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Improvising border security: 'a situation of security pluralism' along South Sudan's borders with the Democratic Republic of Congo

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Improvising border security:

'A situation of security pluralism' along South Sudan's borders with the Democratic Republic of the Congo

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Abstract

This article compares two cases of securitization along South Sudan's border with the Democratic Republic of the Congo. By comparing how a security concern – the presence of the Lord's Resistance Army – was interpreted and responded to, the article shows that border security practices in two borderscapes are improvised, contradictory and contested, and serve to establish authority rather than actually securing the border. This is apparent on three levels: (a) through the multiplicity of security actors vying for authority; (b) in how they interpret security concerns; and (c) in terms of what practice follows. The article argues that by allowing authority at the border to be taken by actors that are not under direct control of the central government, the South Sudanese state is developing as one that controls parts of the country in absentia, either by granting discretionary powers to low-level government authorities at the border or through tactical neglect. Processes of securitization by both state and non-state actors in the

borderland are largely disconnected from the South Sudanese central government, which does not claim authority over this border and thus seemingly does not consider the lack of security for its citizens, and the parallel authorities, as a threat to central stability.

Keywords

borders, insecurity, Lord's Resistance Army, security pluralism, South Sudan

Introduction

The county commissioner in Morobo County in South Sudan's Central Equatoria State (CES) was almost apologetic when explaining who exactly had responsibility for security along the South Sudanese border with the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). He gave a confusing account of there being various security actors with a range of motivations and responsibilities: 'We have a situation of security pluralism. In many countries there is pluralism on the political level; in [South Sudan], however, the pluralism is rather to be found on the level of the security.'1 The commissioner was referring to numerous organized forces and intelligence agencies claiming authority and representing local, state and central government. Each of these actors developed and implemented its own specific set of responses and actions when dealing with security concerns along the border – or even when labelling a situation a security concern.

'Security' is itself already a label, which in this article we use to describe the result of a process of securitization used to legitimize practices and underscore authority. What does or does not get defined as a security concern is thus never objective and instead political in nature. The notion of securitization as a political process, put forward by Balzacq et al. (2010), allows us to problematize the process of assessing and labelling security concerns through discursive practices, along with the simultaneous emergence of practices and invented actions. This article highlights how interpretations and practices of security

concerns by different actors affect relations between the border and the centre of power, drawing on case study research along South Sudan's border with the DRC. If African states are built or unravel from their margins – as argued in a recent trend by a range of scholars (Nugent, 2002; Huesken and Klute, 2010) – practices at the South Sudan–DRC border indicate a set of characteristics about the authority of the South Sudanese state that is being built. Traditional border studies tend to use the political centre as the point of departure (Baud and Van Schendel, 1997: 212; Bassey and Oshita, 2010).

Current scholarship, however, takes the margins as the starting point for the study of borderlands – which are broadly defined as regions significantly affected by the presence of an international border – and their impact on the states in which they are situated (Sahlins, 1989; Baud and Van Schendel, 1997; Roitman, 2004; Feyissa and Hoehne, 2010; Raeymaekers, 2010). The emphasis is on the nature of the border and borderland, and how their relevance to the centre changes over time. Borderlands are thus a transition zone or a hybrid space in which authority, loyalties and affiliations are not clear-cut (Newman, 2011). How the relevance of a border to the centre changes – depending on local actors, interests and interpretations of how the state is to be performed – becomes particularly clear in the two case studies presented here.

The two perspectives on different parts of the border with the DRC show that the South Sudanese state controls large parts of the country in absentia in two distinct but connected ways. This is done either by discretionary powers being granted to state agents loosely representing the central government at the border, or through tactical neglect that creates space for other actors to step up to the control function. The two cases presented here permit a unique perspective on state formation in the South Sudanese context through examination of security practices, also providing an insight into how actors interpret security and make choices about who deserves what kind of protection (Huysmans et al., 2006). It seems that the central government takes the view that security is only a concern when it threatens political authority and interests at the centre. This view does not take into account citizens' demands for local protection and security, and indicates that South Sudan as a state pays little attention to some of its margins. What this will mean for the success of the new state is a subject for future research; this article sets out to explain how this disconnect between the centre and the border under investigation results in and is a result of contradictory processes of securitization.

To illustrate these contradictions, the article compares how the most prominent security concern of recent years in this corner of South Sudan – the presence of the Ugandan Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) – was interpreted and acted upon differently at opposite ends of the border: the eastern triangle at the border with the DRC and Uganda,2 and the western triangle at the border with Schomerus and De Vries: Improvising border security in South Sudan, the DRC and the Central African Republic (CAR).3 Concentrating on which security actors are prominent locally, how they interpret security concerns to boost their authority, and what actions they take as a consequence of these definitions, the article outlines the contradictions in securitization triggered by the presence of the LRA. Using three analytical perspectives – actors, interpretations and actions – the article concludes that South Sudan's central government does not view the absence of security for its citizens in the DRC borderland as a threat to its central authority and stability.

