“No more agreement, only punishment.”

*Rondas campesinas* during civil war in Peru, 1980-1995

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Abstract

This paper deals with the effects of the state co-opting self-defence militias during civil war in Peru between 1980 and 1995. It shows that the top-down security transfer helped defeating the insurgent group *Sendero Luminoso* and thus ending civil war. However, the empowerment of militias also added fuel to local violence as the emerging security vacuum was taken advantage of by settling intracommunal scores. Moreover, with the imposing of military logic, traditional forms of conflict resolution were lastingly disrupted. The paper ends with a discussion on the legitimacy of actions taken in the name of security. Analysing what security and justice do to peoples’ everyday lives, the driving question is whether the state’s security transfer to local militias resulted in less insecurity.

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Introduction

The paper will analyse the effects of state securitisation on local communities during civil war in Peru between 1980 and 1995. So-called rondas campesinas (i.e. peasant self-defence groups) will be focused on. Set in-between the state forces on the one hand and the Maoist guerrilla Sendero Luminoso (i.e. Shining Path, henceforth SL) on the other, these self-defence groups were pivotal for the course and ending of civil war. As state authorities had realized in the late 1980s that SL could not be defeated by conventional military means, rondas campesinas were integrated into counterinsurgency. By training and militarising the mostly indigenous communities the guerrilla was confronted with yet another frontline to fight. Moreover, this shifted counterinsurgency approach constrained shelter and recruitment opportunities that had been used by SL before. In sum, the guerrilla would not have been defeated and thus civil war would not have been halted in the mid-1990s if rondas campesinas had not been integrated into the armed struggle by the state. The contribution of self-defence organisations in defeating SL has been extensively analysed by scholars (Fumerton 2001, 2002; Starn 1993; Degregori 1996; Mason and Campany 1995). However, the (negative) effects of this co-optation strategy within the communities on the ground have been largely neglected.

In light of this research gap, the article will focus on rondas campesinas as those societal forces that are neither the state nor the rebel group, which however act as local security providers as they become entangled in internal armed conflict. Two issues will be of major interest: first, the state’s co-optation of self-defence militias will be analysed with respect to the means and overall impact on the escalation onset. Second, the effects on the local security situation will be looked at. It will be shown that the co-optation of militias helped defeating the insurgent group. However, the training and arming of militias also added fuel to intracommunal violence as the security vacuum on the ground was taken advantage of by settling old scores. As such, this article will not deal with the question on what securitisation is but rather on what it does on the ground. Given the ethnographic emphasis of this study, the focus will be on the provision of security and its practice in the eyes of the people.

Securitisation Theory and the Case of Peru

In the academic debate, the issue of security originally emerged in the field of security studies. Against the backdrop of the Cold War, scholars discussed political and military means to deal with international threats to state security (Krause and Williams 1997). This state-centric perspective was questioned by critical security studies that shifted the focus on the power relationships within which the concept of security was socially constructed. This society-centric concept argued that the states themselves may endanger their citizens rather than protect them. Issues such as economics, environmental change, and health risks were discussed in this regard (Latham 1996; Tickner 1995). The Copenhagen School advanced this debate further by framing security as a political speech-act of securitisation. The assumption goes that securitising agents convince their audiences (e.g. electorate) that a particular phe-
nomenon poses a threat to existence. Usually applied by political leaders, thus, the use of violent force is legitimised in the name and for the sake of the people (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998).

This paper will derive from the securitisation theory as established by the Copenhagen School. Its emphasis on the process of instrumentalisation of security threats allows for analysing contexts below the international or national level alone. As the empirical interest lies in the actions taken by local actors in the name of security and the effects thereof on local ground, the Copenhagen School best serves as analysis framework: what impact did the state’s securitisation approach have on people’s everyday practices in indigenous communities the rondas campesinas were based in? What did the legitimisation of violent force do to the people that were formally entitled with its use? Rather than analysing in what ways national leaders constructed and politicised threats, the focus will be on the extraordinary actions (and effects) taken by local actors in the name of security.

