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Social Network Analysis and the De Facto/De Jure Conundrum: Security Alliances and the Territorialization of State Authority in the Post-Cold War Great Lakes Region

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ABSTRACT This paper presents an alternative reading of the evolution of the territorialization of state authority and security alliances in Africa's Great Lakes Region from that provided by Radil and Flint (2013). Rather than a general transformation in the direction of more territorially centralized states, patterns of state authority have remained variegated in the post-Cold War era, with continuing fracturing in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It is argued that Radil and Flint's differing interpretation stems from an inappropriate application of social network analysis (SNA) to a context characterized by profound divergences between de facto and de jure phenomena and patchy data availability. These observations suggest scepticism regarding the extent to which SNA can help overcome the epistemological rifts that divide studies on the geography of politics.

KEYWORDS: territorialization of state authority; security alliances; social network analysis; method-driven research; research methods; Great Lakes Region; DR Congo

INTRODUCTION

In November 2012, the Rwanda-backed rebel movement M23 temporarily occupied the city of Goma in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), vividly illustrating continuity in a long-standing pattern of cross-border military interference in the Great Lakes Region.ⁱ Although the movement claimed to represent the interests of Congolese Tutsi, it drew only limited popular support from this ethnic group. Its core constituents were disgruntled Congolese army officers refusing redeployment out of the Kivu provinces, aided by a small fringe of Goma-based political-commercial elites maintaining close ties to networks in Kigali (Stearns, 2012). As a flurry of negotiations and diplomatic efforts made little headway in solving the M23 crisis, robust military intervention became an increasingly attractive option. In October 2013, a joint offensive of the Congolese army and African troops operating under the UN flag militarily defeated the M23. This brought the most powerful among the 40 or so rebel groups currently operating in the eastern DRC at least formally to an end.ⁱⁱ

The story of M23 is in many ways emblematic of routinized security and authority practices among state and non-state actors in the Great Lakes Region. Importantly, it testifies to the weak grip of Kinshasa over large swaths of its territory, as illustrated by both its incapacity to redeploy troops from the national army and the M23 rebellion. Furthermore, it shows the crucial importance of trans-border political-economic networks in the ongoing violence in the eastern DRC, and the role of identity, militarized power politics, and economic interests in shaping these networks (Stearns et al., 2013). Finally, the unfolding of the M23 crisis demonstrates the extent to which security practices in the Great Lakes are influenced by supra-national actors, in this case both neighboring countries and UN troops. In these multiple aspects, the M23 crisis highlights the ongoing de- and reterritorialization of state authority at different scales that is characteristic of the post-Cold War era (Ó Tuathail, 1998; cf. Agnew, 2005).

The picture of the political geography of the Great Lakes Region that thus emerges differs from that painted by Radil and Flint in a recent article in this journal (2013). Radil and Flint make the claim that by the end of the Congo Wars (1996–1997 and 1998–2002), states increasingly engaged in inter-state alliances to safeguard their security, as ‘state authority had been reterritorialized to the extent that sub-state groups were no longer seen as useful’ (Radil and Flint, 2013, p. 199). This claim is based on a different, and in our view inaccurate, reading of the evolution of the territorialization of political authority in the Great Lakes Region in the post-Cold War era. Focusing on the DRC, we make the case that neither the period of attempted transitions to democracy (1990–1996) nor that of the subsequent wars (1996–1997, 1998–2002 and 2003–present)ⁱⁱⁱ has led state authority to become territorialized in a manner reminiscent of the ideal-typical Weberian territorially centralized state. Rather than being illustrative of the recentralization of state authority, the changes in the nature of security alliances that are central to Radil and Flint’s argument testify to the reterritorialization of political authority to non-national scales.

The first part of this paper provides an overview of the evolution of state territoriality and security alliances in the Great Lakes Region from the eve of the Cold War onwards. Subsequently, we analyze the causes of Radil and Flint’s (2013) different reading of this evolution, suggesting that it stems from an inappropriate application of social network analysis (SNA) based on a priori conceptualizations of notions such as ‘the state’ or ‘security alliances’. Especially in a context with profound informal dynamics and patchy data availability, as is the case with the Great Lakes Region, such an approach is prone to methodological errors. We end by discussing how Radil and Flint’s analysis shows that SNA has only limited potential to overcome the epistemological rifts that have divided studies on the geography of politics for a long time.