Everyday power practices in borderscapes

Studying how authority is exerted at a border is of particular importance since these are sites of intense contestation, convergence, opportunity and constraint (Asiwaju, 1985; Nugent, 2002; Das and Poole, 2004). In both cases considered here, the LRA has been present. However, the intensity of security concern about the LRA was markedly different between the two areas, as discussed later, and, irrespective of the reality of the LRA's presence, local actors interpreted it differently in the two border triangles. The LRA's presence (at times only alleged) was used to legitimize a series of local responses. In the western corner, these were mainly led by a local non-state defence group – the 'arrow boys' – whereas in the east it was local representatives of the central government who sought ways to justify their lucrative everyday practices in securing the border. This difference in interpretation allows an insight into how South Sudan's centre of power in Juba shapes practical responses to security at the limits of the country's sovereign territory.

Our focus, however, is not on how the border is managed as a divider or connector. We are more concerned with 'borderscapes' – in other words, to move beyond territorial lenses to include political complexity and multiple-actor conflict (Rajaram and Grundy-

Warr, 2007). Out of such conflict, informed by the presence of the dividing line, emerges what Newman (2010: 775) calls the 'ordering of society' through 'socio-spatial practices in a process of creating social orders' (Jukarainen, 2006: 472). Elden (2010: 758) characterizes this as interpreting territory through 'a human behaviour or strategy', which implies changeability and adaptability according to interests. As such, a borderscape 'stray[s] well beyond the borderline' (McCall, 2013: 199) and allows us to take the interpretation of and actions upon a security concern at the border to understand broader processes of power. Between 2005 and 2011, the interim Government of Southern Sudan (GoSS) was responsible for securing Sudan's southern international borders on behalf of the Government of National Unity in Khartoum. With the establishment of the independent Republic of South Sudan in July 2011, the new country gained sovereignty over its territory and nominal control of its borders.

However, how border control was exerted underscored the importance of Agnew's challenge to the assumptions in geography that a feature of the state is to exercise sovereignty through territorial control (Agnew, 1994; Brenner and Elden, 2009: 354). The subsequent debate has called into question the link among territory, control, the monopoly on violence and the state (Bierstecker and Weber, 1996). This debate has poignancy in the case of Africa (Clapham, 1998a) because of the emphasis on the social constructivism that underpins African nations (Jackson, 1990); establishing a clear link between territory and sovereign control is a challenge, given South Sudan's recent history. For years, the guerrillas of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) controlled most of the southern borderlands. Yet now that these former guerrillas form the South Sudanese government and have sovereignty over the entire territory, security concerns at the border are handled with much flexibility and contradiction, and authority is either deliberately or carelessly devolved. This is somewhat at odds with how citizens and state agents at the border interpret and react to security concerns there.

Contradictions of securitization

The commissioner's observation of the existence of 'security pluralism' in his county illustrates the diversity of even the state agencies that claim a role in securing the border.

Yet his remark could also include non-state actors and their practices in securing the borderland and its people. We propose to unpack the commissioner's notion of pluralism in terms of securitization (Buzan et al., 1998) and how securitization is used to establish authority. The concept of securitization is often applied at the national and supranational levels and continues to be the subject of heated ontological debate in critical security studies (Taureck, 2006; Balzacq et al., 2010; Browning and McDonald, 2011).

We use the term 'securitization' in the context of South Sudan in a highly pragmatic way. The concept allows us to illuminate our empirically driven understanding of the term's process dimension. The notion of securitization helps unpack both discursive and practical forms of establishing authority in the borderscape, which crucially is governed neither with a singular understanding of a security concern nor by an authoritative South Sudanese central state. Instead, the security mandate in these borderscapes is claimed by a multitude of actors that use their localized securitization to vie for authority and a strengthened relationship with a disinterested central state. The contradictions of securitization in the borderland of South Sudan and the DRC can be seen at three different but connected levels.

The first is the multitude of security agents representing various levels of government, working in parallel, in competition or in conflict with non-state actors as they seek to secure the borders and their own authority. The second level deals with how security concerns are interpreted, meaning how framing and discourse determine which concerns get named as a 'security threat' by multiple security-related actors, depending on their political interests in a process that Buzan has described for other cases (Buzan et al., 1998; Grayson, 2003). The third level focuses on practice, seeking to understand how the multiple actors use their interpretations of security concerns to develop beneficial practices, actions and responses. Our usage of the commissioner's notion of 'security pluralism' thus covers who provides security and of what kind; how a security concern is defined; and what action such a definition elicits.

