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Geographies of unease: Witchcraft and boundary construction in an African borderland

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ABSTRACT

African borderlands – such as those between South Sudan, Uganda and Congo – are often presented by analysts as places of agency and economic opportunity, in contrast to hardened, securitized borders elsewhere. We emphasize, however, that even such relatively porous international borders can nevertheless be the focus of significant unease for borderland communities. Crossing borders can enable safety for those fleeing conflict or trading prospects for businesspeople, but it can also engender anxieties around the unchecked spread of insecurity, disease and economic exploitation.

Understanding this ambiguous construction of borders in the minds of their inhabitants requires us, we argue, to look beyond statist or globalizing discourses and to appreciate the moral economies of borderlands, and how they have been discursively and epistemologically negotiated over time. Narratives around witchcraft and the occult represent, we argue, a novel and revealing lens through which to do so and our study draws on years of fieldwork and archival research to underline how cartographies of witchcraft in this region are, and have long been, entangled with the construction of state political geographies, internal as well as international.

1. Introduction

The fear of invisible threats carried by the cross-border movement of people has perhaps never been more widely felt around the world than it is in the midst of the 2020-21 Covid-19 pandemic. Yet while the virus may be new, the fear is not. Cross-border migration was being demonized by Western professionals 'in charge of the management of risk and fear' even amid the widespread anticipation of a globalized, borderless world at the end of the twentieth century (Bigo, 2002). There is a long history to the role of epidemic fears and controls in contributing to boundary-making and the pathologization of migrants (Dionne and Turkmen, 2020; Sahlins, 1989).

The construction of African borders has often been contrasted with the long processes by which European borders emerged, as well as with more draconian contemporary border regimes (Asiwaju, 1985; Feyissa & Hoehne, 2010; Herbst, 2000). Our research area (Fig. 1) in the borderlands of South Sudan, Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) typifies the relative porosity, cross-border fraternity and limited state control of many African boundaries (Adefuye, 1985; Leopold, 2005, 2009).

Yet amidst the latest mass refugee influx into Uganda, our research also encountered considerable unease about migration, and a longer history of local-level concern over the effects of cross-border movement on economy, society and moral community. In this study, we therefore ask why – and how – even some of the more recently established international and internal boundaries have gained meanings for their inhabitants that seem to evoke global tendencies towards the pathologization of migration and securitization of borders.

Such unease was expressed by some of our respondents (particularly government personnel) in the familiar refrains of global state security discourse: porous borders and migration blamed for crime, insecurity and resource competition. But we caution against the appearance of universality conveyed by such discourse, and indeed by the apparent commonalities of hardening borders and anti-immigrant politics around

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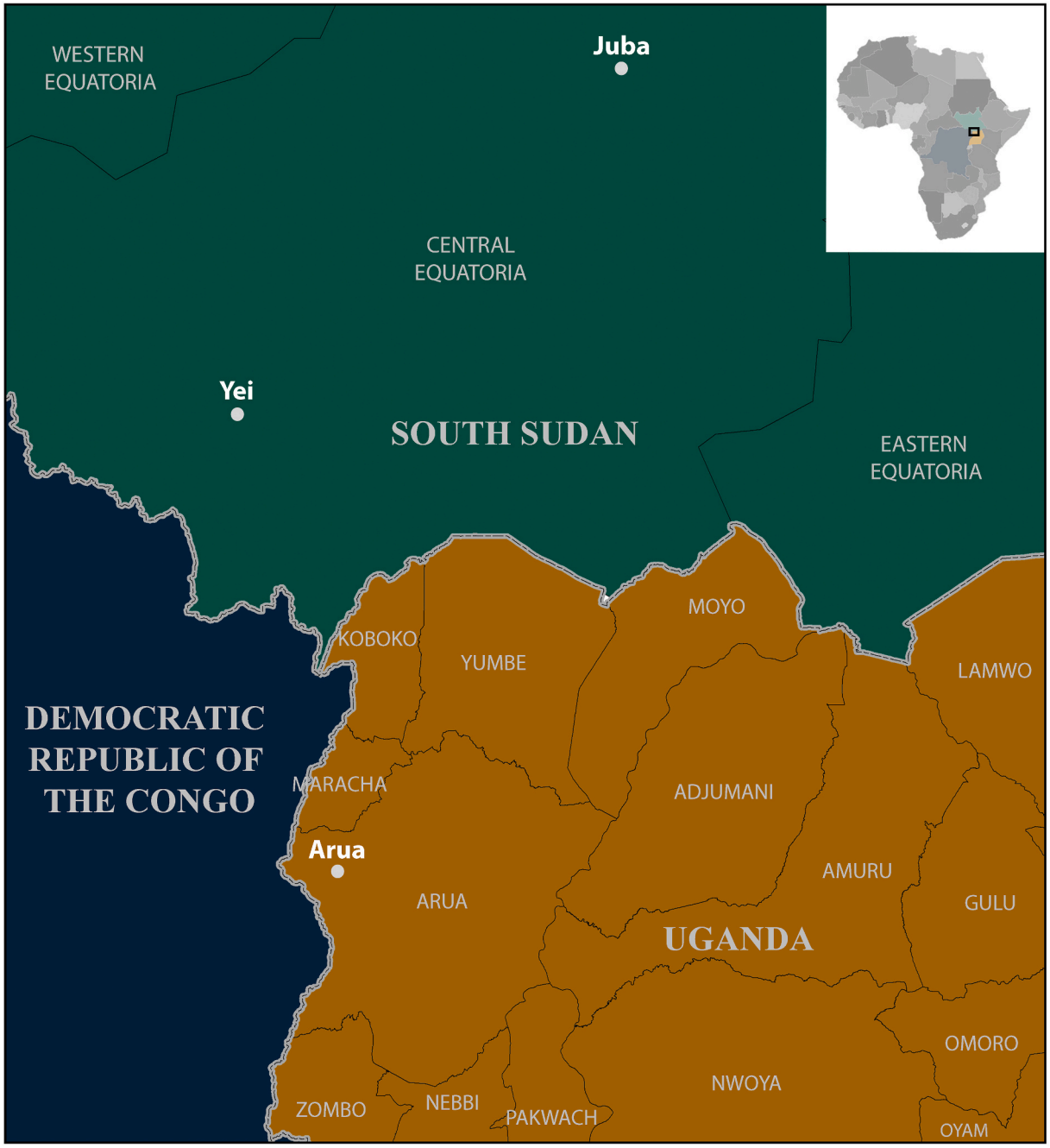

Fig. 1. The northwest Uganda - South Sudan borderlands, showing districts (Uganda) and states (South Sudan).

the world. Global patterns are always locally inflected and mediated, and the territorial state is itself historically and geographically contingent (Agnew, 1994). As borderlands scholarship has emphasized, boundaries only become real on the ground through the work of borderland inhabitants and border-crossers in imagining, negotiating and exploiting them (Feyissa & Hoehne, 2010; Johnson et al., 2011; Nugent, 2002). Understanding these processes of border-making, we argue, requires exploring local imaginaries and epistemologies of space that exist in dialogue with universal statist discourses but reveal the more personal, quotidian and intimate ways in which political and economic geographies are experienced and morally interpreted.