STATE TERRITORIALITY AND SECURITY ALLIANCES IN THE GREAT LAKES REGION

Radil and Flint’s (2013, p. 189) conceptualization of state authority in the Great Lakes Region in terms of Agnew’s (2005) ‘sovereignty regimes’ is a fruitful analytical approach. Agnew proposes a country-by-country typology of de facto sovereignty, based on the juxtaposition of Mann’s (1984) concepts of ‘despotic’ and ‘infrastructural’ power. While the former refers to the—not necessarily territorial—

‘relative strength of central state authority’, as based on the ‘effective and legitimate apparatus of rule’, the latter describes the relative consolidation of state territoriality (Agnew, 2005, p. 445). This consolidation is determined by the capacity of the state ‘to actually penetrate civil society, and to implement logistically political decisions throughout the realm’ (Mann, 1984, p. 189). Based on these criteria, Agnew proposes four ideal-types. A ‘classic regime’ combines strong and legitimate state authority with significant infrastructural power within the state’s boundaries. The antipode to this is the ‘imperialist regime’ where central state authority is ‘seriously in question because of external dependence and manipulation’ (Agnew, 2005, p. 445). Furthermore, in the imperialist regime

state territoriality is subject to separatist threats, local insurgencies and poor infrastructural integration. Infrastructural power is weak and nonexistent, and despotic power is often effectively in outside hands (including international institutions such as the World Bank as well as distant but more powerful states). (Agnew, 2005, p. 445)

The ‘global regime’, incarnated by a hegemon such as the USA, is able to project both despotic and infrastructural power outside its boundaries, while the ‘integrative regime’, exemplified by EU member states, combines a consolidated territoriality with a rescaled central state authority (Agnew, 2005, p. 445; cf. Brenner, 1999).

Indeed, as suggested by Radil and Flint (2013), several countries in the Great Lakes Region qualify as imperialist sovereignty regimes, although this qualification does not apply across the board. Specific histories and regional dynamics influence state territoriality (Murphy, 2005), causing significant diversity. For example, central state authority in the former centralized kingdoms of Rwanda and Burundi has historically been relatively strong and territorialized (Chrétien, 2000). Arguably, the Rwandan state has approximated a regional variety of Agnew’s (2005) global regime type during the Congo Wars, broadcasting power over parts of the eastern DRC through a complex infrastructure of proxy and military structures. It is especially Congo/Zaire that is a textbook example of the imperialist sovereignty type. Contrary to Radil and Flint (2013, p.199) we observe no significant changes in this situation in recent history.

The post-colonial rhizome state

Reflecting the principle of ‘conquest on the cheap’ that guided the infamous ‘scramble for Africa’ (Herbst, 2000, p. 16), the projection of infrastructural power in colonial Congo was limited to major cities, the import/export grid, and plantation and extraction enclaves. This led to a form of ‘archipelago statehood’ or a territorialization of authority that is based on a dichotomy between l’Afrique utile and the economic margins (Reno, 1998; Tull, 2005, p. 39, drawing on Callaghy, 2001). The latter were largely governed via local intermediaries that often continued to enjoy substantial autonomy, creating a system of indirect rule with fractured sovereignty (Herbst, 2000).

Having ascended to power amidst secessions and rebellions that had profoundly fragmented the Congo in the early 1960s, Mobutu set out to consolidate his rule by reinforcing both despotic and infrastructural power. While he strongly invested in the

expansion and centralization of the territorial administration, he controlled the state apparatus predominantly by projecting power through the sinews of personal networks (Callaghy, 1984). Thus, Zaire became a classic example of what Bayart has labeled the 'rhizome state' (2006, p. 270), where the formal structure of a classic sovereignty regime is constructed upon a multiplicity of 'subterranean', not formally institutionalized, social networks. This form of rule blurs the boundaries between personal networks and the state apparatus, and renders territorial control only of importance insofar as it contributes to the generation of patronage resources and regime security. Consequently, the rhizome state contributed to the reproduction of the uneven patterns of infrastructural power inherited from the colonial era.

Dependent as it was on the availability of a vast stock of resources for patronage-based distribution, the wheels of Mobutu's machine of rule were indispensably greased by the generous support of Cold War-era patron states. Such support became increasingly important when domestic revenues started to dry up due to ongoing economic decline from the mid-1970s onwards (Young and Turner, 1985). The growing scarcity of resources lessened the centripetal power of the presidential patronage network, leading to its progressive fragmentation. This fostered the development of in-or semiformal economic networks that were relatively independent from state-led patronage, although officials played vital roles in them on a more decentralized and private basis (MacGaffey, 1987). An important manifestation of these economic changes was the growth of trans-border trade between the Kivu region and Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi, reinforcing the Kivu economy's historical orientation toward East Africa. Together with the dramatic crumbling of transport infrastructure, this weakened economic interdependencies with Kinshasa (Vwakyanakazi, 1991).