Taken together, the three steps shine a light on how contested the notion of security is, how useful securitization is in establishing authority, and how this has direct implications for civilian security at the local level (Huysmans et al., 2006). Local securitization along South Sudan's border with the DRC is thus not uniformly interpreted, but instead

socially constructed through interest-driven agendas largely disconnected from central government's interpretation of security concerns. Because of the relationship between interpretation and practice in the local context and the contradicting interpretation and instrumentalization of security concerns by central government, it is useful to use Liotta's terminology to establish how a security concern is handled. Liotta proposes a distinction between 'threat' and 'vulnerability', with a threat being 'identifiable, often immediate, and requir[ing] an understandable response', whereas a vulnerability is 'often only an indicator, often not clearly identifiable, often linked to a complex interdependence among related issues, and does not always suggest a correct or even adequate response' (Liotta, 2005: 51). In a rejoinder, Grayson rightly criticizes Liotta for suggesting that threats and vulnerabilities could be treated as 'objectively definable social facts'. Instead, indeed, 'the designation of "threat" or "vulnerability" … is an act of interpretation' (Grayson, 2003: 337–338). In this spirit, we use the two labels to illustrate how the process of interpretation influences local responses and increases the central government's disengagement in controlling its southern borderlands with the DRC.

A brief history of the South Sudan–DRC borderland

In 2005, the southern rebels of the SPLM/A signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) with the Government of Sudan in Khartoum. This ended a civil war, started in 1983, in which Sudan's southern borders were of great strategic importance (Johnson, 2003: 44; Schomerus et al., 2013). Like many other guerrilla movements – in Rwanda and Uganda, for instance (Clapham, 1998b) – the SPLM/A relied on the permeability of the borders to fight the war (D'Agoôt, 2013). From 1992, the SPLA controlled the northwestern end of the South Sudan–DRC border. In 1997, it captured the town of Yei, which enabled it to take complete control of the border with the DRC and crucial border crossings to Uganda. From the late 1990s, the SPLM/A controlled much of southern Sudan's international borders. After the CPA, the SPLM/A formed the interim GoSS. Yet transforming the SPLM/A into a professional army and governing party was and continues to be challenging (Metelits, 2004; Kalpakian, 2008), not least because many citizens of South Sudan hold wartime grievances against the SPLA (Branch and Mampilly, 2005).

At the border considered here, such grievances are emphasized, which as we will see has an impact on how the security concern caused by the LRA is interpreted locally. South Sudan shares a 628 km long frontier with the DRC that has experienced 'persistent conflict, widespread illegal trading networks, and massive forced migration, all of which continue to the present' (Leopold, 2009: 465). Conflicts have spilled across this border since the 1964 Simba rebellion (Johnson, 2010: 104). There have been longstanding tensions between the SPLM/A and the various governments in the DRC. The SPLM/A supported Laurent Kabila against Mobutu Sese Seko, but when Kabila took power in Kinshasa in May 1997 – two months after the SPLM/A liberated the border triangle with the DRC and Uganda – 'Père Kabila quickly lost sight of this part of the country', according to one Congolese police officer.4 Consequently, Khartoum could act along the Congolese hinterland with as much impunity as it had under Mobutu in fighting the SPLA (Johnson, 2010: 106). Khartoum retains good relations with Kinshasa today.

The LRA has been active in southern Sudan since the early 1990s; in late 2005 it moved into the area along the DRC border (Prunier, 2004; Schomerus, 2007). From 2006 to 2008, the new GoSS facilitated peace talks between the LRA and the Ugandan government when the LRA took up residence in Garamba National Park in the DRC's remote Haut-Uélé district across the border. The peace talks ended when the Ugandan army launched an aerial attack on the LRA camp in Garamba in December 2008. 'Operation Lightning Thunder' was billed as a joint operation by the SPLA and the DRC army. It was supported by the USA and the United Nations (UN) mission in the DRC (Atkinson, 2009). Poorly planned and executed, the aerial attack scattered groups of LRA fighters and left civilians unprotected against brutal attacks (Schomerus and Tumutegyereize, 2009; Atkinson et al., 2012).

However, South Sudanese civilians experienced the aftermath in very different ways depending on where they lived. After the aerial bombardment, a small LRA group moved eastward towards the border triangle with South Sudan and Uganda. Eleven people were killed in the most prominent LRA attack near Yei on 4–6 March 2009,5 but soon afterwards this LRA group left southern Sudanese territory and was never seen again on that side of the border. The majority of LRA fighters went westward towards areas around South Sudan's borders with the DRC and the CAR. Attacks – particularly inside the DRC and the CAR – claimed hundreds, possibly thousands, of lives (Human Rights Watch, 2009). Large refugee camps for Congolese and Central Africans sprang up

inside South Sudan; thousands were internally displaced on both sides of all three borders. The LRA also advanced into important towns in South Sudan, such as Ezo. Since 2010, LRA activity has been largely absent from South Sudan, despite alleged incidents in late 2013. Initially, the Ugandan 284 Security Dialogue 45(3) army took the major role in pursuing the LRA (Schomerus, 2012), but currently a regional task force of the African Union (including Ugandan, South Sudanese and Central African Republic troops), supported by US military advisers, is responsible for eliminating the relatively small remaining group of LRA fighters. Security concerns due to LRA activity have hence generally been more intense at the western end of the border than the eastern.