In the course of our research we encountered such moral negotiations of borders primarily in the form of discourse and action relating to phenomena which are commonly described in English as 'witchcraft' or 'poison (ing)'. This is unsurprising in light of the extensive anthropological work on African witchcraft as a dynamic, mobile range of ideas, which are often expressive of the hidden ways in which wealth and power accumulate and circulate across borders in a globalized economy (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1999; Geschiere, 1997, 2013; Ndjio, 2008). Yet as Amber Murrey (2015) points out, political geography has been slower to embrace such epistemologies as ways of negotiating spatial orderings of power and exploitation. The recent scholarship on African witchcraft, meanwhile, rarely considers how occult geographies relate specifically to political boundaries. In this article, we bring the literatures on witchcraft and borders into novel dialogue in order to demonstrate *how occult imaginaries are entangled with the construction of state geographies*.

In doing so, we are conscious of the dangers of seeming to reinforce

the exoticization and stereotyping of African epistemologies. Why focus on witchcraft when Ugandans and South Sudanese also spoke about political boundaries in universally-recognizable idioms of state security and immigration threats? Our answer is that there are also dangers in paying attention only to the globalized languages of state territoriality and border security. In particular, such discourses can obscure the ambiguities of borders for their inhabitants, who have to navigate their multiple risks and opportunities. For those who accept its existence, witchcraft is an inherently ambiguous set of phenomena: a means of both acquiring and attacking power and wealth (Geschiere, 1997). It is thus a particularly revealing lens for highlighting the often contradictory effects of cross-border movement and a powerful explanation of the resulting inequalities. Crucially, witchcraft imaginaries are concerned not only with the security threats of cross-border movement, but also *with its unequal economic effects*: the sense that some people have become unnaturally wealthy to the exclusion, or through the exploitation, of the borderland populations.

While witchcraft discourses may provide a powerful critique of capitalist exploitation and inequality they do not, however, provide a straightforward basis for resistance (Murrey, 2015). Indeed, our research finds that mobilization to combat the threat of witchcraft often works instead to reinforce the political geography of both international and internal boundaries in the region in increasingly exclusionary ways. Rather than representing an 'anti-space' of resistance to the state (Roxburgh, 2017), we argue that *cartographies of witchcraft map onto, and ultimately strengthen, state political geographies*.

These findings are based on extended qualitative research in northwest Uganda and South Sudan (Fig. 1) by the authors, in which discourse and action around witchcraft were frequently encountered in everyday conversation, public discourse and court cases, and occasionally in the form of more drastic anti-witchcraft measures. Oral and documentary historical sources reviewed include periodic instances of collective, often violent, action against suspected witchcraft practitioners over the past century. This is a region known for some of the most influential studies of witchcraft by colonial-era social anthropologists as well as efforts by colonial administrators to control anti-witchcraft actions (Leonardi, 2007, 2019).

Colonial sources are of course highly problematic for revealing vernacular understandings of witchcraft, but they offer glimpses of the changing political and economic contexts within which witchcraft concerns were reaching the attention of governments (Middleton, 1963). More recent ethnographic research on the region has also highlighted the significance of anti-witchcraft measures, particularly in constituting a sense of moral community and social health (Allen, 2007; Allen and Reid, 2015; Barnes-Dean, 1986; Storer et al., 2017). Yet there has been little consideration of how these actions and discourses relate to the region's political and economic geography, despite its borderland character, nor to the modernity of occult imaginaries now emphasized in the wider anthropological literature.

Our analysis draws upon data collected for multiple projects in northwest Uganda and South Sudan across a 13-year period. These projects focused on governance, (in)security and local justice and, critically, saw witchcraft concerns arise throughout, despite differences in project foci and methodologies. Leonardi undertook research in South Sudan's Central Equatoria State between 2005 and 2014 involving a combination of oral history interviewing, informal conversations and court observations, for a series of projects on customary authority, local justice and land governance. Discourse and litigation around witchcraft came up repeatedly, as well as in the archival records on the region. Storer conducted over 200 interviews and ethnographic observations in Uganda's West Nile region between 2016 and 2018, exploring transformations in idioms of misfortune. Part of this research involved investigating anti-witchcraft action which had become a pressing concern for local authorities in two of West Nile's districts. Leonardi and Fisher undertook further fieldwork (around 70 interviews) in West Nile in 2017–18 for a project on local-level articulations of (in)security, with a particular focus on spiritual and supernatural concerns (Fisher & Leonardi, 2020). While we did not conduct research in the DRC, the proximity of the Congolese borders and experiences of movement across them featured in many of our interviews in both Uganda and South Sudan.

During our fieldwork, we encountered numerous vernacular terms deployed to describe occult practices, whose meanings sometimes changed across time or space. Some anthropologists therefore avoid English-language terms like 'witchcraft' altogether (West, 2005). But the terms 'witchcraft' and 'poison', and related ones like 'wizard' and 'witchdoctor' are also commonly used by people in our research areas, and, like some of the shifting local terminology, their mobility and ubiquity can express important aspects of how the forces they describe are understood to operate. It is often the shifting, mobile and slippery meanings of these terms that add to their power. We therefore follow Geschiere in using a 'loose terminology that can do … justice to the constant shifts and ambiguities of the central notions', notions which often graft onto new technologies, tensions and anxieties (Geschiere, 2013, p. 10).

We attempt to be more precise, however, in our use of the terms 'boundary' and 'border'. Boundaries – both international and internal – are invisible lines delimiting state territory and its internal spatial orders, while borders are constructed materially through 'the institutional paraphernalia and practices associated with managing and policing boundaries', such as customs and passport controls, and physical markers (Megoran, 2012, p. 465). Borders have also increasingly been shown to be constructed through imaginative, discursive and performative work, and we therefore discuss this scholarship in the next section in order to show that the trends in borderlands literature and in studies of witchcraft and other spiritual geographies show increasing synergies and point to the potential for closer dialogue. The third section introduces our research area and its historical, political and economic geography. In the fourth section we develop our detailed empirical analysis of discourse and action around witchcraft in these borderlands, highlighting four main spatial themes emerging from our interviews: the import of new forms of witchcraft by cross-border migrants, particularly returning refugees; the occult capture of labour across borders; the magical production of wealth, particularly through cross-border trade; and the anti-witchcraft measures which work to construct and reinforce local and ethnic boundaries. We conclude by reflecting on the wider implications of our study, and the value of understanding the construction of borders and boundaries through the lens of oft-overlooked epistemologies, discourses and geographical imaginaries.