Post-Cold War centrifugal tendencies and classic geopolitics (1990–1996)

The centrifugal tendencies unleashed by the decline of the presidential patronage network would intensify during the 1990s, when the effects of externally imposed structural adjustment packages made themselves increasingly felt (De Herdt and Marysse, 1996). The progressive withdrawal of superpower support to Mobutu, judged superfluous toward the end of the Cold War, further depleted the stock of available patronage resources (Reno, 1998). The subsequent dwindling of Mobutu's international and domestic legitimacy rendered him increasingly susceptible to pressures for democratization, which became a crucial part of aid conditionalities in this era (Joseph, 1997; O'Loughlin, 2004). Hard-pressed, Mobutu formally committed to a transition to multi-party democracy in 1990. In practice, however, he did everything within his waning power to derail the fledgling democratization process and to ensure that key parts of his patronage network had continued access to resources (Reno, 1998; Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2002).

Reflecting wider trends in Sub-Saharan Africa (Bayart et al., 1999), Mobutu's strategies to cling to power qualify as what Reno (1998) has called 'warlord politics'. Among other practices, Mobutu resorted to the manipulation of the privatization of large-scale mining ventures, involvement in illicit markets, and the fostering of disorder and violence, in part by playing competing factions off against one another both in the decaying security services and among the political opposition. In combination with increased political competition in the context of announced

elections, and a complex set of local factors, this exacerbated existing inter-community tensions in the Kivu provinces, culminating in ethnically tinged violence in 1993 (Willame, 1997). A similar intensification of the ethnicization of politics could be detected elsewhere in the region, as fostered by both democratization and shifting aid policies. Donors' emphasis on decentralization and the financing of 'civil society', rather than the central state, raised the stakes of local forms of belonging and further weakened fragmenting presidential patronage networks. Consequently, rulers started to play the ethnic card to remain in power (Geschiere, 2009). In some cases, like in Burundi and Rwanda, partly externally driven democratization processes contributed to sparking widespread ethnically tinged violence (Prunier, 1995; Lemarchand, 1996 [1994]).

These developments also profoundly impacted security practices. Both government security forces and the host of insurgencies that had developed in the post-colonial era suffered from the erosion of superpower patronage. However, insurgencies were generally more apt in finding new sources of revenue than state forces, often through involvement in rapidly expanding transnational illicit markets (Reno, 1998). At the same time, they had increased access to arms and personnel due to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the disintegration of national security forces. The result of these developments was a general shift in the balance of coercion from militaries of crumbling regimes like Zaire toward both insurgencies and comparatively stronger government forces in the region (Howe, 2001). The latter were usually post-insurgency militaries that had helped regimes come to power *manu militari* such as the Uganda People's Defence Forces and the Rwandan Patriotic Army, both connected to governments that harbored ambitions to expand their regional sphere of influence (Stearns, 2011).

These shifts in coercive power also triggered changes in security alliances. Many of the existing or newly emerging insurgencies in the 1990s had (rear) bases in neighboring countries. Rulers with disintegrating security forces had growing incentives to co-opt these insurgencies and use them as a currency in the regional geopolitical game. Expansionist rulers, for their part, used foreign-based insurgencies either as proxies or as professed reason for military invasion by invoking the principle of 'pre-emptive self-defense' (Howe, 2001, p. 95). The resulting increase in regional military interference was facilitated by changes in the regional norms surrounding sovereignty, with the Organization of African States turning a blind eye to violations of territorial integrity. These various developments contributed to the enkindling of 'classic geopolitics' (Howe, 2001, p. 94), a trend that was reinforced by the civil wars in Burundi and Rwanda, which led to a massive influx of mostly Hutu refugees and rebel fighters in eastern Zaire in 1993 and 1994, respectively.

In sum, a number of changes in both the political economy and the geopolitical environment in the post-Cold War Great Lakes Region intensified the existing pattern of security alliances between (exiled) armed groups and states (or rather the rulers whose personal networks dominated the state apparatus). In particular Zaire became a free haven for foreign rebel movements, harboring by 1995 'an alphabet soup' of around 10 different armed groups from neighboring countries (Stearns, 2011, p. 51). Consequently, when Rwanda's rulers started to plot military action in order to get rid of the Hutu rebels that had regrouped in refugee camps near its borders, it found no lack of allies interested in toppling Mobutu.

