

## The 'Securitization' of Africa's AIDS Pandemic: Whose Security?

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### Abstract

This paper begins a new project, which evolves out of previous research situating the emerging epidemiology of the global HIV/AIDS pandemic and the institutional response in the broader context of global neo-liberal economic and political restructuring. My main objective is to begin to lay out the steps involved in understanding the relationship between emerging and shifting conceptions of security – global, national and human – and approaches to development assistance in the south, with specific attention to the global management of the HIV/AIDS pandemic in sub-Saharan Africa. Meanings of security since the end of the Cold War have altered to the extent that the focus is no longer the threat of interstate wars; today security threats are understood as emerging from rogue or failed states, terrorist cells, and 'underdevelopment' – threats emanating largely from the South. Mark Duffield argues that the lines between development and security have been blurring and converging since the 1990s and that the politics of development reflect a new security framework within which the modalities of underdevelopment have become dangerous.<sup>1</sup> What this new merging of development and security has accomplished, according to Duffield, is an erasure, or suppression of a consideration of the historical underpinnings of inequalities within the global system – an erasure of the manner in which wealth is created in determining the extent and nature of global poverty.<sup>2</sup>

Included in the unfolding of new security discourses and practices is increasing attention to the HIV/AIDS pandemic as a 'security crisis'. This merging of development and security is reflected in new understandings of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Stefan Elbe has summarized the ways in which HIV/AIDS has been 'securitized'; advancing the 'securitization' of HIV/AIDS are actors as diverse as the United States Government, the UN Security Council, UNAIDS and other UN agencies, NGOs, and members of the academy.<sup>3</sup> States Elbe: "Human security theorists and activists (securitizing actors) have certainly presented HIV/AIDS as an existential threat to the survival of human beings, families and communities (referent objects) while national security policy makers (more securitizing actors) have portrayed HIV/AIDS as an existential threat to the survival of militaries and states (more referent objects of security).<sup>4</sup> The meanings of 'AIDS as a security crisis' are as varied and contradictory as the conception of security underlying the analysis. Many fall within a realist paradigm to the extent that security threats are understood as directed toward the sovereign state. Although the consideration of viruses broadens the realist framework to the extent that security is defined in more than just military terms, the emphasis is

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Duffield, *Global Governance and the New Wars: The Merging of Development and Security* (London: Zed Books, 2002) 22.

<sup>2</sup> Duffield, 28

<sup>3</sup> Stefan Elbe, *Securitizing AIDS: A Framework for Paralysis?* Paper presented at the 44<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention of the ISA, Portland, Oregon, Feb 28, 2003.

<sup>4</sup> Elbe, 10

still on the anarchical structure of the system, the ‘Hobbesian state of nature’ rather than on broader contributors to human in/security located in the current global distribution of power and resources. AIDS mortality is seen to undermine peace, order and good governance; viral spread conjoins with military threats. Accounts that extend the definition of security beyond the nation-state, either through a focus on individual security or global security tend to focus on the virus in isolation – as the agent responsible for undermining security – giving the appearance that the virus is not enmeshed in wider relations of oppression.

My overarching concerns are as follows. What are the implications of the emerging discourses on AIDS and security? Whose security are we talking about? And to what extent does the hegemony of a particular set of values and policies nourish and sustain the ‘security crisis’ of HIV/AIDS in SSA and shape responses to the pandemic? I want to shift the lens from the focus on how HIV/AIDS can be understood as a security crisis, to a consideration of how reigning policy frameworks serve to undermine human security and the exercise of basic human rights – in what ways are HIV/AIDS and insecurity intertwined? *Why* has HIV/AIDS led to a crisis in human security? This paper begins with a brief account of how the HIV/AIDS pandemic, thus far, has been ‘securitised’. I then briefly spell out what I see as missing in the ‘securitization’ of AIDS – the context of SSA’s ‘AIDS and security’ crisis. Finally, I propose what a feminist and a materialist lens – one that situates bodies afflicted by disease in historically constituted (and gendered) communities might contribute to the analysis.