Methodology

We compare actors, interpretations and actions in response to security concerns caused by the presence of the LRA in two locations. Rooted in our backgrounds in socio-anthropology and development studies, data were gathered through semi-structured or open-ended interviews and supported by observation. Although gathered for two different research projects, the data were useful in a comparative case study, particularly because both authors broadly researched how various authorities governed security and insecurity. At the eastern end of the border, data were gathered over six months between January 2009 and March 2010. At the western end, fieldwork was conducted intermittently from 2006 to 2013 through numerous visits lasting from a few days to several weeks. In 2013, in addition to conducting interviews and holding focus group meetings, a small research team of eight enumerators conducted a structured survey.

However, studying practices of border control in the context of South Sudan is challenging because information is generally unclear, respondents are often suspicious, and rumours about security concerns are ever present.6 Yet extended periods of fieldwork occasionally allowed access to sensitive information, enabling us to observe the changing situation over time and to identify any gaps between what we were told during interviews and our own observations.

Vulnerability to threat: Discretionary powers in the eastern borderscape

At the eastern end of the border, security pluralism plays out as the concern of state actors representing the authority of central government at the border. These 'deconcentrated' state agents, defined by Bizet (2002: 476) as agents who represent the central government in institutions operating at provincial or local level, embody the GoSS at the border with Uganda and the DRC. Deconcentrated state agents answer directly to Juba, generally bypassing county or state-level authorities, which are often in competition with them. They differ from decentralized agents, who carry out tasks and are accountable to a lower level of government – for instance, the state or county government. Primarily staffed with former SPLA soldiers – many of whom liberated this area from the forces of the Government of Sudan in 1997 – the deconcentrated representatives of the central government include customs and immigration officials, various police departments, intelligence officers and the army. They are given discretionary powers and deal with security concerns flexibly. On this part of the border, securitization was observed when deconcentrated state agents sought to legitimize their mandate and presence in the eyes of their superiors in Juba by inflating security concerns from 'vulnerability' to 'threat'.

One of the most important roads from Uganda into South Sudan cuts through this borderland with the neighbouring DRC. In this area, the only official border checkpoint between South Sudan and the DRC was at the village of Bazi ('official' here means where goods can be cleared, central government taxes levied and immigration papers issued).7 In the 1970s, the village was an important trading hub between Sudan and Zaïre.8 Today, however, all trade and traffic comes from Schomerus and De Vries: Improvising border security in South Sudan 285 Uganda and is cleared at the Ugandan border in Kaya, a vibrant border town about 15 km away. Most of the Bazi checkpoint's lucrative activity consists of redundant cross-checking of customs papers issued in Kaya to enable state agents access to some resources.

In September 2009, the commissioner of Morobo County decided to prohibit the customs station in Bazi from stopping trucks coming from Uganda. This decision removed the mandate of most of the state agents in Bazi at a stroke (De Vries, 2013), and it was precisely at this moment that these agents started to elevate security concerns about the LRA from 'vulnerability' to 'threat', arguing that a checkpoint was necessary

for security reasons. The Morobo commissioner, who – in contrast to the deconcentrated state agents at the border checkpoint – is part of the decentralized system and answers to the CES state government, was not impressed: 'Some lame excuses came up, such as the LRA and the proliferation of weapons in the wrong hands. I closed my ears really. The county had not seen any signs of the LRA and there are no examples of looting with guns here in Morobo.'9

The number of deconcentrated state agents in Bazi is astounding: in April 2009, the town was home to 46 agents of various GoSS departments, along with the two SPLA companies.10 These state agents had an interest in inflating the importance of the checkpoint to ensure access to the financial benefits derived from border procedures. But, more importantly, they stated that as former rank-and-file members of the SPLM/A they knew how to deal with security concerns and were entitled to use the discretion provided by a strong mandate from their former commanders who joined South Sudan's central government in Juba. When the state agents were ordered to stop cross-checking papers from trucks from Uganda, it was in their political and personal interest to continue exerting authority over the now freely passable road. Requesting small amounts of money from passengers or truck drivers had previously been a lucrative income stream, and the state agents now found other ways to legitimize their position as representatives of central government and justify their practices by securitizing the border administration. This meant inflating a security concern in three ways. First, the South Sudanese state agents competed with the Congolese over the border itself, which divided the village into a Congolese and a South Sudanese side, and had very little to do with their tasks as state agents. Second, they maintained as much control as possible at what remained of the checkpoint, including controlling the road into the DRC. And third, they inflated the vague and flexible notion of security concerns – most prominently the LRA.11

Cross-border relations

Historically, relations between ex-SPLM/A men in Bazi and Congolese officials stationed on the two sides of the village were tense owing to several factors, including the lack of a common language. 12 This mutual incomprehension is coupled with a

history of SPLM/A activity on the Congolese side of the village from 1997. Between 1995 and 1997, the Ugandan West Nile Bank Front militia built a training camp on the DRC side of the road in Bazi, which is where the first SPLM/A troops installed themselves. Until insecurity on the Congolese side of the border forced the population to move to the South Sudanese side in February 2013,13 many former SPLA soldiers – who are now mostly state agents – continued to live on the DRC side. They found homes either in huts of the former training camp or in one of the two lodges owned by a former SPLM/A general. Having kept their uniforms and guns, they claim a right to live on the Congolese side because they liberated the land. 'They walk around with their guns as if they are at home', a Congolese police commander said.14 Carrying guns on DRC territory violates an agreement between authorities on both sides of the border. Thus, when South Sudanese state agents and soldiers took their Kalashnikovs to the DRC side, they were showing open disrespect to the Congolese authorities. This provided fertile ground for conflicts over territory and entitlements. These tensions and local debates about who has the right to do what on which side of the border have little to do with issues of national security. Yet, because it involves men who represent the central government in Juba, a local altercation can have wider reverberations.