Kaleidoscopic authority and the trans-border political economy of the Congo Wars (1996–2002). In 1996, a heterogeneous coalition of Congolese rebel groups backed by a variety of foreign governments and led by the Rwandan army invaded Zaire, capturing the capital in only seven months. The alliances, stakes, interests and expectations developed in the course of this war would speed up the outbreak of a second one in 1998. This second war drew in an even larger number of foreign powers, earning it the Western-centric nickname of ‘Africa’s First World War’. The multitude of participating foreign governments and rebel groups were connected via an intricate and fluid web of alliances to both the Congolese army and a confusing array of local rebel groups and militias, the majority of which were active in the east. These armed groups ranged from larger-scale insurgent movements with conventionally styled armies to smaller scale rural-based Mai Mai militias that were often heavily involved in local inter- and intra-community conflicts. The result was the severe fragmentation of the Congo’s territory, which was carved up in an area controlled by the government and a host of larger and smaller rebel-held zones. Due to the volatility resulting from the constantly changing alliances, the contours of this patchwork of fiefdoms were far from stable, giving the political geography of the eastern DRC a kaleidoscopic character (Vlassenroot, 2004).

Similar to the security alliances formed during the prelude to the Congo Wars, the links among the belligerents were diverse in nature, ranging from durable proxy constructions to temporary operational or commercially oriented alliances. This diversity reflected variations in the underlying motives for forging alliances, which tended to be multiple, overlapping, and in some cases contradictory, especially where various factions or individuals within the same government or group had diverging interests and opinions (Tamm, 2013). Some of the most important motives for engaging in security alliances—both before and during the wars—were: (1) Geopolitical considerations, often following the logic of ‘the enemy of my enemy is my friend’ or that of ‘preemptive self-defense’; (2) Political maneuvering by incumbents under pressure, for example to deflect attention from waning domestic legitimacy, to play divide-and-rule games, to reposition themselves on the regional or international scene, or to pacify disgruntled army officers by granting them access to revenue-generating opportunities; (3) Ethnic solidarities, especially where ethnic groups straddle boundaries and violence is ethnically targeted; (4) Personal loyalties and ties; (5) Economic interests, for example where rebel groups can offer, or are in need of, access to resources or lucrative markets; (6) Political-ideological orientation such as the desire to remove autocratic regimes; (7) Military strategy and tactics (Howe, 2001; Clark, 2003; Lanotte, 2003; Prunier, 2009; Reyntjens, 2009).

As the wars progressed, belligerents’ rationales for fighting, and by implication for the forging of security alliances, started to shift in the direction of revenue-generation, reflecting changing political, military and economic conditions. As a result, a regional war economy developed that was largely, but by no means exclusively, based on the commercialization of natural resources (Nest et al., 2006). This economy was driven by a number of trans-border networks that encompassed both regional and local military actors and political-commercial elites. In the areas held by the Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie (RCD) rebel group, the economy was to a large extent controlled by Kigali, to the benefit of certain Rwandan companies that were closely linked to or ran by the Rwandan government and army. Uganda’s

involvement in Congo's war economy was more privatized, with individual army officers and businesspersons liaising with clients in local rebel groups for commercial activities (UNSC, 2001, 2002).

Toward the end of the war, when peace talks were underway, direct intervention of foreign militaries was phased out and transformed into more covert forms of economic involvement, often via local intermediaries (UNSC, 2002). The continued existence of these militarized trans-border networks proved a significant obstacle to both the peace process and Kinshasa's ability to re-establish a degree of authority over the whole of the national territory (Grignon, 2006; Prunier, 2009). Importantly, these networks have caused de facto security alliances between state and non-state actors to remain important tools of power projection, despite the multiplication of de jure inter-state security alliances documented by Radil and Flint (2013). M23 is but the most recent example of this continuing trend.

These observations cast doubt upon the extent to which the augmentation of formal inter-state alliances reflects consolidated transitions to democracy and associated reterritorializations of state authority, as argued by Radil and Flint (2013, p. 199). The signing of a number of cease-fire and peace agreements from the mid-1990s onwards, which formed the bulk of these inter-state alliances, should rather be ascribed to international pressure, war-weariness, and the changing political and security calculations of some of the participating rulers (Willame 2007; Prunier 2009). The growth in inter-state alliances must also be seen in light of the rise of 'new regionalism' discourses that accompanied the emergence of globalization as the paramount grid of intelligibility in the 1990s. These discourses drew attention to the growth in importance of material and non-material interlinkages between non-state actors within and between regions. Paradoxically, the policy translation of this was the promotion of de jure integrative sovereignty regimes, in part through the continuing dominance of the EU in imaginaries of regionalization (Marchand et al., 1999). In the security sphere, 'new regionalism'-inspired policies fostered (sub)regional peacekeeping and security efforts under the banner of 'African solutions for African problems', a process driven by both international actors wary of militarily intervening on the continent and regional hegemons seeking formal channels to consolidate and expand de facto spheres of influence (Howe, 2001).

