

UNDERSTANDING COMPETING NARRATIVES ON KARAMOJA'S BORDERS¹

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Abstract:

This paper seeks to unravel the different ways in which manifestations of borders can be understood beyond the pre-occupation with not only the 'location' and 'visibility' but also 'linearity' and 'fixity' of borders. The paper challenges the ahistoricized and state-centric framing of on-going discussions on Karamoja's borders and the conflicts engendered that fail to underscore the exclusionary intentions of past and present 'bordering' processes. This makes these discussions incapable of illuminating the complex dynamics engendered by current border contestations. The paper argues that the more border contestations remain unmitigated and unresolved, the more they undermine the resilience to shocks in border communities. The paper recommends, among others, the need for a detailed understanding of the different narratives in order to re-conceptualize borders, not as lines delimiting territory and bounded state spaces that constrain movement on the basis of which ideologies of control thrive, but as social spaces, points of contact and bridges on basis of which opportunities for enhancing interactions are enhanced while deflating the differences created by borders.

Introduction

This paper seeks to critique conventional thinking on Karamoja's contested borders in order to unravel competing narratives that help to frame a new paradigm for understanding differences in border manifestations and experiences.² Historically, Karamoja's borders have been contested, although lessons entailed have barely informed the thinking about contemporary border demarcations. Most of the debates have been preoccupied with not only the 'location' and 'visibility' but also 'linearity' and 'fixity' of borders, making it difficult to imagine them in 'non-spatial' and 'de-territorialized' terms that permit the interrogation of their complexities.

On February 19, 2019, a pronouncement by the Minister of Local government, Mr. Tom Butiime, moved a historically contested border between Napak and Katakwi districts to Iriri Bridge, six kilometers inside Karamoja, transferring many Karamojong settlements at Alekilek to Katakwi. This followed an

¹. This paper is an outcome of a collaboration between Centre for Basic Research (CBR) and the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), which funded a research project titled: *'Emerging Land Tenure and Land Conflicts Dynamics in Post-Disarmament Karamoja'*. The research was conducted by the author between August and December 2018.

². The theoretical discussions in this paper are an abstraction from empirical research findings contained in the above report on the basis of which the understanding of the contested border dynamics in Karamoja was undertaken. Additional insights were obtained from an analysis of primary, archival and other secondary sources, such as minutes of district and sub-county councils, and district executive committees, newspaper reports on the basis of which the different narratives on borders were interrogated.

independent re-survey and boundary opening of the Teso-Karamoja border commissioned in 2016 by the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development (MLHUD).³ The Alekilek incident rekindled fears regarding the equally historically⁴ contested Apeitolim-Kobulin-Nyarkidi border between Abim, Napak and Kapelebyong districts. Border contestations add to a catalogue of historical land injustices that have epitomized Karamojong marginalization.

As a colonial administrative unit of the Uganda protectorate, Karamoja was carved out of Rudolf province that extended up to Lake Turkana in September 1918.⁵ Demarcations of Karamoja borders started with the 1902 'Uganda Order in Council' that stipulated Uganda's international borders as they are today.⁶ Subsequent demarcations of Karamoja's external and internal borders were instrumentalized by the British to consolidate political control, regulate stock increases, contain resource degradation, curtail mobility of Karamojong pastoralists outside designated tribal areas, and curb raiding.⁷

Between 1918 and 1940, Karamoja's border with Kenya was re-drawn several times, leading to the loss of about 2,000 square miles (almost 15 percent) of its grazing land to the Turkana and Pokot (Mamdani, Kasoma & Katende, 1992). In 1918, the British transferred all land East of the Eastern escarpment to Kenya to ease administration of Turkana.⁸ Karamoja's Eastern border with Suk was drawn in 1920 to provide land for the Suk displaced by the expansion of European settlements in Western Kenya.⁹ The Karamojong lost the stretch of land extending up to the Chemorengit hills¹⁰ and River Turkwel annexed to Kenya in 1921.¹¹ Karamoja lost more land when its borders were drawn with East Lango and East Acholi in 1920¹², Bugishu in 1959¹³ and Teso (where Usuk County in present day Amuria) was transferred in 1958.¹⁴

In August 1958, delimiting Karamoja's border was considered necessary for establishment of '*an agricultural cordon sanitaire*' to keep the Karamojong from raiding neighboring settled farming

³ . See Arafat Nzito, 'Napak: Heavy Security Deployment as land wrangles escalate', Chimpreports, February 26, 2019 (<https://chimpreports.com/napak-heavy-security-deployment-as-land-wrangles-escalate/>)

⁴ . See Correspondence from Charles Lamb, A.D.C. Jie, Kotido to the D.C. Karamoja, of 28 January 1958 titled: 'Teso Settlement', Ref. JD/MISC, in File No. CLAN.5/2 Karamoja Border with Teso and Sebei, Moroto colonial archives.