2. Imaginative and political geographies: witchcraft and border studies

> The magical, the fantastic, the intolerable, impurity, violence and fear, side by side with many other aspects, represented—and still represent—the foundations and empirical arguments often used in the making and consolidation of a myriad of limits, margins, divisions, boundaries, frontiers, borders (Neto, 2017, p. 305).

To date there has been relatively little work on the occult or spiritual dimensions of international borders in Africa, Neto's recent research on the spectral aspects of the Angola-Zambia border marking a valuable exception. Yet the wider scholarship both on boundaries and borderlands and on witchcraft and spiritual insecurity have been moving towards considerable potential synergies, as both increasingly highlight the significance of imaginative, moral and emotional geographies. We therefore suggest that there is value in bringing these fields together more explicitly in considering the meaning and making of political boundaries, both within and between states.

The study of international boundaries may have begun as a matter of international law, relations, diplomacy and security, but since the 1990s scholarship from a range of disciplines has moved beyond legal,

cartographic and purely textual approaches to explore how boundaries are made into borders on the ground (Megoran et al., 2005). The thriving field of borderlands studies has emphasized borders not as lines on a map but as zones of interaction and contestation, in which multiple actors are involved in constructing, exploiting, resisting and shaping how state boundaries work in reality (Fauser et al., 2019). This work of 'bordering' includes not only economic activities or institutional practices but also the imaginative, narrative and performative aspects of giving meaning to borders (Murton, 2019; Newman and Paasi, 1998). Borders 'are often pools of emotions, fears and memories' (Paasi in Johnson et al., 2011).

Such approaches have been intertwined with new understandings of state formation as well as territory. If we understand the state itself as 'an ideological and cultural construct' (Mitchell, 1991), then imaginaries of power and state authority are no less real or effective than material infrastructure or institutional forms. State power everywhere 'becomes effective as authority only because it invades, and is appropriated by, everyday epistemologies of power, of the magical, the spiritual and the extraordinary' (Hansen and Stepputat, 2001, p. 20). The very idea of the modern state as governed by rationality is a central part of its myth and its 'languages of stateness', but should not obscure the power of other languages and myths in its construction (Hansen and Stepputat, 2001, p. 15). State actors may themselves engage in imaginative and performative border-making, depicting international boundaries as 'a moral border between good and evil' (Megoran et al., 2005) and migrants as threats (Bigo, 2002; Gravelle, 2018; Vives, 2017) to justify the increasing securitization of borders (Deleixhe et al., 2019).

African states are seen to have had less incentive or capacity to establish such hard borders, relying on the legal strength of their boundaries rather than effective governance of their borderlands (Herbst, 2000; Jackson and Rosberg, 1982). Yet the colonial imaginary of ethno-territorial ordering has nevertheless been perpetuated by many postcolonial African states in their efforts to define and govern citizenship (Brankamp and Daley, 2020), leading to increasing xenophobia against migrants in countries from South Africa to Cote d'Ivoire (Adida, 2014; Jackson, 2007; Tizora, 2019). Ethnic belonging has increasingly become the basis for claiming citizenship rights at the local level too, so that internal administrative and political boundaries are defined and contested in terms of ethnicity and autochthony (Bøas & Dunn, 2013; Mbembe, 2001; Sjogren, 2015).

Given the colonial origins of the attempts to map political territory onto 'tribes', some scholars have highlighted precolonial territorialities, endogenous epistemologies and African traditions of 'conviviality' as alternatives and potential resources for resistance to ethno-territorial border-making (Brankamp and Daley, 2020; Nyamnjoh, 2017). Indeed, much research has emphasized the maintenance of solidarities and identities across African borders and the value of transborder economic networks (Adefuye, 1985; Feyissa & Hoehne, 2010).

Yet as Nyamnjoh stresses, conviviality also contains risks, tensions and the challenge of balancing 'intimacy and distance' (Nyamnjoh, 2017, p. 264). It is precisely these tensions that also produce fears of witchcraft, according to Geschiere, who identifies common tendencies across continents and periods for occult fears to be directed at close relatives and neighbours, exposing the inherent dangers hidden in relationships that rely on trust. Yet, importantly, the dangers come from outside the intimate sphere into which they are carried by the suspected witch, who thus operates across the moral boundary between 'inside' and 'outside' (Geschiere, 2013; Allen, 1993). There are parallels with the 'relentless movement' of witches in European historical imaginaries (Williams, 2016). Contemporary African witchcraft discourses similarly emphasize the ability of occult threats to transcend distances between town and village or even across continents, especially as families become ever more mobile and dispersed (Geschiere, 2013).

Far from demonstrating African exceptionalism then, witchcraft concerns across the continent and in many other global contexts reflect the universal tensions inherent in intimate relations and their interaction with the world beyond. This has made occult discourses particularly apt for expressing the effects of globalisation and capitalism in compressing distance, penetrating intimate relations and creating or exacerbating inequalities and exploitations among those relations (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1999; Ndjio, 2008). Research on African witchcraft since the 1990s has therefore emphasized its 'modernity', fluidity and mobility, emphatically overturning any previous assumptions that it represented archaic worldviews (Sanders, 2003, p. 339; Geschiere, 1997; Smith et al., 2017).

Efforts to combat witchcraft tend to focus on 'containment' because of this disturbing capacity for occult threats to bridge scales and to transgress boundaries, like the market itself: 'Both tend to force openings where there was closure' (Ciekawy and Geschiere, 1998, p. 5), whether by importing dangerous substances into intimate spheres (as in the poisoning accounts we discuss below), or by extracting the labour and life force of close relatives in ways that miraculously compress time and space (as in the widespread zombie stories that also feature in our research area). Such accounts can be seen as vivid expressions of 'the "unnatural" states associated with making things move' in extractive economies (Watts, 2019), and the way that global supply chains produce profits at one end and precarity at the other (Schouten et al., 2019, p. 788).

Occult imaginaries within and beyond Africa are inherently geographical and concerned with movement, scale and distance, and with the intersections and unevenness of local, regional and global economies. As such, they do not depict a magical otherworld operating autonomously from worldly affairs: occult forces may be invisible to most people but they take effect in the material world, moving in mysterious ways across space, often concentrated in particular locations and environmental features, and embodied in human, animal or other material forms. The saintly graves in Delhi where ghostly jinn spirits have come to be venerated are 'sites of the intertwining of sacrality and everyday life, memory, and community' (Taneja, 2013:142; also; Varley and Varma, 2018). Spiritual landscapes are fundamentally embedded in other dimensions of daily life and sources of security (Winch, 2017).

Anthropologists have long recognised the resulting political significance and ambiguity of African witchcraft, which appears as both a source of power and means of attacking the powerful, and can thus be both constitutive and subversive of state authority (Geschiere, 1997). But the political *geography* of witchcraft is only recently coming into focus, as scholars highlight how uneven development has shaped 'geographies of fear' in Melanesia (Eves and Forsyth, 2015), or how extractive landscapes are critiqued through Cameroonian epistemologies of witchcraft (Murrey, 2015).