Post-settlement fragmentation and continuing unbundling

In 2002, a peace agreement signed in Pretoria brought a formal end to the Second Congo War. The Pretoria accord consisted of a political and military power-sharing deal that stipulated the formation of a transitional government charged with territorially reunifying the country, organizing elections and developing an integrated national army. Thus, it essentially had the task of forging a central state out of a series of semi-autonomous militarized political-economic fiefdoms with a pronounced trans-border orientation (Jackson, 2006).

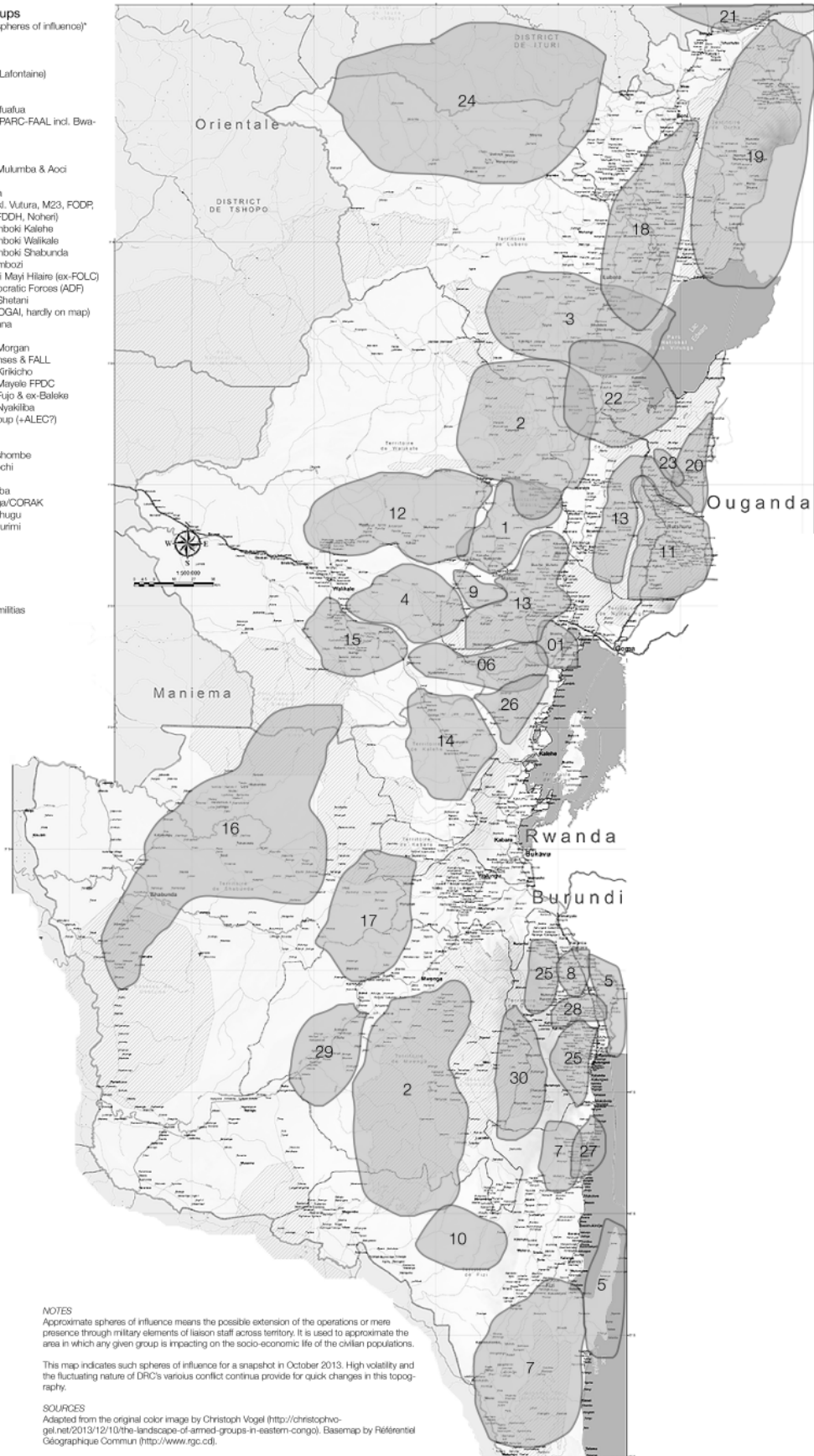
This peacebuilding strategy was strongly supported by international donors, who invested a large part of pledged post-conflict reconstruction funding in the rebuilding of central state institutions, infrastructure and the organization of elections. They also exercised substantial influence on key policy processes in selected issue areas, reflecting the ongoing 'unbundling' of state sovereignty in particular functional