Much of the literature has simplified the Peruvian civil war as conflict driven by rebels waging war in order to benefit economically from the cocaine trade (Dreyfus 1999; Kay 1999; Felbab-Brown 2005; Mason and Campany 1995; Cornell 2005, 2007; Harmon 1992). However, the narco-dollar argument is incomplete. The Maoist SL was able to implicate the state into a 15-year-long civil war due to a conjuncture of background and agency-related circumstances. First, sweeping land reforms of 1969 resulted in benefits to a number of people that were better situated than they had been prior to those policies. However, the most disadvantaged segment of Peru’s peasantry, the sierra comuneros in Ayacucho, were rendered even more vulnerable to economic crisis (Kay 2001: 170; Palmer 1986: 137). As the national government was incapable of fostering sustainable development in this region, SL filled that void by providing services the central state was not able to do (Degregori 2007: 8–12). The province became the major retreat and recruitment area for SL. Beyond that, the state has been criticised for underestimating the guerrilla at the beginning of first operations in the early 1980s. It was not until late 1982 that the government deployed armed forces into the emergence zone of Ayacucho. Given the repressive nature of the initial counterinsurgency and counterviolence by SL, the death toll shot up between 1983 and 1984. However, in the late 1980s, the state forces regained legitimacy after adjusting their approach towards a bottom-up strategy and less indiscriminate violence (Marks and Palmer 2005: 96–100). Besides local economic programs, this revision included the co-optation of self-defence militias.

Against this backdrop, the Peruvian case adds value both to securitisation theory as well as contemporary IR research. On the one hand, the majority of studies dealing with securitisation have focused on ways political leaders convince followers to perceive adversaries as security threats that need to be fought (McDonald 2008; Siverson 1995; Sjostedt 2008; Buzan 2008). In contrast to this one-directional understanding of securitisation, the effects of this instrumentalisation on local ground have been very seldom taken into account. Kroft (2012) represents one of the few exceptions in this regard. On the other hand, based on a classic dyadic understanding of conflict waged between the state and the rebel group alone,
contemporary IR has not considered militias as crucial force in the run-up, course, and ending of internal armed conflict. Those few studies that focus on militias identified these forces as state-proxies alone (Barter 2013; Carey, Mitchell and Lowe 2013; Ahram 2011). This research gap is striking given that the pivotal role of militias as security providers becomes apparent when looking at recent (post-)conflicts such as in Libya or in the Central African Republic (Pelham 2012; Gaub 2013; Herbert, Dukhan and Debos 2013; Mehler 2012).

This paper will attempt to fill these two research gaps. First, the focus on the effects on people’s everyday lives in indigenous communities will reverse the predominant interest in the ways political leaders instrumentalise security threats. Second, rondas campesinas will not be treated as state-proxies alone but rather as autonomous social forces. The focus will be on the provision of internal security for the local community first rather than external security for the national state. Thus, the empirical findings can add to the debate on securitisation as well as better understanding of militias. Besides this empirical and theoretical value, the case of Peru is worth looking into given the huge amount of data provided by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (CVR). In particular, testimonies by contemporary witnesses will constitute the primary source of analysis.

Following the previous introductory remarks, next a brief literature review will cover the Copenhagen School securitisation debate as well as the academic community’s blurred notion of militias. Afterwards, the Peruvian state’s co-optation strategy and the effects will be illustrated. At last, the findings will be discussed with regard to generalisation.

Literature Review

The notion of security has been treated as state domain first. The ability of the central authority to exercise the monopoly of violence over a variety of state and non-state actors has been identified as major functional criteria in any nation state (Sedra 2007; Lawrence 2012; Andersen 2012; Sedra and Burt 2011). This state-centrist perspective on security is reflected both in the Copenhagen School as well as the militia discourse. The following overview presents the most common assumptions in that regard. The Copenhagen School has applied the notion of securitisation to the analysis of foreign policy behaviour in international relations (Buzan et al 1998; Smith 2005; Abrahamsen 2005). McDonald (2008) argued:

“[Securitisation] can be defined as the positioning through speech acts (...) of a particular issue as a threat to survival, which in turn (with the consent of the relevant constituency) enables emergency measures and the suspension of ‘normal politics’ in dealing with that issue” (McDonald 2008: 567).

Translating into everyday politics, the basic assumption goes that threat and insecurity are discursively constructed by political leaders in the attempt to legitimise extraordinary measures for the supposedly threatened people’s own sake (Buzan 1997; Buzan et al 1998; Buzan and Wæver 2009). For instance, former US President Bush’s justification of the 2002 National Security Doctrine in the wake of the global ‘war on terror’ has been brought forward in this respect (Buzan 2008; Dunmire 2009; Jervis 2003; Kellner 2004; Monten 2005).
The academic debate has meanwhile shifted the notion of securitisation from foreign policy behaviour only to related security concerns such as minority rights (Roe 2004; Jutila 2006; Sasse 2005; McDonald 2011; Karyotis and Patrikios 2010), transnational crime (Emmers 2003; Wilkinson 2007; Jackson 2005, 2006; Elliott 2007; Williams 2008), or the spread of HIV/AIDS (Elbe 2006; Prins 2004; Vieira 2007; Maclean 2008; Sjöstedt 2008). However, the majority of these studies remain on the level of international policy alone (McDonald 2008: 566). Only a few scholars have applied the securitisation perspective on levels below the international domain. For instance, Khan and Nyborg (2013) analysed local perceptions of humanitarian interventions by peacebuilding actors in communities in North-Western Pakistan (see also Donais 2009). Bubandt (2005) and Kent (2006) dealt with local articulations of security and the ways in which these intersect with global discourses of security. Based on the analysis of the Cuban Revolution, Holbraad and Pedersen (2012) presented a ‘revolutionary’ model of securitisation (see also Holbraad and Pedersen 2013).

