

Abstract

This book analyses historic and contemporary border regime developments in East Africa and draws a complex picture of borders control in Africa beyond stereotypical “Western” imaginations. Based on ethnographic research, it describes the everyday realities of Kenyan border officers dealing with colonial border legacies on the ground, and analyses actual enforcement practices. Moreover, the book examines the implementation process of One Stop Border Post (OSBP), which is currently taking place all over the African continent. OSBPs stand in between regional, pan-African as well as neo-colonial, capitalist interests, and will shape cross-border trade, migration, security and transnational relations in the future. The book offers a critical analysis of this implementation process with reference to local voices from different borderlands of Kenya with Ethiopia, Tanzania, South Sudan and Uganda. The case studies thereby exemplify the ambivalent reality of borders worldwide, which simultaneously open and close at the same time, whereby reproducing inequalities.

The book is organized in three main parts. After an INTRODUCTION that provides major terminologies and concepts of borders, the (colonial) history of border-making in Kenya, and a reflection on the innovative methodological approach of multi-sited border ethnography, the chapter BORDER LIFE portrays the everyday lives of people who live at Kenya’s borders. On the one hand, it describes everyday realities of rural and urban borderland inhabitants in Turkana, Busia, Kajiado and Marsabit County, and highlights the specific role of no man’s lands as ambiguous spaces. On the other hand, it portrays the situation for non-local border officers working in unfamiliar environments, who are required to shift between deployment sites during their careers. Border officers are locally considered as cultural “others”, but likewise distance themselves, e.g. through discursive othering, from the surrounding borderland communities. Finally, the chapter critically sheds light on the role of the anthropologist and includes self-reflexive positioning.

The next chapter THE BORDER POST focuses on material representations of borders in Africa as a mixture of colonial relicts and modernized infrastructures. It highlights the recent transformation process of border stations into One Stop Border Posts (OSBPs) with a focus on Kenya. OSBPs illustrate that African states are actively reorganizing their border regimes. The underlying ethnographic study provides a description of the implementation process and a critical analysis of its local effects, such as locally experienced economic exclusion and the loss of livelihoods in the context of accelerated traffic. The multi-sited research design makes it possible to compare dynamics in several border locations of Kenya (Malaba, Busia, Namanga, Moyale and Nadapal). In this context, OSBPs are perceived as “travelling models” that depend on local translation processes in individual settings. However, this translation process can at times lead to challenges and disruptions on the ground, especially in places of conflict and violence, which is described in the cases of the borders in northern Kenya (Turkana and Marsabit).

The chapter B/ORDER CONTROL analyses strategies of border management in Kenya, and how they are simultaneously challenged by alternative practices. The book applies a praxeological perspective and argues that borders (and state orders) have to be continuously made real. Three subchapters describe different areas of border control. The first part highlights the management of human mobilities through passport control and profiling, and in the form of ID registration processes in border areas. It is shown that border enforcement can foster inequalities, and that the Somalis in particular become subject to extra security screenings. The second part analyses trade control. At the border, mobile patrols target the detection of smuggling, but often fail to be successful due to the complexity of the phenomenon. Furthermore, in the context of new OSBPs, the government has been trying to integrate long-established cross-border cattle trade in bureaucratic border procedures, which is met with resistance by local pastoralists. All in all, it is shown that lines between the formal and the informal, between state and non-state can become blurred, which is highlighted in the last part on the integration of community-policing formats into border control (e.g. the position of chiefs, the nyumba kumi initiative, reservists, etc.).

The final DISCUSSION recapitulates the main topics of the book and discusses them in the context of larger socio-political developments. Ambivalence is described as an essential characteristic of border development processes worldwide. While governments promote free mobility and the illusory disappearance of borders for the privileged, others are strongly affected by border closures. The same can be said about Kenya, where new border infrastructures should lead to “smooth flows” through border stations, while borders are simultaneously shielded through new security strategies and technologies against the “unwanted”. The discussion further highlights the potential of regional integration and of a borderless East African Community (EAC). But while One Stop Border Post infrastructures are described as signs of pan-Africanism and decolonial emancipation by governments, they simultaneously promote foreign, neocolonial interests with the danger of economic exploitation. Overall, the book agrees with demands for regional integration “from below”, which requires more formal representation of local border communities in border committees and in political decision-making. Finally, the book ends by expressing the need for more anthropological study-up research projects on mobility regimes, as the discipline has the potential to provide important contributions to the critical understanding of space-making and power relations.