domains (Ruggie, 1993). For example, the World Bank exercised predominant influence on the drafting of the 2002 Mining Code. However, real developments in the DRC mining sector continue to be strongly shaped by patronage politics, often leading to opaque deals with foreign mining firms (Kuditshini, 2008). In the face of the deficiencies of the Congolese public sector, such firms have increasingly turned to private security companies and ‘total logistics’, thus promoting the privatization and concentration of infrastructural development. This shows how transnational networks dominated by private logics contribute to the reproduction of an archipelago pattern of infrastructural power and security governance (Schouten, 2011), a trend that is also visible elsewhere on the continent (Abrahamsen and Williams, 2009). The fracturing of state authority is particularly evident in the violence-ridden eastern part of the DRC. The de facto regionalization and decentralization fostered by the wars strongly work against the centripetal tendencies unleashed by the efforts to resurrect national state institutions. Key parts of former belligerent networks have struggled to maintain their spheres of influence, resisting or manipulating the appointment of administrators and the integration of their troops into the national army. Consequently, Kinshasa has only partial control over the east, a control that moreover runs predominantly via personal networks rather than administrative infrastructure, leading to the reproduction of long-standing patterns of indirect rule (Vlassenroot and Raeymaekers, 2008; Eriksson Baaz and Verweijen, 2013).

Armed Groups
(approximate spheres of influence)*

- 1 APCLS
- 2 FDLR FOCA
- 3 FPC/UPCP (Lafontaine)
- 4 FDC-Guides
- 5 FNL
- 6 Mayi Mayi Kilufua
- 7 Yakutamba (PARC-FAAL incl. Bwasakala)
- 8 MCC Bede
- 9 MAC
- 10 Mayi Mayi Mukumba & Aoci
- 11 M23 (ex)
- 12 NDC Sheka
- 13 Nyatura (inkl. Wutura, M23, FOOP, FDIFC, MPA, FDDH, Noheri)
- 14 Raia Mutomboki Kalehe
- 15 Raia Mutomboki Walikale
- 16 Raia Mutomboki Shabunda
- 17 Raia Mukombozi
- 18 URDC/Mayi Mayi Hilaire (ex-FOLC)
- 19 Allied Democratic Forces (ADF)
- 20 Mayi Mayi Shetani
- 21 FPPI (ex-COGAI, hardly on map)
- 22 RUD-Urunana
- 23 FDLR-Soki
- 24 Mayi Mayi Morgan
- 25 Local Defenses & FALL
- 26 Mayi Mayi Kirikicho
- 27 Mayi Mayi Mayele FPDC
- 28 Mayi Mayi Fujo & ex-Baleka
- 29 Mayi Mayi Nyakiliba
- 30 Muhima group (+ALEC?)

Not included
 Mayi Mayi Mushombe
 Mayi Mayi Chochi
 Mayi Mayi Luc
 Mayi Mayi Simba
 Bakata Katanga/CORAK
 FRD-Abanyaghugu
 RUC/Bapfakururimi
 FLPC
 LDF Busumba
 FDN
 LRA
 and all other unconfirmed militias



NOTES
 Approximate spheres of influence means the possible extension of the operations or mere presence through military elements of liaison staff across territory. It is used to approximate the area in which any given group is impacting on the socio-economic life of the civilian populations.
 This map indicates such spheres of influence for a snapshot in October 2013. High volatility and the fluctuating nature of DRC's various conflict continua provide for quick changes in this topography.

SOURCES
 Adapted from the original color image by Christoph Vogel (<http://christophvogel.net/2013/12/10/the-landscape-of-armed-groups-in-eastern-congo>). Basemap by Référentiel Géographique Commun (<http://www.rgc.cd>).

Figure 1. Armed groups in eastern DRC, October 2013.