Similar to the state-centrist perspective applied by the Copenhagen School, militias have been associated with as government proxies (Barter 2013: 77; Carey, Mitchell and Lowe 2013: 250; Ahram 2011: 17). The most general understanding of militias is that of an irregular armed group that is at least tolerated by the governing power. Despite its sometimes spontaneous genesis it operates on behalf of the regime. However, in the course of conflict militias might make themselves independent and pursue an own agenda (Schneckener 2007; Shultz 2005). Governments and external actors have frequently tried to win militias over for their purposes; be it by giving economic incentives or by training self-defense units (Schneckener 2007: 16-18). While that definition helps to specify the notion of what militias are supposed to look like; however, it does not say much about the relationship towards the conflict actors on the ground. Barter (2013) discusses the conceptual difficulties:

“(…) [Identifying] rebel groups presents fewer challenges, in part because rebel forces may be addressed in terms of a single relationship: they are armed groups which oppose the state. Defining anti-rebel forces is more difficult, not only because political biases run high, but also because there are two key relationships involved: the state/militia relationship and the rebel/militia relationship. While the behavior of rebel groups is largely conditioned by the behavior of state forces, anti-rebel groups will be influenced by the behavior of states as well as rebels. (...) [Viewing] militias as proxies is misleading, principally because the very weak states which rely on militias are those which are least capable of determining their agendas” (Barter 2013: 76-77).

The analysis is even more complicated the more local and remote the dynamics on the ground get. The case of Peru demonstrates the constantly changing militia environment. *Rondas campesinas* existed before the expansion of the guerrilla primarily serving as local security providers for instance against cattle rustlers. With both the guerrilla and state forces consolidating in the affected areas, *rondas campesinas* were enticed but also threatened to join either of the two stakeholders. Juxtaposing militias in the North and the South, Starn (1999) argues that the latter were co-opted by the state in the war against the guerrilla while Fumerton (2001) underlines the communal ownership of self-defence as crucial variable for mobilisation (see also Kruijt 1999). As the empirical analysis will show, not all forces opposing rebel organisations necessarily serve the state. In other words, “[being] anti-rebel is not
the same as being pro-state, an assumption which dominates the literature” (Barter 2013: 79).

The literature review has revealed two shortcomings in contemporary research this paper will attempt to tackle: first, the Copenhagen School and its different spin-offs have so far neglected to understand what the top-down securitisation actually does to everyday practices of people that are affected by the politicisation of threat. Second, with perceiving militias as proxy agents alone, the academic community has underestimated that militias might become independent and autonomous. They could start out as self-defence community and eventually change into a private army instead. In other words, if the state is not capable of providing security on local ground, what happens if security and legitimacy is transferred to the affected communities? What kind of justice is then exercised by whom in the name of whose security? The empirical analysis below will attempt to account for these questions.

Securitisation during Peru’s Civil War

This section is divided into two parts. First, the state’s co-optation strategy will be presented. Second, the effects of securitisation of militias on local level will be discussed. A cursory overview of the state’s efforts to recapture these dynamics after conflict will end the empirical analysis.

Co-optation of Militias

*Rondas campesinas* originated in northern Peru’s department of Cajamarca in the mid-1970s.1 A major consequence of the land reforms of 1969 had been the de facto disappearance of *haciendas*. The following lack of authority on the ground facilitated the rise of organised rustling (Picoli 2008: 28). As reaction to the national state’s incapacity to protect local communities against these gangs, self-defence and vigilance groups were formed. There were two challenges these communities were confronted with: first, with national economy’s crisis hitting ground particularly in rural areas, cattle rustlers increasingly cooperated with local authorities (e.g. judges, police, and district attorneys). Second, the less security was provided by the national state the more suspicious the villagers became towards each other. This led to a rise of intracommunal robbery and rustling (Degregori 1996; Zahar 2000; Fumerton 2001; Starn 1995).