Thus far, however, there has been surprisingly little consideration of the role of occult imaginaries in the construction of international borders or internal boundaries.[1] Yet the questions of opening and closure that anthropologists have highlighted in these imaginaries invite obvious connection with border governance. Movement across borders epitomizes the mysterious mechanisms by which mobility produces value – transporting a commodity across a border and into a different currency and taxation regime can transform its value instantly, while the more invisible and illicit the movement, the more value may be produced. The cross-border movement of people also generates its own hidden economies of paperwork, legal regulation and counterfeiting, in which rights and profits seem to be gained or lost in arbitrary ways. It is not surprising that borderlanders are often 'very much absorbed by the question of the ways in which movement (imaginary and otherwise) is constrained and permitted' (Stokes, 1998), or that witchcraft may be an apt way of expressing the ambiguities attached to migration (Sanders, 2001).

The fear that migrants may embody and import invisible threats is particularly prevalent globally in the context of the current viral

[1] Exceptions are Flynn (1997) and Neto (2017).

pandemic, but public health and security concerns have long been used to justify migration controls and border enforcement around the world (Dionne and Turkmen, 2020; Fauser et al., 2019, p. 485; Sahlins, 1989). Likewise in the region on which we focus, colonial epidemiological campaigns took a territorial approach, enforcing borders as cordons sanitaire (Bell, 1999; Lyons, 1996).

We are not therefore suggesting that occult fears about movement in our research region represent a unique or extreme demonization of migration – far from it, given that these borderlands are still characterised by considerable transborder conviviality, cooperation and fluidity of identity. But we focus on occult imaginaries because they are not part (at least explicitly) of the mainstream state policies and practices of border security and are therefore particularly revealing of how ethno-territorial notions of citizenship have nevertheless become internalised and vernacularized. Secondly, concerns about witchcraft go beyond the more universal discourses of migration to reveal the ambiguous and unequal effects of the political economies that are structured by both international and internal boundaries in the region. Thirdly, responses to occult fears reveal the constraints – and contribute to the hardening – of this political geography, because people's capacity to take action against witchcraft is largely confined within the most local of boundaries. Anti-witchcraft measures and occult imaginaries ultimately strengthen the political geography of the region even when they are focused on the smallest-scale moral community, because the boundaries of this community are increasingly defined in national and ethnic terms and by state administrative geography. Efforts to exclude and remove the threat of witchcraft from particular territorial localities are thus, we argue, an example of the broader practices of bordering increasingly identified by political geographers and scientists in 'the dispersed and heterogeneous sites at which the border function of exclusion from the political community takes place' (Salter in Johnson et al., 2011).

3. *The Uganda-South Sudan-DRC borderlands: historical and economic geography*

The borderlands of Uganda and South Sudan neighbouring the DRC (Fig. 1) provide a particularly valuable case-study for exploring the ambiguous meanings of borders for their inhabitants and traversers. These international borders would seem to epitomise the arbitrariness of colonial boundaries, cutting through social, economic and cultural communities and therefore resisted or disregarded by their inhabitants (Adefuye, 1985). Yet over the past century, these boundaries have nevertheless come to delineate economic regimes and conflict frontiers as well as state territories (Leopold, 2005, 2009). As such, they have contradictory meanings: crossing borders can bring profits or provide refuge, yet it also entails dangers and losses. Below we explore how these tensions and ambiguities manifest in changing concerns about witchcraft. But first we provide some context for these concerns in terms of the historical geography and political economy of this borderland region, in which the movement of people and goods has been crucial for survival and success, yet also a source of unease and insecurity.

During the nineteenth century, this region was depredated by the overlapping frontiers of ivory and slave trading emanating northwards from the East African coast via the Great Lakes region, and southwards from Egypt and Khartoum (Leopold, 2005; Titeca et al., 2020). The Turco-Egyptian government of Sudan in the 1870s and 1880s did little to inhibit slave raiding and violent requisitioning by commercial and imperial forces, leaving enduring memories of brutality, enslavement and displacement. The region was subsequently partitioned by the European colonial powers into the Belgian Congo, Anglo-Egyptian Sudan and British Uganda Protectorate. The Sudan-Uganda boundary to the west of the Nile was poorly defined in 1914 and some stretches remain contested up to now. The colonial governments dealt with such imprecision and a spreading sleeping-sickness epidemic by forcibly relocating settlements to create an uninhabited border-zone and banning all cross-border movement. Colonial administrations sought to categorize people into 'tribes' and confine them within territorial chiefdoms, establishing an enduring administrative geography (Leonardi, 2020).

At the same time, however, the colonial economy was generating new demand for migrant labour from the region to work in the plantations and farms of southern Uganda, or in the colonial military and police forces (Leonardi, 2007; Leopold, 2005; Middleton, 1963;). From the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century then, this region experienced external forces as overwhelmingly extractive of labour and resources. Yet the colonial administrations also coercively asserted that the movement of people conveyed disease – a concern revived in more recent years by fears of HIV and Ebola spreading across borders (Allen, 2007; Storer & Pearson, 2019). The sense of ambivalence and unease that accompanies the opportunities offered by long-distance movement of goods and labour thus has a long history in this region.

The postcolonial period has seen both continuity and change in these patterns. The continued marginalization of Southern Sudan, northern Uganda and northeast Congo contributed to multiple armed rebellions and waves of cross-border displacement. In one sense these refugee movements have reinforced cross-border ties and reciprocal obligations and blurred national identities among borderland inhabitants. But on the other hand, regimes of citizenship categorization and tensions between refugees and hosts have also hardened national identities and stereotypes (Merkx, 2000). Experiences of displacement and exile are often associated with the disruption of cultures and moral orders, as one of our Ugandan respondents emphasized:

> People came [back] from Sudan [in the 1980s] with different ideologies, especially those who were in the camp, the different thinking. As we went to Sudan we lost, we lost that social network. What they did was to adopt an individual way of existing, everybody for himself … As we came [back], that bushman-like behaviour of people [continued], very rude … guns were rampant, there were guns everywhere.[2]

Cross-border networks nevertheless facilitated the involvement of many borderlanders in the increasingly lucrative – if risky – informal or illegal *magendo* economy from the 1970s onwards (Meagher, 1990). In the early 1980s, returning Sudanese refugees were able to use 'friendships' built in Uganda or Zaire to conduct illicit cross-border trade (Merkx, 2000, p. 4). Arua Town in northwest Uganda, together with smaller border towns and markets, became centres of this trade. Leading Ugandan businesspeople known as the 'Arua Boys' or the 'tycoons', traded in fuel and manufactured goods from as far as Dubai and Hong Kong, exchanging profits for gold and dollars provided by Congolese and Sudanese traders (Titeca, 2009). Cross-border trade was by its very nature secret and exclusionary. Smuggling involved moving at night or through 'the bush', activities more commonly associated with occult practices. Traders flourished while those living in spaces through which the goods flowed struggled, including at the hands of rebel groups like the West Nile Bank Front (Leopold, 2005). The bus companies, hotels and grand homes built by the tycoons were a visible symbol of emergent inequality (Meagher, 1990). The deployment of the Ugandan army to DRC from 1998 also saw more Ugandan state and military actors employed in the trade (Titeca, 2012, p. 36). While the Arua boys remained well-placed to expand into trades like ivory and to develop links with new partners like Chinese buyers, increasingly it has been Kampala-based businesspeople with high-level links to Uganda's political and military elites who have profited from the most lucrative and expansive commercial networks (Titeca, 2018). Similarly in South Sudan, the most profitable cross-border commerce requires connections to the governing and military elites (Walraet, 2013).