DISCUSSION: THE ANALYTICAL PITFALLS OF SNA ENSNARED ON THE STATE SCALE

Radil and Flint's (2013) main empirical strategy to get a grip on the ambiguous political geography of the Great Lakes Region is to study the prevalence of security alliances between states as well as between states and sub-state actors. They detect an initial augmentation of state–sub-state alliances, and a subsequent shift toward inter-state alliances, arguing that these trends reflect a transformation in the territorialization of political authority from imperialist to more classic sovereignty regimes (Radil and Flint, 2013, p. 190). They tentatively relate this development to processes of democratization, arguing that these first prompted rulers to try to expel exiled armed groups from their national territory and, after coming to fruition, made alliances with sub-state groups at least partially redundant. Quantitatively investigating security alliances on these different scales warrants a multilevel research design to control for variability on different aggregation levels (Snijders and Bosker, 1999). However, in this particular context, such a research design would be untenable due to the scarcity of valid and reliable quantifiable data. In order to still draw inferences based on an aggregated network of security alliances despite these handicaps, Radil and Flint are forced to make three implicit assumptions. First, they assume that all security alliances are sufficiently equivalent in substance to be counted equally as dyads in the network. Second, by only focusing on relations between states, and between states and sub-state actors, they assume that the supra-national scale can be deduced by networks at the state and sub-state levels, and that alliances between sub-state actors are of no relevance. And third, they assume that their data set is sufficiently complete to draw inferences based on aggregated network level statistics, which are sensitive to unobserved cases (Borgatti et al., 2006; Kossinets, 2006).

As illustrated above, these assumptions are unwarranted in a context of personalized, rhizomic and unbundled authority, where informal, supra-national and trans-border networks and practices have preponderant weight in shaping de facto security governance. In such an opaque context, we cannot assume that the ritual reconfirmation of de jure territorial integrity by means of the signing of formal agreements provides accurate information on its de facto territorial effects. In fact, the significance of informal dynamics in the region is such that there are considerable discrepancies between the de jure and de facto quality of phenomena in general, whether it concerns sovereignty, security alliances or regionalization. This renders inferences concerning the territorialization of authority based on de jure appearances inherently problematic. Furthermore, it cautions against a priori generalizations regarding the rationales of state actors' practices. As we have demonstrated, the reasons why rulers sought de facto security alliances with state and sub-states forces were multiple, overlapping and shifting. Consequently, these alliances might not in all cases have told the same story about the territorialization of state authority. For example, while Zaire's rulers solicited security cooperation out of weakness, Rwanda's did out of strength. Similarly, rulers' motives for signing formal inter-state security alliances have been varied: whereas for weak rulers, such a reconfirmation of de jure sovereignty might constitute symbolic capital to enhance domestic authority or gain access to the resources associated with regional cooperation, for regional hegemony it might be a means to evade donor scrutiny or to reinforce regional influence spheres. In the light of this diversity, and the highly heterogeneous

trajectories and outcomes of transitions to democracy in the region, it is unlikely that democratization was the principal driver of the observed transformations in the pattern of security alliances.

Due to the rhizomic character of state authority and the webs of security alliances that encompass the Great Lakes Region, Radil and Flint are right to take networks as their principal unit of analysis. However, the same opacity and complexity that render a network approach appropriate in this particular context also limit the degree to which the findings can be interpreted as ‘macro structures’ that have emergent properties (cf. Mitchell, 1974). The salience of informal dynamics in the region easily leads to the exclusion of relevant nodes, including by the prioritization of usually more visible state actors over more subterranean linkages. For example, the DRC data used by Radil and Flint exclude numerous Mai Mai groups, which are as important a cause of territorial fragmentation and ongoing violence today (see figure 1), as during the Congo Wars. Moreover, as during the wars, Mai Mai groups continue to occasionally function as allies of the DRC government and the numerous foreign rebel groups active in the east (UNSC, 2012). The latter are again key actors in the trans-border networks that are at the heart of de facto regionalization. An inclusion of linkages between sub-state groups in the network of security alliances would, therefore, have been indispensable for capturing both the fragmentation and the trans-border links that undermine the centralization of state authority in the Great Lakes Region.

Including alliances between sub-state groups would have also been more in line with Radil and Flint’s (2013, p. 192) claim that the relational perspective they adopt ‘emphasizes relationships between agents as producing observed outcomes rather than seeking explanation in the characteristics of the agents themselves’. Apparently, when determining which nodes to include in the network analysis they have privileged the categorical property ‘has security alliance with a state’. Furthermore, by proposing that an increase in inter-state alliances was the outcome of an evolution in the direction of classic sovereignty regimes, they assume that the rulers signing these agreements represent states that have effective territorial control, and effective authority over security matters. As mentioned, the nature of state authority, power projection and security dynamics in the Great Lakes renders these assumptions problematic (Jones and Stys, 2013). Thus, Radil and Flint have made themselves susceptible to what Agnew (1994) calls ‘the territorial trap’: unduly taking state territoriality as a given. Although aggregating data to the scale of states can be a viable strategy to make research findings comprehensible, in this case, it is problematic on methodological grounds. Radil and Flint have no mechanism built in their empirical analysis that can falsify the assumptions that fix the analysis on the state level.