The pre-civil war existence of self-defence militias in Peru held two relevant implications: first, co-opting militias by the state would be less difficult given the extant customary practices and institutions on local and sometimes even regional level. Second, with a different cultural framing of security traditions within the different communities, the impact of mili-

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1 Basically, two forms of *rondas campesinas* emerged during civil war. In the northern departments of Cajamarca and Piura, peasants organised themselves in the attempt to defend their land and cattle against rustlers – by nonviolent means only. Their status was formally acknowledged by Law 24571 in November 1986. In contrast, in the *sierra central* the first Civil Defence Committees were established that explicitly made use of armed force against the guerrilla. These *rondas campesinas* were formally acknowledged by President Fujimori’s decree 741 in November 1991 (CVR 2003: 437).
tary assistance would be more unpredictable as militias might become more autonomous than initially expected.

The government’s decision to integrate self-defence organisations into the armed struggle was based on strategic considerations. Given the lack of success of conventional counterinsurgency approaches, political and military leaders decided to co-opt militias. However, state authorities very late decided to bring rondas campesinas into play. Although local self-defence organisations had been heard of already in the late 1970s and despite some military leaders arguing in favour of rondas campesinas during the early 1980s, the counterinsurgency strategy was formally readjusted as of 1989. Two imperatives were promoted: selective operations against Senderistas and the systematic organisation of so-called Comités de Defensa Civil (Civil Defense Committees, CDC). The argument went as follows: “Progress is most significant in these non-military domains of internal armed conflict, not only by getting people’s support but also by minimizing operational capacity of the insurgents” (English translation of CVR 2003: p. 285). For instance, on 9 December 1989, in front of national and international reporters, President García himself presented the CDC of Rinconada Baja, Apurímac Valley, with two hundred shotguns. Although the congress did not pass respective legislation until 1990, this direct CDC-support facilitated their autonomisation and legitimisation through official recognition. The pivotal relevance of rondas campesinas to the conflict is summarised by Kay (2001):

> “Instead of considering self-defence communities as potential terrorists sympathizing with the SL, the government realized that these bottom-up organisations were trying to defend the survival of their members and to compensate for the state that had failed in protecting them against robbery and crime, executing arbitrary justice, and delivering basic services. The major actor responsible for the defeat of SL was the peasantry that had been the major victim of the rebels and the security forces in the first place” (English translation of Kay 2001: 171).

Much has been written on the success of CDC in defeating SL defeat in rural Peru (Fumerton 2001; Starn 1995; Degregori 1996). The following episode well illustrates the impact of CDC in that regard: on 13 April 1988, around forty heavily armed SL guerrilleros accompanied by hundreds of Senderista peasants attacked the village of Pichiwillca, the basis of the Defensa Civil Antisubversiva (Counterinsurgency Civil Defense, DECAS), in the Apurímac River Valley. This valley was economically of high value to SL as well as the indigenous communities living there due to its agricultural richness. Helped by ronderos from neighbouring villages and a navy infantry unit, the SL attack was fought off leaving more than ten guerrilleros dead. This success marked the beginning of a large-scale counter-offensive organised by DECAS. In the following two years the ronderos were able to regain control over the entire Apurímac River Valley. However, the control over the Valley proved to be preliminary step. DECAS expanded activities in the Sierra. On 9 August 1989, around 200 ronderos left Santa Rosa to Tambo in order to reorganise the weak CDC in La Mar province. In contrast to previous years, these

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2 Although the formal integration of rondas campesinas happened in 1989, first coordinated initiatives had been launched in the mid-1980s. For instance, military commander General Adrián Huamán advocated a new approach emphasizing on humanitarian aid and development – i.e. winning ‘hearts and minds’ – rather than armed repression. He had been installed in 1984 (Fumerton 2002: 92).
developments illustrated a new character of rondas campesinas in two regards. First, by shifting towards offensive operations against the guerrilla the CDC began to professionalise their cause. For instance, ronderos were more and more often paid by neighbouring communities to participate in the battle against SL. This was certainly due to the material support though not less relevant due to the legitimacy provided by the state. Second, in contrast to initiatives in the early 1980s, the CDC chose not to back down against the guerrilla. “This time, the proliferation of self-defence militias was not imposed by the military commanders; it was rather the peasants’ own choice” (English translation of CVR 2003: 445).

There are two issues worth taking into consideration that challenge the state-proxy perspective in the literature. First, militias can be very unpredictable and changing forces. For instance, starting out as self-defence organisation they can evolve into a (regional) network of army-like forces striving for material gains. This can be particularly true when retrievable natural resources such as coca come into play. Second, the brief overview has shown that militias in Peru were often actors on their own; basing their collective decisions on strategic rationales. Particularly in the later stages of conflict, CDC benefitted from the cooperation with the national government.