[2] Interview with Former Government Employee, Lefori, Moyo District, Uganda, 21 May 2017.

The inequalities of the trading economy also contributed to resentments along national lines. After the end of the Sudanese civil war in 2005, cross-border trade boomed and many Ugandans found employment and business opportunities in Southern Sudan. The trade remained heavily controlled by Ugandans, producing resentment and increasing hostility towards them in Southern Sudan (Titeca, 2009, p. 14). Ugandans complained of unregulated taxation, harassment by military and security forces, and attacks on Ugandan traders (Ariko, 2007; Bwogi, 2007; *Daily Monitor*, 2007; Kiwawulo, 2008). Similar tensions and perceived inequalities have characterized trade across the DRC-Uganda border, where Ugandan traders feel more vulnerable than their Congolese counterparts (Schomerus and Titeca, 2012).

The dangers of cross-border movement only intensified with the outbreak of civil war in the recently independent South Sudan in 2013. Over a million refugees subsequently crossed into Uganda, while military clashes near the border and cross-border incursions made the conflict seem uncomfortably close for the Ugandan borderland inhabitants. The security threat posed by 'porous borders' had become a ubiquitous refrain by the time of our research in West Nile in 2017 (Fisher & Leonardi, 2020):

> The number one security problem is the porous border. Moyo is a district bordering South Sudan … Lawlessness is more in South Sudan than in Uganda. The flow of small arms and criminality is uncontrolled in South Sudan, and that means they come into Moyo also and engage some of our people in criminality also. Then there is war in South Sudan and human trafficking: taking our youth to join rebel forces, either by force or by convincing them that they are unemployed here.[3]

While the South Sudanese conflict and refugee influx provided the most common focus for these security concerns, some Ugandans also pointed to the wider issues of cross-border trade and criminality:

> West Nile is a very porous region. People are not sure of their security because of improved technology and skills. People can steal cars in Kampala and find it easy to pass through Arua to Congo or Sudan. That makes people here worried. Also people can kill and then take off over the borders, or commit robbery and then do the same.[4]

The insecurity and economic and political marginalization of the regions on both sides of the Uganda-South Sudan border remained a source of grievance directed at the respective central governments by local politicians – and most starkly by rebel groups in South Sudan's Central Equatoria. But competition for limited resources has also become channelled into more localized struggles over land and internal boundaries. Concerns about increasing populations – now massively exacerbated by the refugee influx – and anticipation of commercial farming and resource extraction have generated increasing insecurity over land rights, which remain primarily customary rather than individually registered (Leonardi & Santschi, 2016). At the same time, political strategies of decentralization along ethnic lines in both countries have heightened the association between local territorial control and administrative and political resources, positions and power (Justin and de Vries, 2019; Nsamba, 2013). The result has been proliferating demands for new ethnically-defined local government units and increasing conflicts over their boundaries (Leonardi, 2020).

State decentralization strategies have effectively pitted ethnic groups against one another in the struggle for access to state resources and control over land and natural resources, so that the apparent better fortunes of one ethnic group or district are seen to come at the expense of their neighbours. Meanwhile the real profits in this borderland region have been made by transcending these local geographies, particularly by engaging in cross-border and long-distance trade, or developing connections to state and military elites. The political geography of these borderlands is thus increasingly fragmented and ethnicized, in ways that serve to undermine any regional solidarity or resistance to the wider inequalities of national and international political economies. Instead, grievances over the unequal distribution of resources and the insecurities of the regional economy tend to be directed at more local targets – migrants, refugees or the mysteriously wealthy. This is particularly apparent when we explore the discourses and actions relating to witchcraft, which are deeply revealing of the simultaneous opportunities, exclusions and inequalities of the borderland economies.

4. Occult geographies of profit and precarity in the borderlands

As we elaborate below, occult geographies are inseparable from political and economic geographies. International boundaries have gained additional meaning through their perceived demarcation of differences in occult practices, both reflecting and contributing to the emergence of national identities. The region's political geography is also not limited to international boundaries. Since the colonial period, governments have used ethnicity as an organising principle for governing and territorializing their populations, with the result that internal boundaries between districts and counties have become increasingly significant and contested. Occult geographies again reflect and help to construct ethnic differences and to locate these spatially.

What the occult discourses reveal above all though is that these forms of territorial organization and identification are fundamentally economic geographies, structuring regional disparities in wealth and development while enabling commercial networks that both transcend and exploit the borders. The result has been more conspicuous inequalities and the sense that certain individuals are profiting from the risky borderland economy and invisible long-distance connections, while the majority suffer from the associated insecurity and precarity of life and livelihoods. Inequalities – whether between relatives, neighbours or regions – are often apparent in the capacity to employ and exploit the labour of poorer people. These themes all feature prominently in the concerns our respondents expressed about changing, and mobile, forms of witchcraft, which include occult practices referred to locally as 'poisoning'. The spatial imaginaries of witchcraft and poisoning tend in turn to produce solutions which emphasize containment and bordering, which, we suggest, contribute to (rather than subvert) the political geography of the region.

4.1. Cross-border movement and contamination

There seems to be a long history to concerns about the potential for hidden threats to be carried by the movement of people in this region: some oral histories and colonial reports associate the origins of particular forms of occult poisoning with women from neighbouring or distant groups captured in warfare (Reference removed for review). In precolonial settings, women were often the most mobile, moving to their husband's territory on marriage, and might therefore be suspected of bringing forms of witchcraft from outside the community (Allen, 1993, pp. 367-70). But from the 1920s onwards, new opportunities for migrant labour made young men more mobile and are cited by South Sudanese as the source of new forms of poisoning acquired for the first time by men:

> What happened was that many people were going there to work in sugar or cotton, they got their money, came back and settled, got married. It is during this migration, and interaction with poisoning in

[3] Interviews with District Administrative/Security Officer, Sub-County Administrator and District Councillor, Moyo, Uganda, 24 May 2017.

[4] Interview with NGO Manager, Arua, Uganda, 1 March 2017.