⁵ . See Communication from PC, Eastern Province, to CS, on: 'Closed Areas', of 17 July 1919, Ref. No. 25/16; in File No. N.147: SMP No. 25, 1918 - Karamoja, opening of; PC's Office, EP, Jinja; Opened 1918.

⁶ . See Uganda Protectorate, Order-in-Council, the Uganda Order in Council, 1902, Buckingham Palace, 11 August 1902, reproduced in Al-Hajji Field Marshal, Dr. Amin Dada, VC, DSO, MC. 'The Shaping of Modern Uganda and Administrative Divisions, documents 1900-1976. Kampala: Uganda, pp. 21-2.

⁷ . See 'Memorandum on Karamoja District' from ASP C.A. Turpin, Ag. DC, Karamoja, to the PC, EP, Jinja on the subject: 'Closed Areas', 21st June 1919, Ref. No. 33/19; in File No. N.147: Secretariat Minute Paper No. 25, 1918 - Karamoja, opening of; PC's Office, EP, Jinja; Opened 1918.

⁸ . See 'Introduction' in Capt. J.R. Chidlaw-Roberts, 'Report on Karamoja District, Mar. 1919 to Oct. 1920', 15 Nov. 1920 submitted to CS, UP, in File No. Z.437: SMP No. 62/20, 1920 - Reports and Returns, reports on Karamoja. PC, EP, Jinja.

⁹ . See 'Memo on Karamoja District' from A.S.P. C.A. Turpin, Ag. DC, Karamoja, to PC, EP: 'Closed Areas', *op.cit.*

¹⁰ . See Para. 3 on 'Boundaries' in 'General Report on the Karamoja District', by Ashton-Warner, Ag. DC, Karamoja, submitted to PC, EP, Jinja, of 13 Aug 1921, Ref. No. 5/21; in File No. Z.437: SMP No. 62/20, 1920 - Reports and Returns, reports on Karamoja.

¹¹ . See Para. 10, in 'Interim Report on Karamoja', by B. Ashton-Warner, Ag. DC, Karamoja, submitted to PC, Eastern Province, 18 June 1921; in File No. Z.437: SMP No. 62/20, 1920 (*op.cit.*)

¹² . *ibid.*

¹³ . See Communication from DC, Karamoja to PS, Ministry of Security and External relations, on: 'Bugishu/Karamoja Border-Kukumai', of 14 Oct. 1959, Ref. C.LAN.5/2; in File Lan.5/4, District Boundaries – Karamoja-Teso-Mbale (Bugishu) Boundary.

¹⁴ . See File No. CLAN.5/2 Karamoja Border with Teso and Sebei, Moroto colonial archives.

communities.¹⁵ Apart from the problem of Karamojong mobility, the British also faced challenges dealing with Iteso who had by 1958 extended their settlements and borders into Karamoja.¹⁶ In August 1960, more Teso cultivation than before was encountered on the Karamoja side of the Angisa track.¹⁷

While the reasons for February 2019 re-demarcation of the Teso-Karamoja border were diverse, it served a logic akin to colonial statecraft of political control, addressing livestock raiding and ending mobility. In striving to enhance Karamojong resilience, the National Resistance Movement (NRM) government is promoting settled crop farming and seeking the abolition of migrations¹⁸ to end livestock raiding¹⁹. Delimiting Karamoja's borders further through the alienation of Alekilek was, therefore, akin to colonial statecraft. While Katakwi political leaders evidently celebrated acquisition of Alekilek, the Karamojong openly protested and denounced the shift in the border as a provocative land grab.²⁰

Internally, the most pronounced border contestation, which started in 2008 and intensified after the 2016 elections, was between Abim and Kotido districts over the Chamkok-Angorom-Lokililing belt.²¹ On September 30, 2016, Kotido district council resolved to create 9 new sub-counties including Lokililing at the border with Abim²². On October 3, 2016, Abim wrote to Kotido challenging this decision.²³ Following adamancy by Kotido district, on December 21, 2016, Abim district council formally protested the move by Kotido to the Ministry of Local Government.²⁴