**Effects on Everyday Lives**

The previous analysis has shown that militias became the feather that broke the balance towards the state. The strategic shift of counterinsurgency in the late 1980s crucially helped to defeat SL. Instead of perceiving rondas campesinas as sympathisers of the guerrilla, the government realised their potential as ally in rural areas; both in terms of intelligence and as armed force (Kay 2001). While their offensive participation in direct battles with SL certainly contributed to higher violence escalation, their partaking was a crucial factor in ultimately defeating SL. On the one hand, SL lost recruitment opportunities, shelter, and simply access to food. On the other hand, the guerrilla was confronted with yet another frontline besides the police and military forces. The pivotal nature of rondas campesinas both to SL as well as to state forces has been stressed by Mason (2004):

> “Shining Path rebels are subject to the same dilemma as the state: If they (and not the state) are seen as the perpetrators of violence, then peasants will turn away from them and to the state for protection. Rebel violence against civilian supporters can erode their base of support, just as government violence erodes popular support for the government. Sendero’s near defeat was as much a function of its own harsh treatment of peasants as the government’s tactical agility” (Mason 2004: 258).

The indigenous communities’ eventual siding with the state forces has been demonstrated by Degregori (1987). With the military forces deployed in the Ayacucho department by the end of 1982, the guerrilla had quickly left the affected communities. Stranded with the state forces that suspected many Chuschinos of collaborating with SL, a woman from Chuschini was disappointed with the guerrilla that had abandoned the former retreat area along with its people to their fate:
“Why do they not protect us, they have put us in this problem and they don’t protect us; they have to protect us, they must defend us. Why have they told us that they were going to fight in front and we were going to go behind them? Where are they? Now, one can’t see any sign of them, they put us in this mess and they pull out, this can’t be” (English translation of quote in Degregori 1987: 46).

While much of the literature has discussed the crucial role of CDC in ending civil war in Peru (Degregori 1987), only a few studies have pointed to the negative effects of securitisation on local ground. Given the limited scope of this paper, the following overview will only cover three of the most important effects: very much interdependent and overlapping these were the rise of accidental killings, the creation of a local security vacuum, and the disruption of traditional hierarchies and conflict resolution in exchange for a militarised living together. In particular, the latter aspect will shed light on the impact of militarisation on social life – in the eyes of elderly and women.³

Looming in late 1984, the increasingly better organised rondas campesinas became more involved with violence on the ground. Primarily defending their communities, in some cases the attacks and counter-attacks resulted in accidental killings of noninvolved people. For instance, on 20 January 1985, four youth were stoned to death by a peasant group close to Ayacucho city after mistaking them for SL members (DESCO 1988: 119). A similar incident took place in Huánuco on 26 September 1985 when rondas campesinas confused plain-clothed police members with Senderistas and killed three of them by machetes (DESCO 1988: 133). These accidental killings hold two implications: on the one hand, they are striking given that the state forces had been criticised by the communities for the arbitrary counterinsurgency. On the other hand, the rise of collateral damage illustrated the increasingly opaque battle field on the ground – not to forget, the window of opportunity to settle old scores.

Although the militarisation of communities enabled these to be less vulnerable to guerrilla attacks, at the same time, existing tensions between neighbouring communities were heightened by the forced cooperation: “In most cases, the co-optation measures provoked resentments and passive resistance among the people in those villages given the profound rivalry that had long existed between communities that were now forced to live together” (English translation of CVR 2003: 43. See also Degregori 1996: 51-56; CVR 2003: 271-272.). Violent clashes between communities were first reported on 20 February 1983 in the communities of Huaychao, Carhuaran, and Uchuraccay in the province of Huanta (CVR 2003: x).⁴

After similar confrontations in this province, the communities demanded security guaran-

³ Children have not been dealt with in particular by studies on rondas campesinas. The rare testimonies provided by CVR or in-depth analysis such as Fumerton’s (2002) standard work merely depict children as either potential SL recruits or vulnerable members of indigenous communities (CVR 2003; Fumerton 2002).