In August 2007, for instance, the governor of CES wrote a memo to the South Sudanese living on the Congolese side in Bazi telling them to abide by Congolese law or move to the South Sudanese side.15 In January 2008, a skirmish between the Congolese army and South Sudanese ex-rebels led to an afternoon of fighting that was only resolved after intervention by SPLA headquarters and the state governor (De Vries, 2011). In their attitude towards the Congolese, the South Sudanese state agents behaved more like self-important foreign residents than representatives of the central government. So, what were their actual tasks, and how did they execute them?

Interpreting national security concerns at a border checkpoint

State agents operating at the checkpoint can be roughly divided into those responsible for economic activities (notably customs) and those responsible for security (such as public security and criminal investigations). Formally, the tasks and duties of, for example, an immigration officer are well defined. Yet an overly strict interpretation of

immigration duties – for instance, forcing local Congolese and South Sudanese travellers to stop for inspection of papers and luggage – created strained relations between the border communities and their authorities. Such practices allowed the central government agents to assert their power and effectively intimidate other authorities in the village. The tensions these practices created could then be reported to Juba, with the hope that attention would continue to be focused on the border area, and the importance of keeping state agents there confirmed. The South Sudanese state agents thus overstated the tensions with the Congolese, inflating vulnerability caused by everyday border conflicts to the level of a security threat. Given the reported incidents, the central government in Juba allowed their staff on the border to exert their discretionary powers. To secure their government mandate, the state agents' argument that there was a 'national security threat' from the LRA was powerful, even though the factual basis for such claims was thin.

When confronted with the fact that the LRA had never been seen in the area and that the rebels would never pass an official checkpoint anyway, the state agents argued that the LRA threat was real and required the continued existence of the checkpoint. They pointed to the reported movement of a group of people close to Morobo town early one morning in April 2009, perceived to be LRA. Furthermore, they quoted the case of a woman who had been beheaded while collecting firewood near the DRC border in Kaya. It was never established that either event involved the LRA, but the state agents used the events – along with the need for security to maintain social order – to argue for the continued existence of the checkpoint in Bazi. In addition, the uncertain relationship between the governments in Juba and Kinshasa contributed to legitimizing the powers of the central government's local representatives at the border. In autumn 2009, rumours emerged that Sudanese intelligence agents from Khartoum were operating in the DRC borderlands. Stories about smuggling illegal products such as mercury and arms from the DRC into South Sudan fuelled the notion that their Congolese neighbours were a threat to national security.

Then, on Sunday 15 November 2009 between 4.00 and 9.30 a.m., a plane flew over Morobo County about eight times. A taxation officer from Kaya confirmed that 'the [Ugandan forces] were called but they had not sent a plane, so most probably it came from Congo'.16 The mystery plane was quickly linked to stories about the presence of intelligence officers from Khartoum operating in the DRC borderland and the

deployment of Congolese troops along the South Sudan border. Even though nobody knew what type of aircraft it had been, the interpretation of the events in security terms gave the state agents at the border legitimacy in their everyday practices of controlling the border. There is certainly a deeply rooted suspicion towards the DRC due to this area's history during the war, and it is clear that ex-SPLM/A rank and file who had now become local representatives of the central government, as well as their superiors in Juba, perceived relations with the DRC through the lens of wartime experience. Yet local tensions, the LRA threat and a possible invasion by Congolese forces were at best vulnerabilities inflated into threats. At worst, they were simply invented dangers that helped legitimize the presence and practices of the deconcentrated state agents. Since the central government in Juba did not get involved in local cross-border issues – clearly a sign that, centrally, these were not perceived to be of national importance – local state agents used the discretionary powers granted them to securitize their resource-generating activities. To the local state agents who wanted to maintain their lucrative checkpoint, the LRA threat just provided the latest in a series of excuses.

