

Security Controversies along the LAPSSET Infrastructure Corridor in Kenya

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Akademisk avhandling för filosofie doktorsexamen i Freds-och utvecklingsforskning vid Institutionen för globala studier, Göteborgs Universitet, som, med vederbörligt tillstånd av Samhällsvetenskapliga fakultetsstyrelsen läggs fram för offentlig granskning fredagen den 16 december, 2022 klockan 13.15 i Linnésalen, Seminariegatan 1B, Göteborg

SCHOOL OF GLOBAL STUDIES



Kilaka, Benard Musembi (2022). **Security Controversies along the LAPSSET Infrastructure Corridor in Kenya**. Ph.D. dissertation in Peace and Development Research, School of Global Studies, University of Gothenburg, (P.O Box 700, 405 30 Gothenburg, Sweden)

Language: English, with a summary in Swedish

ISBN (Print): 978-91-8069-091-1

ISBN (PDF): 978-91-8069-092-8

<http://hdl.handle.net/2077/74070>

Abstract

This PhD thesis accounts for the changing political relations between different actors in northern Kenya through a focus on controversies emerging from the securing of the LAPSSET mega project. Through the controversies, the thesis provides a useful lens for understanding how state authority becomes visible in areas with limited state presence and how different actors navigate the new reality.

As the thesis shows, efforts by the national government and private actors to secure key components of the infrastructure project, such as the oil fields in Turkana and the Lamu Port, have elicited mixed reactions due to the adverse implications of the security practices on people's livelihoods, dignity, and public security, amongst others. Therefore, this thesis examines the different security practices around the project. Furthermore, it analyses the different controversies that such practices generate and how they are resolved (or not). Since the project is still under construction, the thesis focuses on the Lamu Port and the oil sites in Turkana, where the controversies are, so far, the most visible.

Theoretically, this study draws inspiration from scholarly works on the politics of infrastructure in diverse fields, such as International Relations, Political Theory, Science and Technology Studies, and Anthropology. Moreover, this thesis pursues a practise-based approach and therefore puts practices in the foreground. In analysing the controversies emerging from the security practices around components of the LAPSSET project, the thesis draws inspiration from pragmatic sociology and critical institutionalism, which present a useful framework for understanding how different actors react and interact during periods of uncertainty.

To understand how the controversies play out and how they are reconfiguring political relations between different actors in Northern Kenya, this thesis draws on insights from community members in Turkana and Lamu, civil society activists, national and county government officials, and employees of private commercial companies, who are, in one way or another, involved with the controversies tied to security practices around the LAPSSET project. The thesis relied on empirical material collected during a fieldwork exercise in Kenya (Lamu, Turkana, Mombasa, and Nairobi) in 2018, 2019, and 2021.

Keywords: LAPSSET; mega infrastructure project; controversy; security practices; political relations; critical infrastructure protection; northern Kenya; Turkana; Lamu, pragmatic sociology, critical institutionalism