On January 12, 2017, Abim District chairperson wrote to the Minister to stay the approval of Lokililing sub-county under Kotido, as a good part of it was in Abim.²⁵ The approval of Kotido district's Lokililing resolution by the Local government Minister on July 5, 2017²⁶ escalated tensions between Abim and Kotido, leading to violence in some places. To ease heightened tensions, on August 21, 2017, the Minister issued another order revoking his earlier one creating Lokililing under Kotido.²⁷

Apart from Abim and Kotido, there are also contestations between Kaabong and Kotido over the location of their border along the stretch between Lobeel and Moruitit. The contestations in the Apeitolim-Kobulin-Nyarkidi belt are not only about the external border with Teso which dates back to the

¹⁵. See communication from Mr. P.A.G Field, Provincial Commissioner, Northern Province to the District Commissioner, Karamoja dated 29 August 1958 on the subject: 'Security and Settlement – Karamoja/Sebei Border', ref. C.LAN.5/2, in File No. C/LAN.5/2: Boundaries – District – Sebei Border.

¹⁶. *ibid.*

¹⁷. See communication from A.D.C in charge of Amudat dated 10 August 1960 on the subject: 'Teso Cultivation, Angisa Kukumai Settlement', ref. C.LAN.5/2, in File No. C/LAN.5/2: Boundaries – District – Sebei Border.

¹⁸. See Wambede Fred and Micheal Woniala, 'Government moves to abolish nomadic pastoralism', Daily Monitor online, Monday, April 29, 2019 (accessed April 2019).

¹⁹. President Museveni while giving his 2019 Labour Day message on May 1, 2019 at Agago promised to deploy militias along the border between Karamoja and neighboring districts as a panacea to Karamojong cattle rustling (see US ruled by seasonal leaders – Museveni', Daily Monitor, May 2, 2019, pp. 4).

²⁰. See Steven Ariong, 'Several injured as police clash with Napak border protesters', Daily Monitor online, February 24, 2019. See also Arafat Nzito, 'Napak: Heavy Security Deployment as land wrangles escalate', Feb. 26, 2019, *op.cit.*

²¹. See Min. No.04/12/08, in Minutes of Kotido District Local Government Council Meeting held on 19 December 2008 at the NUSAF Conference Hall, starting at 9:00 a.m., pp. 5

²². See Minute No. 12/COU/09/2016 in Minutes of the 3rd Meeting of the 10th Council of Kotido District Local Government held on Friday 30th September 2016 at the Youth Centre (Former Court Hall), pp. 16-19.

²³. See Min 02/ADC/21/12/2016 – 'Communication from the Chair', in Extra-ordinary Minutes of the 3rd Meeting of the 1st Session of the 3rd Council of Abim District Council held on the 21 Dec 2016 at RDC Conference Hall, pp. 8.

²⁴. See Min 02/ADC/21/12/2016 – 'Communication from the Chair', pp. 3-4.

²⁵. See Jimmy Ocheru, District Chairperson, Abim in a correspondence to the Minister of Local Government of 12 January 2017 on the subject: 'Illegality in the creation of Lokiling sub-county by Kotido district Council.

²⁶. See correspondence from the Minister of LG of 5 July 2017 to the district Chairperson, Kotido DLG on the subject: 'creation of new administrative units in Kotido district' (ref. ADM/327/328/02

²⁷. See correspondence from Tom Butime Minister of Local Government, to The district chairperson, Kotido, dated 21 August 2017 on the subject: 'Revocation of new administrative units in Kotido district'.

1950s, but also about the current presence of large numbers of Iteso immigrants in both Napak²⁸ and Abim²⁹ districts, a thorny issue dating to the colonial period.³⁰

While there were always controversies over the distinction between the ‘administrative’ and ‘legal’ borders³¹ during historical border contestations between Karamoja, Teso, Lango and Acholi between the 1930s and 1960s, focus was always exclusively with the physical location of borders. This is also true with the contemporary border contestations, be it Alekilek, Lokililing, Nyarkidi; or Lobeel and Moruitit. The debates in Karamoja that followed the Iriri violent protests over the ‘loss’ of Alekilek in February 2019 as well as the 2016/17 contestations by Abim over the attempted annexation of Okililing by Kotido were largely reactive, and remarkably simplistic for exclusively focusing on the correct locations of the physical borders.