> Uganda, especially among men, that some men also acquired this practice and brought it back.[5]

One Yei chief's father warned him in 1937 that Masindi in Uganda was the principal source of poison.[6] In northwest Uganda meanwhile, Congo was more commonly depicted as the source of new forms of witchcraft. In the 1950s, the anthropologist John Middleton reported the introduction of new '*elojua*' poison into Lugbara areas, said to be bought by local migrant labourers from Congolese migrants in southern Uganda. One of Middleton's chief informants, an elder, instructed that 'young men should not go to Congo and get evil things' (Middleton, 1963, pp. 183, 246-8).

Colonial medical campaigns against sleeping sickness and meningitis sought to spread the message that invisible threats could be carried by people across borders. There is some evidence that these diseases were associated with witchcraft: serious outbreaks of cerebro-spinal meningitis in Kajokeji in the 1930s were accompanied by major witch-hunts (Leonardi, 2007), while recent interviews with Ugandan elders suggest that sleeping sickness was attributed to occult poisoning (Kovacic et al., 2016). Whether or not they reinforced the perceived occult threats of cross-border movement, these medical campaigns certainly contributed to the hardening of boundaries. Cross-border movement increasingly had to take place under the cover of dark, which contravened the normal dislike of 'night-walking' associated with occult activities.[7]

From the 1960s, international boundaries became lines between conflict and refuge, although these lines were also transgressed and blurred by rebel groups operating in and across the borderlands. Some of these groups have themselves appropriated and reworked older forms of magical protection and therapy, which had historically been an important source of power but in the 1980s–90s became intertwined with the violent threat posed by groups like Uganda's Lord's Resistance Army or the Congolese Mai Mai (van Bockhaven, 2020; Titeca, 2010).

The movements of refugees also became associated with increasing and new forms of witchcraft and poisoning. In 1980s Southern Sudan, Ugandan refugees from West Nile were subject to considerable hardships and the 'forced urbanization' of the refugee camps, where Harrell-Bond (1986) recorded acts of 'mob justice' to manage people suspected of poisoning. Some Ugandans now claim that new and more potent forms of poison or witchcraft were obtained by people when they were in Sudan, leading to collective action and killing of suspects after their return (Allen and Reid, 2015).[8]

Other West Nilers fled over the Congo border, where they lived among Congolese citizens rather than in refugee camps. Survival often depended on living among strangers and assimilating in order to trade, which posed particular moral dilemmas. An elder emphasized the occult dimensions of this sense of change:

> When people went to exile, people went and learnt new cultures …. They came back and started to drink, started practicing *mazi*, those things weren't there before. That is why you see things like evil spirits here now; people brought them from exile [in] 1982, '83.[9]

The returns of West Nilers in the 1980s were accompanied by a major influx of Southern Sudanese refugees fleeing war. The latter's lengthy exile in Uganda is also associated with the acquisition of new forms of witchcraft, which accompanied their return after 2005:

> *Abiba* is a form of witchcraft, which was brought by Sudanese returnees from Uganda … *Abiba* is new and people learned about it in exile in Uganda. They bought this kind of poison from markets in the Lugbara areas of Maracha in the Terego land. Some poisons were also bought from Ma'di on the eastern bank of the Nile. The Kuku bought *abiba* from Ugandans during the wartime, and are using it to kill each other.[10]

A South Sudanese refugee in Moyo District similarly claimed in 2017 that *abiba* was a 'recent' phenomenon, originating with the Alur of Nebbi District in Uganda, that he had only heard about in West Nile in the 1990s and which was brought into South Sudan's Kajokeji later by returning refugees: 'So really this *abiba* is foreign'.[11] In 2007, people in Yei in South Sudan were also attributing an increase of occult poisoning to the return of refugees: 'poisoning has increased because people have brought back these things from Uganda'.[12] Blaming 'witchdoctors' (or diviners) for inciting mob killings of suspected witches, a South Sudanese police commissioner also emphasized the 'foreign' origins of the witchdoctors: 'They come from Uganda, where there are many criminals … They are here illegally.'[13]

Concerns and discourse about occult threats have played a part in the formation of national and ethnic identities over time, reflecting the interaction of occult and political geographies in the construction of state territory. Attempts by state actors like this police commissioner to construct and govern boundaries have recurrently involved the pathologization and criminalization of unregulated cross-border movement, while rebel operations in the borderlands have enhanced the sense of frontier threats. But occult discourses also go beyond the statist language of border security to reveal the significance of cross-border movement in structuring economic inequalities and exploitations.

4.2. *Capturing labour*

Economic inequality and exploitation have also been apparent in the long history of labour extraction in this region, from enslavement and colonial labour demands to more recent recruitment or abductions by rebel or state security forces. In the early 1950s, a Southern Sudanese politician was reportedly 'concerned to find that the ancient superstition of Kulia Batu is still fairly widely believed' in Yei District:

> The belief is that at dusk, saloon cars come across the frontier from the Belgian Congo or Uganda and carry off any unwary Sudanese to an uncertain fate. It is even alleged that the Yei merchants are the agents of the Kulia Batu. The words 'Kulia Batu' mean in effect 'cannibals'.[14]

These cannibals were said to be 'European, Arab or even Indian', suggesting a link both to colonial labour recruitment and to the history of slave raiding in the region (cf. Shaw, 2002). Stories of colonial bloodsucking and cannibalism across east and central Africa offer 'a glimpse of the world as seen by people who saw boundaries and bodies located and penetrated' and constitute epistemologies for describing 'the extractions and invasions with which they lived' (White, 2000, p.

[5] Interview with a Retired Engineer from Kajokeji, Khartoum, Sudan, 17 February 2003.

[6] Equatoria Province Monthly Diary Oct 1937, National Records Office, Sudan (NRO) Civ Sec 57/4/17.

[7] Equatoria Province Monthly Diary Jan–March 1937, NRO Civ Sec 57/4/17; Interview with a Retired Engineer from Kajokeji, Khartoum, Sudan, 17 February 2003.

[8] Interview with Social Worker, Moyo, Uganda, 29 May 2017.

[9] Interview with Elder, Onzivu, Arua, Uganda, 14 January 2017.

[10] Interview by Leben Moro with Paramount Chief in Kajokeji County, Southern Sudan, 13 November 2009; Fieldwork report by Leben Moro for the RVI-USIP project *Local Justice in Southern Sudan*, in Author 1's possession.

[11] Interview with Refugee - a Teacher and Former Kajokeji County Councillor, Moyo, Uganda, 29 May 2017; also with Refugee Teacher, Ibakwe Settlement, Moyo District, Uganda, 31 May 2017.

[12] Interview with a Kakwa Chief, Yei, South Sudan, 20 January 2017.

[13] Interview by Leben Moro with Police Commissioner, Kajokeji, Southern Sudan, 23 November 2009: Fieldwork report by Leben Moro for the RVI-USIP project *Local Justice in Southern Sudan*, in Author 1's possession.

