of war and were accompanied by an arbitrary checking of documents as well as by the ubiquitous presence of many secret agents and civil informants.

Frequently, violence is regarded as an omnipresent force, pervading social conditions as a "routinized, even socialized violence", which operates not only in public or political arenas but also in the personal sphere, as Vigdis Broch-Due remarks (Broch-Due 2005: 2). I argue that it is actually the people who routinize their environment in their quest for order in their everyday lives. Picking up on Vigh, I label the phenomena observed in Goma "routinization". To me, routinization is a tool for maintaining control and for establishing order in one's everyday life. A routine contains elements of flexibility and ability, training and experience. If routine is indicative of the usual, unconscious habit of doing something, I propose that the notion of routinization would be appropriate for referring to people's active and conscious ways of navigating violent conflicts. The room to manoeuvre may not be very great, but the technique of routinization is a way of taming the lived state of emergency. Arguing along with Nordstrom that narratives domesticate experiences, (and, as I assert, that experiences also domesticate narratives), interpreting war as *l'insécurité* is a way of proving to oneself that something more or less bearable is going on. You have to keep tuned in to pavement radio (as Stephen Ellis advises, 1989) to observe and interpret the jungle of narratives and rumours that lead to a conscious way of answering the question of "Should I stay or should I go?" This forces us to assume war and insecurity are heterogeneous spaces of interaction. Interpreted as a form of routinization, the integration of long-persisting conflict structures into a dynamic social life becomes a possibility and can be seen as a form of con-

tinuous negotiation over established order. Where the state of emergency becomes normality, or even a "state of emergence", as Bhaba points out (2003: 41), violence can be classified, anticipated, ritualized and mastered.

This is highlighted by Paulin, a 21-year-old student who presents social reflexivity as an achievement of the population:

> I think here in Goma every adolescent knows how to reflect. He knows well that now we are in situation x and this will mean for the future y. One can predict the future (Paulin, 7 November 2008, Goma).

To be precise, this anticipation makes people "routinize violence" in spite of being "routinized by violence". This becomes evident in the paradox that occurs when the state of emergency turns normal and the evening nap in the living room can be maintained even in the hail of bullets – to the surprise of the anthropologist, whose techniques of routinization are not yet that well developed.

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Unter vertrautem Feuer: Entscheidungsfindung während der "Kivu-Krise" in Goma, DR Kongo, 2008

Zusammenfassung: Die Autorin des Beitrags untersucht Entscheidungsfindungsprozesse der Einwohner von Goma während der Kivu-Krise im Oktober 2008. Nach einer kurzen Geschichte der Ereignisse wird im empirischen Teil des Beitrags die Rolle von Gerüchten und Erzählungen für die gesellschaftliche Szenerie gewaltsamer Konflikte aufgezeigt und voneinander abgegrenzt und ihre jeweilige Bedeutung für Entscheidungsfindungsprozesse analysiert. Da sich das Forschungsinteresse der Autorin in erster Linie auf den Teil der Bevölkerung richtet, der am Ort des Geschehens bleibt, und weniger auf den, der sich zur Flucht entscheidet, wird im zweiten Teil des Beitrags die Praxis der Routinisierung hervorgehoben, eine bewusste Strategie der Betroffenen, um mit dem nicht-deklarierten Ausnahmezustand in Goma umzugehen. Routinisierung wird als Mittel definiert, die alltägliche Ordnung aufrechtzuerhalten, indem man auf Erzählungen gelebter Erfahrung zurückgreift.

Schlagwörter: Demokratische Republik Kongo, Goma, Ausnahmezustand, Kommunikation, Entscheidungsfindung