Much as borders are here to stay and cannot be wished away, they have been historically constituted as markers of spheres of state power; and are inescapably a product of competing projects of establishing power over territories and groups of people (Laine and Casaglia 2017, 3-4). And, as a marker of power, the February 2019 Alekilek border pronouncement, as well as earlier executive orders on Lokililing of July 2017 and August 2017 are reminiscent of the much-maligned technocratic approach to borders, perceived by Newman (2006, 145), as being ‘a physical and static outcome of the political decision-making process that leaves not much room for engagement, analysis and negotiation between those affected by borders, outside of the interests of the state’.

Where ‘a straightforward territorial logic’ is defied or difficult to uphold, e.g. Karamoja’s border with Teso along swampy edges of Lake Opeta, borders have been equated to ‘lines in the sand’ because of being indeterminate (Parker & Vaughan-Williams *et al.* 2009, 583). This downplays the primacy of border ‘linearity’ and ‘physicality’. Beyond the current preoccupation with linearity of border and their existential physical-ness, it is also necessary to understand the multifaceted and dynamic aspects of borders that makes them social institutions and processes (Laine and Casaglia 2017, 3; Parker & Vaughan-Williams *et al.* 2009, 586).

Any border worth its name, to the extent it simultaneously excludes as it includes will always be ceaselessly contested and maintained at the same time between the state and those differentially affected by border demarcations (Laine and Casaglia 2017, 3). There are diverse interests, processes and practices entailed which require a complex framework to understand how to mitigate adverse effects from border contestations that often turn violent. To arrive at a robust understanding of borders as something concrete and fixed, on one hand, and yet abstract and fluid, on the other hand, requires an interrogation of the complex and often antagonistic processes of border negotiations and networking (Laine and Casaglia 2017, 3; Castells 1994).

There is, therefore, a need for a more rigorous understanding of borders beyond their narrow conceptualization as ‘fixed lines’ delimiting territorial areas. There is a need to transcend a simplistic treatment of ‘borders’ beyond the polemics of whether borders are located in their correct places. With the politics of borders as ‘fixed lines’ continuing, it is important to also consider enhancing our understanding of alternative conceptualization of borders. Even when they serve to exclude, borders also

²⁸ . See Min.3.0/SLC/2017, ‘presentation of sub-county progress report from sub-county chief, Lokopo’, in Minutes of Council Meeting Lokopo Sub-County, held on 23rd November 2017 at the Community Hall, Aramam, pp. 2.

²⁹ . See Min 06/ADC/26/5/2016 District Chairperson addresses District Council, in Minutes of the 1st Meeting of the 1st Session of the 3rd Council of Abim District Council held on the 26th May 2016 at the RDC’s Hall, pp. 11.

³⁰ . See communication from Charles Lamb, A.D.C Jie, Kotido of 26 January 1958 to Sandy, on the subject: ‘Teso Settlement’, Ref. JD/MISC, in File No. C/LAN.5/2: Boundaries – District – Sebei Border.

³¹ . See communication from W.C. Lutara, Administrator Karamoja of 1 April 1965 to the PS, Office of the Prime Minister on the subject: ‘Lango/Karamoja Border’, ref. C.LAN.5, in File No. C/LAN. 5- Boundaries – District, Karamoja, Lango, Acholi, Colonial Archives, Moroto.

provide many subtle opportunities for inclusion and engagement that require unravelling. Considering that borders will be contested wherever they are located, there is always a need to determine how accompanying bordering processes can open practical ways to transform contested borders from being triggers of conflict into opportunities for peaceful co-existence.

A Theoretical Consideration of Competing Border Narratives

The Fixation with ‘Fixity’ and ‘Linearity’ of Karamoja’s Borders:

In Uganda, border contestations and conflicts are not unique to districts of Karamoja as many districts in other parts of the country are embroiled in similar contestations.³² While most writings on Karamoja borders have focused on the colonial and post-colonial demarcations of the Teso-Karamoja border (see for example, Kandle 2018; 2014; Ilukol, Sagal & Ngoya 2012; Bainomugisha, Okello & Ngoya 2007); there have also been historical contestations over Karamoja’s borders with South Sudan³³, Turkana³⁴, Pokot (Suk)³⁵, Sebei³⁶, Bugishu³⁷, East Acholi (present-day Agago)³⁸ and East Lango (present day Otuke)³⁹ dating back from the 1960s to the 1980s. In fact all borders of Karamoja have been the subject of contestations.