CONCLUDING REMARKS: THE HAZARDS OF METHOD-DRIVEN RESEARCH

This paper has demonstrated the hazards of applying SNA to understand the territorialization of state authority in a volatile context like the Great Lakes Region, in particular when it is based on the confounding of de facto with de jure phenomena that typically accompanies the territorial trap. Thus, it shows that in-depth contextual knowledge is essential for deciding which actors can be regarded as equivalent nodes, and what kind of behavior constitutes a link. We can, therefore, only concur with

Emirbayer and Goodwin's conclusion that

network analysis gains its purchase upon social structure only at the considerable cost of losing its conceptual grasp upon culture, agency and process. It provides a useful set of tools for investigating the patterned relationships among historical actors. These tools, however, by themselves fail ultimately to make sense of the mechanisms through which these relationships are reproduced and reconfigured over time. (1994, p. 1447)

This conclusion is powerfully illustrated by Radil and Flint's singling out of 'democratization' as key mechanism for the observed changes in both security practices and the territorialization of state authority. Such a reading obscures the impact of changes in the political economy, geopolitical dynamics and the practices and discourses of donors and transnational actors. They seem to have arrived at such a conclusion by confounding *de jure* with *de facto* democratization, highlighting once more the importance of contextual knowledge.

The above observations also cast doubt upon Radil and Flint's suggestion that their analysis does not just advance knowledge about the role of security-based cooperation between states and sub-state groups 'in a particular historical-geographic context', but also expands 'our understandings of how political power is reterritorialized to reproduce states in the international system' (Radil and Flint, 2013, p.188). These remarks suggest that it is possible to deduce territoriality from the structure of a network of security alliances without familiarity regarding the specific context in which this network is located. This idea reflects Radil and Flint's expectations that the deployment of SNA in political geography will lead to the discovery of abstract principles regarding 'how the structure of social networks has implications for material geographic outcomes' (Radil et al., 2010, p. 322). These expectations lead them to suggest SNA as a method to court 'other social science disciplines where quantitative methodologies remain central' (Radil et al., 2010, p. 322), in particular, so it seems, that of the discipline of International Relations (IR) (Flint et al., 2009).

Based on these statements, we infer that Radil and Flint's analysis of the Great Lakes Region is embedded in a wider project that appears more method than problem-driven (Shapiro, 2002), suggesting that data availability plays an important role in the selection of the level of analysis. Given that SNA is one the most vibrant research frontiers in the present-day social sciences (Borgatti et al., 2009) such a method-driven research agenda is understandable. Exploring both the utility and limits of SNA is an important research endeavor. However, we ought to be wary of letting a method dictate the choice of our theoretical concepts, in particular when the research outcome entails statements about the world rather than about methods. One of the main hazards of following such a path is committing what Sartori (1970, p.1052) calls the *petitio principii* fallacy: assuming what we should be proving. In this case, it appears that both the structure of available data and inflated expectations regarding the possibilities of SNA have inspired Radil and Flint to put the state-level center stage in their analysis, a scalar aggregation that is unwarranted by the existing literature on *de facto* territoriality in the Great Lakes Region. The findings on the state scale are then *a posteriori* made meaningful by associating security alliances on the state level with democratization, a scalar and methodological leap of faith that sets off the territorial trap.

Such leaps of faith alert us to the obstacles that must be overcome before SNA can inject political geography into IR theory in a way that alleviates the core disagreements between the two disciplines. Crucially, SNA does not address the ‘fundamental gap’ that exists between realist and constructivist approaches regarding the situatedness of political-geographic knowledge (Mamadouh and Dijkink, 2006, p. 353), of which the prioritization of the state scale is the quintessential example (Taylor, 1994). What is essentially at stake here is that a method-based fix is proposed for an epistemological dispute. The latter revolves around disagreement about the desired level of abstraction in political science and can therefore not be collapsed into a discussion on the desired level of aggregation for which SNA could provide solutions (cf. Sartori, 1970). If, as O’Loughlin (2000) suggests, one of the main divides between political science and political geography centers around disagreement concerning the extent and significance of contextual influences, we ought to start managing our expectations about the potential of SNA to act as a bridge.

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NOTES

ⁱ Opinions differ as to the geographical delimitation of the 'Great Lakes Region'. While the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region counts at present 12 member states, the designation has also been applied to a much smaller geographical area. We focus herein only on Burundi, the DRC, Rwanda and Uganda.

ⁱⁱ Although the movement declared to have ended its rebellion on 5 November 2013, it is alleged to continue limited activity in Rwanda and Uganda (UNSC, 2014).

ⁱⁱⁱ There has been ongoing violence in the eastern part of the country since 2003.