[14] Equatoria Province Monthly Diaries Feb. 1951, NRO Dakhlia 57/9/24; and Jan. 1953, NRO Civ Sec 2 30/3/6.

5). In Uganda's West Nile, *kulia batu* also became associated with Congolese commerce and were said to cut off people's heads and put them in the foundations of storage buildings (suggesting a link with accumulation). Respondents here reveal that fears persisted into the later twentieth century and recalled being told not to sleep outside when they were young, for fear of being taken by the *kulia batu*: 'These people were not seen, they operated at night, even it was hard to know what colour they were. They took anyone, women, men, as long as you were human.'[15]

This particular threat appears to have been superseded since the 1980s by ideas of zombie labour, which have also been prominent as far afield as South Africa, where 'zombies are thought to have multiplied as wage work has become scarce among the young and unskilled' (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1999, p. 290). In the South Sudan-Uganda borderlands, occult forces known as *abiba* or *maji/mazi* are said to be used by wealthy businesspeople to turn corpses or sleeping people into labourers, often in far distant fields:

> People think that you have died, but you have not died. [They] will bring back the whole body and put your spirit back in you – you will come back to life and you will work for him, doing any kind of work for them, not necessarily evil, you might become a slave, doing digging, so [you are] still there for them, visible to them but not to your people.[16]

A suspected case occurred near Yei in South Sudan in 2005, when a recent grave collapsed and the deceased was said to have been taken by *abiba*; according to a relative, 'people are blaming the driver who drove the deceased to Uganda, saying that the driver is a workaholic and has taken him away to work for him'.[17] There are obvious parallels with the *kulia batu* cannibals in their 'saloon cars' in the late colonial period: *abiba* is even more explicitly related here to the cross-border extraction of labour and the profits of trade and transport.

4.3. Secret profits of cross-border trade

The migrant labour economy of the colonial period might have distanced the source of the labourers' wages and commodities from their home communities, but the postcolonial economy of trade and smuggling has produced profits in even more secretive and hidden ways. It is not surprising then that the Arua 'tycoons' became a focus of occult rumours in Uganda's West Nile from the 1990s. It was said that these men 'went under the water to acquire *mazi* from Congo'.[18] People were suspicious of shops which were mysteriously filled during the night, and said traders communed with snakes or white spirits. *Mazi* accusations were fuelled by the opacities of the cross-border trade, according to one of the few respondents to question their veracity:

> *Mazi*, it is not true. These accusations are everywhere, but they come up because people don't understand about smuggling … These rich people – the ones that have developed Arua – they are supplying all these people who sell small things here. You see them going round town in closed vehicles, distributing. But in the village, people don't understand these things, so they accused them of *mazi*.[19]

The secrecy and subterfuge inherent in cross-border trade may have particularly fuelled occult explanations of its profits. But the inequalities and vagaries of the wider regional economy are also critiqued and perhaps combated through the association of sudden wealth with occult activities. Since the 2000s, accusations were also directed at rural kiosk-owners making smaller-scale profits from selling tobacco and other goods. Markets are described as sites for the procurement of poisonous substances and the services of 'witchdoctors', a term that has come to refer to the commercialised vendors of both protection against and forms of witchcraft. The growing commercialization of and competition over land is also sometimes cited as a motive for either accusations or use of witchcraft (Lindrio, 2019).

The threat of being either targeted by or accused of witchcraft could be seen as a powerful levelling force, pressuring richer members of society to display generosity rather than ostentatious wealth – both the practice and the accusations of witchcraft are often explained in terms of envy and resentment of the wealthy. For more sceptical respondents, witchcraft concerns work not as a positive levelling force but as an obstacle to development, a 'pull-down factor' as a teacher from Kajokeji put it: 'If I go to dig in the morning, very early in the morning, and I make a good farm … they will say, "Ah, so and so has extra powers. Therefore, he has to be killed".'[20] An Ugandan district councillor shared this view:

> A farmer can concentrate and can cultivate there in the bush, you hardly see him for six months. When he comes back, he has planted five acres of cassava, when he sells it he has 10 million [Ugandan Shillings], when he's building, you think he has made this money out of devilish power. Somebody's doing a business that you don't understand and they have a lot of money … so these are some of the reasons that people can suspect village members and can decide to chase you from the village and even beat the village member to death.[21]

As in many other contexts, the use of occult powers has come to be seen not only as a recourse by the poor to express their resentment of more fortunate relatives and neighbours, but also as a means of becoming wealthy swiftly and ruthlessly (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1999; Geschiere, 1997; Ndjio, 2008). This more novel use of witchcraft by the rich is associated with the expansion of markets and towns, allowing spatial as well as economic differentiation (Geschiere, 2013). The opacity and vagaries of business in the borderlands adds to the mysteries of profit-making. But strategies to combat witchcraft tend to reinforce boundaries rather than to redress inequalities.

4.4. Internal mapping and movement control

In one sense, these occult forces transcend state boundaries – indeed this is part of what makes them so troubling. Yet the ways that people talk about and try to combat witchcraft are deeply entangled with state political geographies in this borderland region. Not only are particular forms of witchcraft associated with cross-border movement, but also with specific districts and ethnic groups – and districts have increasingly become defined in ethnic terms. Stories circulate about which districts or ethnic groups are the most potent sources of witchcraft, such as the Alur of Nebbi District or Mount Wati in Terego County.[22] It is striking that a state administrative unit can become seen as a boundary between the 'inside' and 'outside' of moral communities such as Allen (1993) described in the 1980s. A district councillor in Moyo, for example, emphasized that *abiba* was a new form of witchcraft; when asked where it came from she emphasized its outside origins:

[15] Interview with Elder, Arua, Uganda 1 July 2016; Interview with Elder, Onzivu, Arua, Uganda, 17 June 2016.
[16] Interview with Trader, Maracha, 28 June 2016.
[17] Interview with Youth and Church Leader near Yei, Southern Sudan, 6 September 2005.
[18] A common refrain during fieldwork, e.g. Interview with Elder (formerly trader) in English, Arua, Uganda, 9 July 2017.
[19] Personal Conversation with Trader, 8 June 2017.
[20] Interview with Refugee - a Teacher and Former Kajokeji County Councillor, Moyo, Uganda, 29 May 2017.
[21] Interview with District Councillor, Moyo, Uganda, 24 May 2017.
[22] Interviews with Catholic Priest, Arua, Uganda, 18 May 2017 Anglican Pastor, Arua, Uganda, 17 May 2017.

> The normal tale is that they have gone out of the District (laughs). They go to buy from witches that they know; they go outside the District because these are things which we are not hearing of.[23]

Such accounts work to reinforce the sense of identity and moral community that local authorities like councillors have worked to invest in their administrative jurisdictions. Ethnic difference and division has become the focus of political competition for positions and for the creation of new districts or sub-district units, so the emphasis on particular ethnic origins of migrant occult threats feeds into the dominant political idiom in both Uganda and South Sudan.