Some of the issues around which current border contestations are manifesting are a carry-over from the colonial period. In Karamoja, like elsewhere in Uganda, new districts and sub-counties were created after 1986 to improve service delivery and for political expediency. While districts have been carved out of colonial counties, in many of these new districts more sub-counties were created necessitating clear borders where they did not exist or were unclear. The mutability of these borders has caused a lot of conflicts.⁴⁰

Studies show not only how the creation of Karamoja’s borders served colonial interests (Mamdani, Kasoma & Katende 1992), but also how the post-colonial handling of Karamoja’s borders was highly politicized leading to the peripheralization of Karamojong interests (Ilukol, Sagal & Ngoya 2012; Bainomugisha, Okello & Ngoya 2007). Kandle (2018; 2014) considered the never-ending re-demarcation of Teso-Karamoja border as part of a historical process of state formation aimed at a political consolidation of state spaces.

Even when perceived in their ‘fixity’ and ‘linearity’, Karamoja’s borders have occasioned competing narratives about the location of the correct border foregrounded by different physical features

³². The most notable include: (1) the Apsa land conflicts between the Acholi of Amuru district and Madi of Adjumani district; (2) Tororo county boundary conflicts between the Iteso and Japadhola in Tororo district.

³³. See File No. C.NAF.4: Karamoja-Sudan Border and Sudan Affairs, Refugee settlement, opened 2-11-1970 close 24-3-75, Moroto District Colonial Archives.

³⁴. See File No. S. INT. 3/2, Inter-Territorial Meetings and Relationships, Kenya (Secret), Closed 3 January 1966, Moroto District Colonial Archives.

³⁵. See correspondence from H.J. Obbo, Assistant Administrator, Upe County, Amudat, dated 27 August 1964, to the Administrator, Moroto on the subject, ‘The Suk/Sebei Border’, Ref. C.U/ADM/1 (confidential), in File No. CLAN.5/2: Karamoja Border with Teso and Sebei, Moroto District Colonial Archives.

³⁶. See File No. C-LAN.5/2: Karamoja Border with Teso and Sebei, Moroto District Colonial Archives.

³⁷. See File No. C-LAN.5/2: Boundaries, Districts: Bugishu-Sebei Border, Moroto District Colonial Archives.

³⁸. See for example ‘Notes on the discussions made at a border meeting held at Paimol Jago’s Headquarters on Tues. 10th April, 1973 at 10:30 a.m. attended by the people and officials from North Karamoja and East Acholi districts’, in File No. C/LAN. 5 Boundaries, Districts; Karamoja, Lango and Acholi, Moroto District Colonial Archives.

³⁹. See for example, correspondence from Hellen Oyeru, PS Ministry of Provincial Administration of 4 August 1975 to the PS Ministry of Land and Water Resources on the subject: ‘Survey of East Lango and North Karamoja Boundaries due to disputes at Lotukei’, Ref. A 131 Vol III, in File No. GR/LAND/2 Boundaries: Karamoja District Administration, Moroto.

⁴⁰. See Muhereza (2018) for the details about border disputes between sub-counties and districts in Karamoja.

(such as a rock, river, stream, a bridge or a valley) used for demarcating, delimiting and positioning of physical borders in different communities. The preoccupation with descriptive territorial linearity of borders, and the fixity of their location as well as the political and historical processes leading to their demarcation makes the debates in these studies archetypically classical and inherently state-centric to the extent they privilege state interests because they state-determined bounded spaces.

Such narratives are limiting to the extent they not only ignore other forms of representations that border dynamics manifest, but are also incapable of providing a more nuanced understanding of the contradictions entailed in the Karamoja border problematic. Interests of those affected by border are seldom articulated. In state-centered border perspectives consider borders are a mechanism of checking the physical movement of people lacking requisite entry requirement or manifesting certain undesired characteristics (Newman 2006, 148). Communities are separated by fences, walls and militias⁴¹ whose primary function is to keep those perceived as aggressors away from their 'alleged' victims'.

This is how leaders in Teso, Acholi and Lango, as well as those in Abim view their borders with predominantly pastoral groups from mainstream Karamoja. The assumption that underlies such an approach is one where communities that straddle the common borders have no social, cultural or economic relationships, which is a misrepresentation of what happens in most border communities.