⁴ For instance, ronderos of Acos Vinchos, district of Huamanga, repeatedly attacked the neighbouring community of Quinua. Eventually, the Quinua villagers decided to form a CDC on their own in order to fight back (Del Pino 1993: 507). The CVR lists dozens of testimonies stating the increase of intracommunal human rights abuses after the emergence and formal approval of CDC by the national government (CVR 2003: 454).
tees by the state. The early rondas campesinas often did not have a choice but to become a CDC. As the armed forces usually demanded the organisation of CDC under the umbrella of the military, most communities chose to comply rather than being accused of secret collaboration with SL (CVR 2003: 454). Del Pino (1993) quoted a member of a local community in the valley that well illustrates the independent character of CDC in the wake of conflict:

“[Those] of Pichiwillca continually invaded disorganised population, accusing them of collaborating and assisting Sendero. They arrived and maltreated [the local people], as happened on more than one occasion in Quimbiri, without anyone being able to intercede for them, neither the soldiers nor the policemen that one finds concentrated in front of the river, in San Francisco. They entered houses at night, masked in balaclavas, and abducted young people supposedly linked to Sendero, those same ones who in days were discovered murdered, thrown into the river or displayed in the open air” (English translation of quote in Del Pino 1993: 78).

As local communities were expected to comply with extraordinary measures against potential Senderistas, sides had to be chosen in the name of security. One member of a ronda campesina in the Apurímac Valley, Hugo Huillca, put the dilemma in a nutshell:

“[In] the midst of war, one is not permitted to be neutral, one must show oneself to be in agreement and once so, form their organisation [i.e. CDC] (...). In this zone [of the Apurímac Valley] no one can be neutral. They have already killed all those who were neutral” (English translation of quote in Starn 1993: 45).

While the rise of accidental killings and intracommunal rivalry has been mentioned in the literature, the disruption of traditional forms of conflict resolution is the least studied effect of CDC creation in Peru. According to a majority of testimonies gathered by the CVR (2003), a military logic was imposed in the villages by establishing CDC. Following this logic, everyday life was organised along war rationales (e.g. incessant military work-out, vigilante activities etc.). In particular, this included penalising of petty offenses instead of making use of consensual community-based institutions. The CVR quotes a testimony that well illustrates the impact:

“Well, during that time there was no good agreement, because during that time everything was punishment. During that time there was no judge, just the commands made people respect the laws, there was also a lieutenant, it was only them who punished those who behaved bad in the community, they would beat him/her with the butt of the weapon. There were only the lieutenant and the command in the community, there was not even a president there; accordingly, there was no sort of agreement, simply punishment” (English translation of quote in CVR 2003: 450).

The focus on military training constrained the local communities to go along with their regular work such as for instance managing their estates. One testimony described the changes in everyday practices as follows:

“We no longer worked the estate because it was not protected, going from one site to another, searching through our jurisdiction, because this zone of Quimbiri belonged to us. That was the military’s order because there might be a hideout of SL. We had to reinforce the entire zone on

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5 Already in late 1984, national as well as international third parties demanded the state to regain the monopoly of violence in the remote areas in order to prevent intracommunal massacres (CVR 2003: 453-455).
the right-hand border because there was the entrance. The left-hand border is cordillera [i.e.
chain of mountains], there is no road. Consequently, there is no transit, the entrance is only
through the Ayacucho side. We studied all this meticulously with the help of a command led by
former militaries, it was them who led. We had effectively become soldiers” (English translation

The militarisation of everyday life deeply impacted on the social fabrics within the local
communities. Given the command exercised by the armed forces, usually younger ronderos
became CDC leaders as most of them were graduates of the Peruvian military. These were
chosen by the communities according to bellicose qualities alone: “the bravest, the one with
the most power, this was the one we chose” (English translation of quote in CVR 2003: 451).
The traditional meritocratic ruling in Andean communities was pushed aside; with it an en-
tire generation of elder authorities. Naturally, these young leaders frequently made use of
their autonomy towards their local communities by liberating themselves from social con-
trol. In a few cases, the CVR has even identified warlord-like commandos. Accordingly, yet
another testimony illustrates their exceptional position: “They were like gods. (...) They al-
ready acted like kings. With the nomination they had got, in fact, they were kings indeed. To
persons they did not get along with well, they would tell them, now, to the torture already”
(English translation of quote in CVR 2003: 451). As an overall result, the traditionally superior
and highly respected position of the (male) elderly was deeply strained.

In light of these changes, male testimonies identified women’s contribution to the struggle
against SL as secondary only. Usually valued as “very important” in terms of sentry or taking
care of animals, male ronderos did not perceive women as active members of the rondas
campesinas (CVR 2003: 454). However, female testimonies tell a different story. Many wom-
en reported that they were obliged to participate in the rondas and sometimes even took
part in the patrols or fought off SL attacks. Some even received military training either by
male ronderos or the military. This impact on women was well described in the following
testimony:

“We helped them [i.e. male ronderos] to patrol. The children and elderly used to hide them-
selves. Us women, we defended the community just like the men did. As a woman you had to go,
just as the men had to go whenever ordered to do so. This is how we defended ourselves. Those
women with husbands had to fight with them; those who had no husband or were single had to
fight with themselves. During that time there were neither arms nor anything. We simply fought
with the huaraca [i.e. slingshot], we defended ourselves with stones. Only later we also bought
arms and with those we defended ourselves” (English translation of quote in CVR 2003: 452-453).