The geographic imaginaries of witchcraft also generate particular strategies for attempting to contain and exclude it, often at an even more localized level than the district. Within the smallest administrative units in Uganda (Local Council 1, or LC1) or under chiefs, sub-chiefs and headmen in South Sudan, the threat of witchcraft is cited as a basis for regulating incomers. Newcomers (particularly strangers and those from different ethnicities) wishing to settle in a particular village or neighbourhood are said to require letters from their former LC or chief, vouching that they are not witches or poisoners. A LC1 chair in Moyo District emphasized that residents from non-Ma'di ethnicities were by definition 'squatters' in the neighbourhood, and the automatic suspicion of migrants:

> If someone comes and wants to live here, I need to get reason why he shifted here. If I find you are a wizard, I cannot let you settle here; or if you like fighting … I have to research the background of a person before he settles here.[24]

This reflects a long history whereby witchcraft accusations could force individuals and families to relocate, inviting suspicion of migrants, but also a more recently formalized practice of evicting suspected occult practitioners. In the past two decades or so, local authorities on both sides of the border have developed a practice of holding 'elections' in communities convinced of an immediate occult threat, in which villagers vote to identify suspects, who are then evicted under threat of violence (Allen and Reid, 2015; Storer, O'Byrne, & Reid, 2017). While such practices are not endorsed by higher level government and judicial authorities, they are perceived as a legal and fair mechanism by the lowest-level authorities of the local state, and recorded with a degree of bureaucratic officiousness.[25]

Both this hybridized 'modern' practice of elections and more violent methods of eviction or killing are said by some respondents to have helped 'cleanse' communities from the worst occult threats, demonstrating the efforts to make the most localized administrative units into moral communities. Since 2010, along the Uganda-Congo border, rural clan leaders have been involved in the writing of English by-laws, which are on occasion presented to village and sub-county authorities.[26] These by-laws underscore the territorial approach to combating witchcraft, with an emphasis on the need for suspects to be evicted across long distances – specifically '300' miles or kilometres. Some clans have developed 'security wings', where young men are involved in inflicting harsh punishments, particularly on suspects from outside the clan. Similarly a South Sudanese clan headman in Kajokeji near the Uganda border was proud of having 'chased' poisoners away from the area, adding that none of them were from his clan.[27]

Collective action against suspected witches and poisoners can work then as a way of constructing small-scale territorial communities, from which the dangers and corruptions of migration and the borderland economy can be excluded or cleansed. Such claims work to the obvious advantage of the local authorities seeking to govern these territorial units. But they also feed into the broader reinforcement of state political geographies that divide to rule along ethnic lines, undermining broader regional or class-based political solidarities. Action against occult threats is thus an example of how borders and territory are constructed by the myriad small-scale attempts to define and govern the boundaries of political and moral communities (Salter in Johnson et al., 2011).

These small-scale constructions of territory have come to overlap with how state boundaries have been imagined, understood and experienced by the inhabitants of these borderlands. Cross-border movement has been a fundamental part of their lives, enabling access to economic opportunities, refuge from conflicts and the maintenance of transborder relations and cultural communities in defiance of national regimes of citizenship. But the various occult themes discussed in this section also reveal otherwise hidden concerns about the risks, costs and unequal effects of these cross-border opportunities. Accounts of occult threats imported by returning refugees and migrants both reflect and contribute to the ways in which experiences of displacement across borders have shaped national identities and given moral meanings to international boundaries. Most importantly, stories of zombie labour exploitation and the sudden riches generated at the expense of one's kin highlight the unequal effects of the transnational economies that traverse and exploit these borders, while life for the majority of borderlanders remains impoverished and precarious.

5. Conclusion

Our research area has been characterized by high levels of conflict, mass migration and high-risk economic activities, which may help to explain the particular concerns with the moral and social effects of cross-border movement that seem to feature prominently here in discourses about witchcraft. But we nevertheless emphasize the wider salience of our findings, in terms of the need to explore how boundaries are given meaning and territory is constructed in local, vernacular imaginaries and epistemologies. Amid the heightened global concerns with migration, disease control and border enforcement, it is worth remembering that territorial governance and exclusion are also local processes, and that understanding the complexities of these local processes through their vernacular expressions and idioms may be crucial to understanding the broader trends that they both reflect and perpetuate.

The importance of imaginative, discursive, performative and moral border-making at multiple scales has become well-established in border studies within and beyond the field of political geography. Such approaches have increasingly overlapped with the political anthropology of the state as an imaginative construct and are also beginning to pay greater attention to alternative epistemologies and geographies, including spiritual landscapes. We caution, however, against assuming that endogenous epistemologies constitute an alternative or a source of resistance to state political geographies, securitising practices or projects of development (Smith et al., 2017, p. 146). Our case, and others, show that it may be impossible to disentangle spiritual and political geographies, and that state cartographies and boundaries have been constituted by, and appropriated into, multiple projects of border-making and local-level efforts to define (Leonardi, 2020; MacArthur, 2016). Witchcraft imaginaries are a striking example of epistemologies that continually shift and migrate in ways that absorb and reflect global capitalism and state politics. As such, they may do more to construct and reinforce than to resist state borders and administrative geographies, even if they also draw on older practices of cleansing or containing occult threats territorially.

Far from representing a uniquely African form of border work, witchcraft geographies feed into and are fed by the pathologization and fear of uncontrolled movement around the world. But unlike the international, statist discourses of border security, the occult imaginaries we

[23] Interview with District Councillor, Moyo, Uganda, 26 May 2017.
[24] Interview with LC1, Moyo, Uganda, 13 October 2014.
[25] Interview with LC1, Moyo District, Uganda, 22 May 2017.
[26] Field observations and copies of these by-laws by Author 2, May 2016–July 2017.
[27] Interview with Headman, Kajokeji County, South Sudan, 27 September 2014.

have explored also expose the inequalities and exploitations of the economies that these borders structure. These inequalities are largely obscured by statist discourses and practices of border security, which seek to control (and often to criminalize) general movements of people and to enforce national regimes of citizenship and identity. Witchcraft discourses in the South Sudan-Uganda-DRC borderlands, on the other hand, are deeply revealing of the hidden profits and the inequalities of the border economies that state actors rarely discuss. These occult geographies highlight not only the dangers of cross-border movement but also the disparities in wealth between towns and villages, the increasingly ethnicized politics of local administrative territories and the attempts by local authorities to constitute spatial moral communities from which 'outside' threats can be excluded. This also means, however, that while discourses of witchcraft form a potent critique of the regional economy, the actions taken to combat witchcraft tend to reinforce, rather than undermine, internal ethno-political geographies and national regimes of citizenship.

Declaration of competing interest

None.

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