The focus on borders as spatial constructs is problematic in as far as it is not only essentialist in technocratic terms, but also inherently insular because it is informed by 'a take it or leave it' scenario that leaves no room for alternative perspectives from especially those affected by the borders. The preoccupation with the 'fixity' of geographical spaces and their significance in terms of delineating political authority and control exercised over particular territories in state-centric approaches undermines opportunities for cooperation, peaceful and mutual coexistence and reconciliation. Opportunities for non-conflictual interactions between communities inhabiting opposite borders are often far and apart.

Border narratives predicated on politically constructed and culturally defined geographical imperatives are not only static and deterministic; they are also largely oblivious of the possibility of borders existing as 'non-territorial' or 'aspatial' constructs (Newman 2006, 154). While a 'borderless' or 'de-territorialized' world is extremely unimaginable, sometimes borders also need to be understood either 'invisible' or 'non-physical' perspective (Newman 2006, 143).

Even when borders are not visible or aspatial, they exist; and in whichever way borders are deemed to exist, they cannot be taken for granted or considered as a given (Agnew 2008, 176). This is because even in the so-called borderless globalized world of the highly industrialized countries, there is 'no business like border business' (Newman 2006, 144). It is important to understand other forms of manifestations of borders.

The Dialectics of Karamoja's Dichotomous Borders:

The conventional thinking about borders is focused on visible and linear physical borders represented by concrete pillars and beacons (Konrad 2015, 1). To think about borders differently, a useful starting point is to recognize that any border, for being what it is, serves a critical function in ordering society as a consequence of its existence, what is referred to as the 'bordering process' (Newman 2003, 15). Each border is a product of a distinct constellation of bordering processes, in which are manifested

⁴¹ . Documents accessed by the author show that all government since the colonial period (including Obote I, UNLF and Obote II) have always considered deployment of militias along the border between Karamoja and neighboring districts as a panacea to Karamojong cattle rustling. NRM's Restoration of Law and Order in Karamoja (RELOKA) introduced Anti-Stock Theft Units (ASTUs) to buffer neighboring communities from Karamojong. On May 1, 2019, President Museveni reiterated this view during his 2019 Labour Day message at Agago (see US ruled by seasonal leaders – Museveni', Daily Monitor, May 2, 2019, *pp.* 4).

not only ‘hard’, ‘physical’ or ‘visible’ borders but also and ‘soft’, ‘invisible’ or ‘virtual’ borders.⁴² To understand bordering processes, it is important to consider the dialectics entailed in border dichotomies within which their complexities become apparent.

Borders understood as delimiters of territorial control have always justified an ideology of exclusion at the expense of inclusion. Wherever a border is demarcated, it represents a superimposition of one idea of a border over another that has either become antiquated or is not agreeable to that it seeks to displace. For every border, there exists dialectics of ‘de-bordering’ and ‘re-bordering’. This means the dialectics of borders are such that as a concept, it is not stable because of the contradictory viewpoints and practices associated with borders. This opens up opportunities for conceptualizing borders as ‘bridges’ for inclusion rather than as only ‘barriers’.

When borders are represented merely as ‘visible physical lines’, their analysis easily becomes fixated with its opposing sides, rather than with the systems and processes within which the diversity of meanings associated with borders is made evident (Salter 2012). Borders exclude and include at the same time, in much the same way, they, on one hand, define difference and on the other hand, offer opportunities for extinguishing these differences. The process of creating, opening and demarcating borders dichotomizes them as a space for engagement in ways that portend forms of energy whose dialectics most studies are incapable of fathoming.

These energies can be negative (leading to violence) or positive (if harnessed into opportunities for peaceful coexistence). While borders are not static, the notion of motion in borders cannot be restricted only to how borders are formed and changed, but also how they work, and how those affected by the borders relate to them (Konrad 2015, 4). To grasp better the dynamism of borders in the contemporary context, one must explore the different ways in which the construction and impact of borders is perceived by different actors on opposing sides of the borders. The latter approach reveals evidence of common border histories (of similarities and divergent interests), which helps to rethink borders in terms of resource, openness, and cooperation (Laine and Casaglia 2017, 4).