Threat to vulnerability: The state's tactical neglect in the western borderscape

In stark contrast to the eastern end, the western corner of the border with the DRC and the CAR offers few economic opportunities. A resident of a town bordering the CAR summed up how the commercially viable border further east made a positive contribution to people's lives: It is very unfortunate that we are bordering a very poor country … because if you compare the border with Uganda or Kenya at [the town of] Torit, it is a different kind of border. Because there the government is also concerned about the people at the border…. The life of the people at the other border is a little bit improved.17

All the benefits of a national border – such as a national interest in securing supply lines by providing security, access to consumer goods, and solid infrastructure like roads and mobile phone coverage – were, in his observation, exclusively available to those who lived further east near the Ugandan border. Politically and economically, the western end of the South Sudan–DRC border area is a long way from Juba. Relations between representatives of the central government living in the area, including the army, and the

local population are tenuous. Respondents regularly mentioned the fact that the central government in Juba had no interest in supporting Western Equatoria State (WES) as part of South Sudan, even though the resident Azande population played prominent roles in both civil wars (Onwubuemeli, 1974; Rolandsen, 2011: 225). An important local community leader summed up a widespread feeling: 'Zandeland helped the SPLA succeed. We fed them, gave them accommodation…. Up to now [Government of South Sudan] has not given anything, not even a word of appreciation. Don't expect it to ever come.'18 Particularly in the years leading up to the CPA, tensions had run high between the local Azande farming communities and Dinka people who had driven their cattle south in search of better pastures. The cattle-keepers often had much better contacts in the SPLA than did the local population, and the fact that the army was thus seen as implicitly supporting the Dinka increased tensions. These came to a head in 2002 with violent clashes between the two groups. These events still provide the lens through which residents of WES view their connections to the central state. Furthermore, they greatly influenced how local people responded to both the LRA's presence in the border triangle of South Sudan, the DRC and the CAR and the government's failure to protect its citizens during a security concern.

In late 2005, the LRA moved into WES. During peace negotiations between the LRA and the government of Uganda, held from 2006 to 2008, the LRA took up residence on the DRC side of the border, regularly crossing into southern Sudan. Following an ill-fated military operation against the LRA in December 2008, the LRA launched a series of serious attacks in 2009 and 2010 in all three countries in this border triangle. Nonetheless, the central government never acted decisively on the security concern, downgrading the LRA threat to a 'vulnerability'. With little help from the government forces in fighting off the attackers and protecting civilians, local populations mobilized into their own protection militia – the 'arrow boys'. During times of a credible threat from the LRA, the arrow boys were extremely effective in pushing them back and protecting civilians. Some residents of WES interpreted the movement of the LRA, and South Sudan's government's subdued response to it, as part of a concerted government policy to destabilize a borderland that has in the past caused trouble because of tensions between the Azande and SPLM/A members and their families. Yet between 2011 and late 2013 there were no credible reports of LRA attacks on the South Sudanese side, although reports continue of LRA activity on the DRC and CAR sides. The absence of

incidents, however, does not mean that securitization of the LRA security concern ceases. At the western end of the border, this takes two different forms. First, residents maintain that the LRA poses an immediate concern to civilians in the area, thus justifying the continued existence of the arrow boys. Second, the continued securitization of the LRA allows local residents to maintain pressure on the central government to pay more attention to this deprived border area.

The government's interpretation – downplaying security concerns

The central government's reaction to the LRA threat was to establish a token military presence hardly different from that deployed before it. There was little evidence that the SPLA regarded the issue as a priority, or were particularly interested in providing protection for civilians or fighting the LRA. The WES governor said in 2010 that 'the SPLA is not effectively dealing with the LRA issue' (cited in Young, 2012: 200). The government's limited economic and political interests in the area and its tenuous links with the population might account for the lack of government action in a period of security concern, with the central government effectively downgrading what was a security threat to the level of a vulnerability. Such strategic neglect conceals the extent of broader government inadequacy in protecting its citizens. Had the central government interpreted the security situation in the DRC–CAR borderland as also threatening its key interests, full engagement would have been required.

Classifying a serious security threat and responding to it implies that the central government is able to secure its borders. However, the topography of this part of the border is extremely challenging. A failed security operation would leave a worse impression than not responding at all – it would risk cementing people's mistrust of central government and expose the latter's inability to secure its territory. Treating the LRA situation as a vulnerability meant that central government had not obviously failed in its response to it. Given the history of WES's estrangement from central government, strategic neglect rather than mediocre engagement that failed to improve the security situation might in the end create smaller losses for the central government.

Citizens' interpretation of government actions

Insecurity along national borders, in this case caused by the LRA, in theory threatens national security. This ought to have triggered the central government's interest in protecting its territory. In practice, providing security for civilians living in a borderland of little political and economic interest to the central government was not a priority. At a community meeting in one of the affected village clusters, citizens drew a direct contrast between how their own border was governed and other more important stretches: 'The government should do something about this border…. There should be a better way to protect it. The government should think about it. Like the other border [with Uganda or Kenya]: the border is there and soldiers are behind it. So this border should also be like that.'19 Respondents interpreted the SPLA's inactivity as a political statement from Juba and were bitter about the central government's lack of interest in providing protection: 'The effort against the LRA should have been GoSS's responsibility',20 explained a leading chief in Yambio. Another county-level government official explained that from Juba there was 'less attention in regard to WES when there is any LRA. Although the army that is here … are also reluctant to go when there is information about the LRA'. 21 Some argued that the neglect was part of government strategy: 'The government knew very well that LRA was killing civilians, but they did not send security forces. So finally it was the youth who were defending the community. There might be a policy behind the government acting this way.'22 For affected citizens, therefore, the neglect was not incidental but part of a larger plan to abdicate responsibility for citizens the government did not care about, but could still use for larger purposes: 'The government is using [local residents] as human shields to protect themselves', explained one respondent. '[The government is saying] if there is an attack let [the people] be killed…. And if [they] are killed, the government can tell the UN: "Our people are being killed. We need money." The government is just using people as a business.'23