Del Pino and Theidon (1999) found that many women adapted to the masculinisation of the
environment. With their husbands being absent, widows and single mothers were pushed to
redefine their roles and assume self-defence functions (1999: 25). A male rondero from the
Apurímac Valley described their role as follows:

“The women had their own commander, apart from the men. It was a woman, and it was they
who controlled the women. The women were commanded by women, the men by men. They all
had their list of duties, such as vigilance in the daytime, at night, these sorts of things” (Comando
Zorro quoted in Fumerton 2002: 143).
Another rondero from Tambo explained in similar fashion:

“In the countryside, the majority [of adults] are ronderos; from sixteen to sixty years old, more or less, they are all ronderos. The women as well. They, in a voluntary way, in every community, are all ronderos because self-defence is a common concern (testimony quoted in Fumerton 2002: 195).

By supporting ronderos in vigilance activities and patrolling, women were cast with additional tasks besides the common responsibilities such as childcare, food preparation, cleaning, tending animals, or sewing clothes (Fumerton 2002: 96). Burdened with the double-role as de facto rondero on the one hand and preserver of the family on the other, many women banded together with kin and neighbors (Coral 1998: 356). Although these so-called clubes de madres (i.e. mothers’ clubs) informally managed to create their own autonomous space of action (e.g. food services, communal kitchens and gardens), the stereotyped gender roles prevailed (Fumerton 2002: 286). Moreover, the simultaneous double-role as rondero and family provider worsened living conditions on the ground. Teodora Ayne (1993), president of the Ayacucho Federación de Clubes de Madres, explained the women’s dilemma:

“I believe that the rondas campesinas keep Sendero away; since we are already organised we can defend ourselves, they cannot enter. But the rondas also produce more poverty, for there are many orphans, women whose husbands have been killed or have been disappeared by one side or the other. These women cannot go out into the countryside to work because in the morning they must form up, in the afternoon they must form up; so for this reason they are unable to go to their chacras [i.e. estate] to work; this is what produces more poverty, more need and hunger” (1993: 54).

While the elderly lost respect and thus value to the local communities, women were overburdened in two ways. On the one hand, by actively fighting SL they had to adapt to masculine characteristics during battle as well as intracommunal everyday disputes. For instance, instead of calling for a communal meeting to settle disputes or deal with misdoings as this had been the case before civil war started, many women would report to the military or rondero commanders first. These would then punish the malefactors according to military standards. On the other hand, women had to shoulder auxiliary tasks such as taking care of children, food, or other services. Despite this twofold weight on their shoulders, collective memories were constructed on the basis of the dominant masculine peasant warrior fighting off the guerrilla (CVR 2003: 453).

In sum, the creation of CDC in Peru did not only serve to defeating SL and thus ending civil war. The militarisation also led to the rise of accidental killings, the fuelling of the local security vacuum, as well as the disruption of traditional ways of living together and resolving intracommunal conflicts.

As CDC were formally established in the early 1990s (de facto in the mid-1980s) and dissolved in the early 2000s, deep-rooted suspicions would be difficult to tackle by a national reconciliation process. After the defeat of SL in the mid-1990s, it still took some more years until 2002 when rondas campesinas were officially recognized by President Toledo. By law, they are defined as autonomous and democratic form of community organisation. Particular
importance is given to their conflict resolution capacities that are supposed to be pacific only. Besides a set of duties, the rights to democratic participation, to respect for the rights of children and youth are emphasised along the banning of discrimination against women, senior citizens, and disabled people (Langdon and Rodriguez 2007: 98). Despite the peaceful reintegration of CDC into post-conflict Peru, the formal recognition has not necessarily pacified the local settings:

“While some people consider this bill a triumph for the peasant and indigenous movement, others consider it a governmental strategy to keep the rondas within their control. In other words, by institutionalizing the rondas, their grassroots power may be limited. Even though the analysis of the Law No. 27908 is mixed, it seems clear that the passage of this bill demonstrates the social significance of rondas campesinas in the last thirty years of Peruvian history” (Langdon and Rodriguez 2007: 98-99).

Despite this institutionalisation of rondas campesinas, it remains unclear to what extent the various local settings have recovered from the state co-optation; in particular, when it comes to reviving traditional forms of conflict resolution.