Citizens' concerted action – the arrow boys

With no discernible central government protection apparent, the residents of the affected areas mobilized themselves into local militias to provide security. The 'arrow boys' (including some 'arrow girls') were an important protection force in the early days of

LRA activity, and their interpretation (and that of the community) of the LRA threat was in direct contrast to that of the government. The arrow boys are locally recruited vigilante groups securing the borderland and its residents. Membership is flexible, with anywhere between 16% and 50% of the population having at one time patrolled as an arrow boy (Rigterink et al., 2014). The arrow boys are the chief source of border intelligence, gathered during nightly patrols of the bush across the border. When information about LRA movements trickles down, the arrow boys quickly mobilize for armed patrols, while the population supports them by providing food. In some areas, local administrators collect a special arrow boys' tax to pay them or buy provisions. The arrow boys answer primarily to decentralized leaders – such as commissioners, or chiefs working in tandem with commissioners – but have at various times received at least moral support from the state government in Yambio.

Recognizing the precarious situation, in 2010 the parliament in Juba announced that it would support the arrow boys with 5 million Sudanese pounds (roughly US$2m) (Ruati, 2010), but there are no clear reports about whether the money arrived or on what it has been spent. For residents, this is another indication of the central government's lack of interest in the area's security. One female respondent noted how, at the local level, state and non-state forces went head-tohead: 'There were even accusations that the SPLA fought the arrow boys. But the arrow boys were brought up by the community to protect the community, [even though] that was the work of SPLA. So people even accused the government.'24

Results from a survey conducted in the affected areas in April–May 2013 highlighted the lack of trust towards central government forces. When asked who they trusted, almost all respondents said the arrow boys often or always, while over a third said they rarely or never trusted the SPLA. When asked 'When you are afraid of being physically harmed by someone outside your family, who do you go to in order to get protection?', only 19 out of 433 respondents said the SPLA, while 152 said the arrow boys (Rigterink et al., 2014). In interviews, respondents explained that the arrow boys were able to address their concerns by directly protecting them, reporting their grievances to the authorities or arresting the perpetrator. 25 As time passed, the LRA threat in the area subsided, with no credible or significant attacks reported since 2010. Nonetheless, respondents argued that the arrow boys were necessary to provide protection owing to the LRA threat, thus further maintaining the need for this armed non-state actor. As a result of the

government's playing down the LRA threat, the arrow boys are still operating to fill the void left by government security forces, even though the LRA threat might now in reality be less significant. With few direct links to the central government, citizens on the western end of the South Sudanese border view their position in the new country through the lens of the experience of how the government responded to the LRA security threat, which has profoundly shaped their opinion of the government. One young man residing near the border explained: 'What can make the people trust the government is for them to maintain security. That is the first priority for people, then they can trust the government.' However, his experience led him to dissolve the strict division between 'government' and 'people', since those affected by insecurity had to be able to protect themselves: 'The government are the people. The people are the government. They are also part of the community. It is possible that security is in the hands of the people.'26

The notion that actors in the central state very determinedly placed security in the hands of the people is strengthened by the passing of responsibility from state actors to non-state actors. In the end, experience redefines what government does and how it relates to its citizens. 'We are not against the government, we are not turning against government', said one man in a community meeting. 'But government is only protecting itself and we are protecting ourselves.'27 By taking security into their own hands, the citizens on the South Sudan–CAR border might feel safer, but they are not empowered as citizens of the state in which they live. On the contrary, strategic neglect by the central government has maintained the marginalization they encountered during and after the war.

Conclusion

We set out to illustrate the contradictions of securitization at three different but connected levels – between different security actors, in their interpretations of security concerns, and in how these interpretations translate into practice. Yet what do the two examples of dealing with the same security concern at the national border with the DRC tell us about the ways in which authority is established and practised and how government and citizens relate to each other in the newly independent South Sudan? A

look at similarities rather than differences between the two cases hints at some general themes.

The cases showed that many different security actors play a role, described by the county commissioner of Morobo County as 'a situation of security pluralism'. Multiple government agencies, such as the organized forces and numerous intelligence agencies, are prominent authorities in the eastern borderscape. This is in stark contrast to the situation in the west, where government security agencies and forces are largely absent, but where instead non-state security forces effectively became authorities by taking on the responsibility of protecting civilians. The significance of this difference becomes clear when seen in connection with the second level of contradictory securitization: the deeply politicized labelling of the seriousness of security concerns.

We draw two important conclusions from juxtaposing the two cases. First, various actors deploy interpretations of security concerns as a 'threat' or a 'vulnerability' for tactical reasons, depending on what interpretation best serves to strengthen their own authority. Such interpretation and the actions that follow from it shape the margin's relations with the centre of political power, regardless of whether state or non-state actors are involved. The state agents in the eastern borderscape interpreted the security concern as an excuse to exercise authority over the border and its residents. In the western borderscape, the government actors' downgrading of the security concern as one warranting little government action confirmed to affected citizens that the government lacked interest in the security of the area. Contradictory securitization of the LRA became the lens through which the citizens of the western borderland interpreted their relations with the central government. Citizens then used the government's disinterest to continue to emphasize the magnitude of the security concern, even though the last major LRA incident occurred in 2010.

Thus the government's disinterest became a signal to the local population to assert non-state authority by mobilizing their local defence force, the arrow boys. The second conclusion is that South Sudan's political centre securitizes in contradictory ways not only the LRA presence, but also this part of the national border, making it unclear what kind of authority the national government aims to exert over its territory. In the east, suspicion towards the Congolese authorities is seen as a legitimate reason for local state agents to take action, while there seems to be no such concern about Congolese state

agents in the west. Hence contradictory securitization happens not only on the local level, but also in central government. This affects the third level of contradictory securitization: the multi-actor practices that follow various interpretations of security concerns. It is striking that, in the eastern borderland, state agents are dominant in securing the national border, while at the western end it is the local civilian defence force. Yet, in both localities and for both sets of actors, one objective for their actions is to exert their authority in garnering support from the central government in Juba, which is why in both localities the security concern continues to be inflated to a 'threat' (although of course in WES the LRA clearly was a serious threat in 2009–10).

At first it seems as though the central government reacted differently in each case. However, a closer look shows that, in both instances, the central government displayed what can be characterized as strategic disengagement. Along the western borderland, this absence becomes clear through a tactical neglect of people and territory, leaving other protagonists to fill the gap. At the eastern end, the central state's absence manifests itself in significant discretionary powers being handed to local representatives of the authorities in Juba. This article has argued that the two cases show how the interpretation and practices of security concerns along the border with the DRC point to South Sudan developing as a state that, although seemingly strong at the centre, has no genuine authority and no significant reach into its territories. It largely exists only as the notion of a state. The central government of South Sudan in reality controls significant parts of its territory through deliberate neglect and by surrendering authority to actors more willing to compete for it. Although the central government emerged from the guerrilla forces of the SPLM/A, who relied heavily on controlling the borderlands, the South Sudanese government today seems comfortable with the lack of control over parts of its borders and security for its citizens. Clearly – and in contrast to how most states view their borders – South Sudan does not see security concerns at the borders as a threat to its authority and stability in the centre.

Notes

1. Interview, county commissioner, Morobo County, 17 March 2009.

2. Morobo County in Central Equatoria State.

3. Ezo and Tambura counties in Western Equatoria State.

4. Interview with Congolese police officer, Bazi, 13 March 2009.

5. Fieldnotes from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) security briefing, Yei, 10 March 2009.

6. This is particularly so when the topic under investigation focuses on relations with the central government. Accordingly, we do not fully identify respondents.

7. Along South Sudan's 4800 km long international border there are relatively few checkpoints. During the interim period, there were no border checkpoints between the CAR and Ethiopia.

8. In the 1970s, Zaïre was an important supply line to southern and western parts of Sudan.

9. Interview, county commissioner, Morobo, 24 November 2009.

10. In spring 2009, the checkpoint had 22 customs officers; five staff members dealing with commerce and industrial supply; six immigration staff; three taxation officials; four traffic police; two military intelligence officers; two public security guards; and two criminal investigators. The state revenue authority had three staff members. In addition, there was a group of GoSS police and two companies of the army.

11. Fieldwork observations.

12. The Congolese speak French; a few also speak Kakwa, the language of the cross-border people. The South Sudanese agents originating from elsewhere speak some English and Juba Arabic. Hence, the local South Sudanese authorities – who do not speak French – are often called upon to translate from Kakwa into Juba Arabic. 13. In late 2012, a local rebellion emerged on the Congolese side of the border. With the

exception of Congolese security forces, the DRC side of the village is now deserted. Observations, Bazi, November 2013.

14. Interview, Congolese police commander, Bazi, 17 March 2009.

15. Resolution No. SG/SGC/GO/CES/J 26/2007 by Central Equatoria State governor, Juba, 6 August 2007.

16. Conversation, taxation officer, Kaya, 16 November 2009. The plane flew over on 15 November 2009.

17. Interview, Source Yubu resident, 15 May 2013.

18. Interview, chief, Yambio, 17 December 2012.

19. Community meeting in affected payam (a payam is an administrative unit that encompasses several villages) along the border, 6 May 2013.

20. Interview, chief, Yambio area, 17 December 2012.

21. Interview, county official, Tambura County, 10 May 2013.

22. Interview, male resident, Source Yubu, 14 May 2013.

23. Interview with group of young men in Tambura Town, 12 May 2013.

24. Interview, female church worker, Mopoi, 11 May 2013.

25. Community meeting in affected payam along the border, 20 May 2013.

26. Interview, male resident, Source Yubu, 14 May 2013.

27. Community meeting in affected payam near border, 20 May 2013.

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