Conclusion

What did securitisation eventually do to people on the ground? It made them vulnerable and powerful at the same time. In other words, in the course of civil war self-defence militias in Peru became victims as well as perpetrators of violence. They were victims as they were either violently forced into cooperation with SL or state forces. They were perpetrators as they either decided to defend their communities against external intruders or they were co-opted by the state in the armed struggle against the rebels. The co-optation of militias had an ambivalent outcome. On the one hand, rondas campesinas and later CDC advanced as crucial ally of the state in defeating the rebel group; by either constraining the rebels’ recruitment opportunities, shelter, and access to food or serving as yet another frontline besides the police and military forces. On the other hand, the militias became autonomous and often unbound forces. Particularly in rural areas, militias would de facto usurp local monopoly of violence. In the case of Peru, the co-optation strategy led to three major effects. First, set in a general atmosphere of suspicion, the number of accidental killings and human rights violations increased in local communities. Potential threats by rebels or state forces would be fought off by armed force under the banner of securitisation. Closely related second, existing tensions between neighbouring communities were heightened by the forced cooperation. With the haciendas gone after the land reforms of 1969, military logic de facto filled the void of state authority. Given the lack of military personnel, however, in most cases ronderos were appointed to represent this authority in lots of communities. Against this backdrop, extant practices of security provision (i.e. organising against cattle rustling) were likely to be transformed in the course. Granted public legitimacy and military equipment, the likelihood of taking advantage of the securitisation cloak and settling intracommunal scores became significantly higher. Third, by imposing a military logic in the indigenous communities traditional ways of living together and resolving conflicts were disrupted. While the elderly leaders were substituted by young and military-trained ronderos, women were overburdened
with actively defending the communities as well as keeping things ticking over such as provision of food or childcare. The exchange of resolving disputes by military punishment rather than customary based consensus probably impacted the most on the communities.

Beyond the empirical findings on the effects of state instrumentalisation of militias in Peru, the analysis holds theoretical implications for future research; both on questions of securitisation theory as well as militias. The state’s securitisation approach can be a double-edged measure. On the one hand, the formal recognition and empowerment of local agents in material and ideational terms (i.e. military assistance and national legitimacy) increases the public support of the government. It also allows the national authority to pool the risks of the counterinsurgency measures. Collateral damages (e.g. human rights abuses) can thus be more easily justified as accidental in the name of the people’s overall security. However, on the other hand, by transferring security services via the military to local militias the government de facto admits its incapability of delivering the monopoly of violence in areas beyond Lima. Adding to the often indiscriminate repression by state forces on the ground, thus, the local communities are even more likely to see that at the end of the day they are on their own. This in turn might further the transformation of extant security practices and fuel local security vacuum. The construction of threat and the extraordinary measures against it might thus become a very arbitrary though still legitimate act executed by agents that are de facto detached from any government control. All this justified through the rubric of security. The effects had a minor impact on the overall civil war onset in Peru compared to the actions taken by SL or the state forces. However, these effects would impact on everyday lives of people and their perception of security provided by the state as well as by themselves. From a post-conflict perspective, particularly the disruption of social fabrics might be difficult to restore in the long-run; both by the own people and not to mention the local representatives of the Lima-based state authority. As such, culturally imbalanced social orders in those affected communities might serve as breeding ground for the resurgence of political upheaval, riots, or SL remnants expanding their cocaine trade in the marginalised areas of the country (see also Mealy and Austad 2012: 559-561).

Contrary to the majority of studies that perceive militias as state proxies alone, this article has also shown that a state-centrist view fails to grasp the manifold and constantly changing nature of militias on the ground. Future studies will have to be aware of two issues in order to better grasp the impact of militias on the ground. First, militias are more than state proxies alone. They act on their own and are driven by specific motivations which are not necessarily consistent with the state’s interests. Second, militias are not fixed entities. Adapting to the conflict environment they might change over time. Although the single case study poses a narrow empirical scope, the results hold implications for policy-makers. The co-optation of militias in Peru helped the state in defeating the rebel groups. However at the same time, the negative effects on local ground were not anticipated. In particular, when it comes to the long-term effects in remote areas where data availability is anyway constricted. Regardless of the national state’s willingness or capacity to monitor dynamics on local ground, recent conflicts in Libya or Syria have illustrated the necessity to take the long-term impact of mili-
tias into consideration before militarising them. While transitional authorities have struggled to integrate militias in Benghazi to the national reconciliation process (Pelham 2012; Mayer 2013), the blurred militia context in Syria has prevented Western governments from taking military action against the Assad regime (Carpenter 2012; Mucha 2013). In other words, the arming of militias might be a strategically right decision by the state in the short term. However, the militarisation might likewise result in more local insecurity and intracommunal violence as well as seriously hamper the post-conflict transition.

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