As long as borders exist, they will always be contested by some and accepted by others. It is important to move away from the simplicity of conceptualizing borders as merely singular instruments of either exclusion or inclusion which certainly creates conflicts because each is at the expense of the other. There is a need for a more complex interpretation that looks at borders not only as a means of exclusion and contestation but also simultaneously as ‘avenues of openness, inclusion and cooperation’ (Kolossov and Scott 2013, 13). Depending on one’s location, borders will always be experienced differently by different groups and categories.

The dialectics of Karamoja’s borders as double instruments of simultaneous exclusion and inclusion are such that Karamojong communities subjected to dry season exclusion^{43, 44} using council resolutions⁴⁵ and executive orders,⁴⁶ have, during the wet season to play host to immigrants from communities that excluded them who come to open crop fields in the green belts areas along the Western Karamoja border. It is a good starting point to view borders as ‘Janus-faced’. Doing so, as intimated by Van Houtum *et al.* (2005), implies an understanding of borders as always having two opposing and

⁴². Newman (2003, 505) uses the notion of ‘thick’ and ‘thin’ borders.

⁴³. See Steven Ariong, ‘Karamoja protests grazing ban’, Daily Monitor January 24, 2019, *pp.* 11.

⁴⁴. See Minute No. 29/COU/01/2017 in Minutes of the 5th Meeting of the 10th Council of Kotido District Local Government held on Friday 31st January 2017 at the Youth Centre (Former Court Hall), *pp.* 12.

⁴⁵. See Min 02/ADC/21/12/2016 – ‘Communication from the Chair’, in Extra-ordinary Minutes of the 3rd Meeting of the 1st Session of the 3rd Council of Abim District Council held on the 21 Dec 2016 at RDC Conference Hall, *pp.* 4.

⁴⁶. See Min 02/ADEC/17/7/2017 – ‘Communication from the Chair’, in Minutes of the 1st Meeting of the 2nd Session of the 3rd DEC of Abim District held on 17th July 2017 at the CAO’s Office, *pp.* 7. See also Julius Ocungi, ‘Agago bans Karimojong from grazing in district’, Daily Monitor 21 January 2018, *pp.* 10.

related interpretations. How communities on one side of a border see those on the other side represents how they perceive 'the other side' and differences between 'them' and 'the others' (Spierings & van der Velde 2013, 6).

As barriers, borders can break continuity while at the same time provide immense opportunities for continuity to thrive. The dialectics of borders is such that each perspective generates a contradictory other that appears to negate it, which in itself is an affirmation of existence of multiple meanings of borders. Such a construction allows borders to become 'dynamic edge spaces in which the agency of those affected by borders plays a very critical role' (Konrad 2015, 4).

Karamoja's Borders as 'Transitional Spaces':

Notwithstanding the existence of concrete border pillars and beacons, borders now more than ever before, appear as transitory, indefinable and vague frontiers of separation of territorial entities largely due to a play of economics, technology and politics (Laine and Casaglia 2017, 3). Any border worth its name manifests dynamic and complex interactions that call for an understanding of borders as 'spaces of interaction and connectivity' that transcend the territorial trap of seeing the border just as a line that functions to exclude. Much as it excludes, a border is also a 'meeting point' (Newman 2006, 152) or an 'area of contact' (Laine and Casaglia 2017, 3), hence should be read as series of spaces of mobility and uncertainty (Konrad 2015, 3), hence 'spaces of transition' that are 'fluid' in spatial and temporal terms (Newman 2006, 150).

The constant changes taking place in borders make 'spaces of places' become 'spaces of flow' (Konrad 2015, 4). When borders are constantly changing, it means they embody some kind of motion; and like other motions (such as migrations and trade flows), borders require space to articulate their energy (Konrad 2015, 6). Articulated as transitional spaces where motion is exercised, borders embody forms of energy that drives conflicts in the same way they engender peaceful co-existence. Less attention is usually paid to the latter.

I agree with Bauder (2011, 1131) that 'if borders are born in dichotomies and fashioned in dialectics, and as constructs evolved from opposing forces, then one has to recognize multiple border sensibilities that do not permit the border concept to be fixed, stable, or universal'. There will be conflict as well as opportunities for peaceful co-existence. Such a conceptualization allows borders to be portrayed as bridges and points of interaction, as opposed to being only barriers constituted by rigidly fixed lines. From considering borders as lines which both reflect and enhance difference, borders become an embodiment of many things positive that are likely to ensue from interactions of communities and groups separated by borders (Newman 2006, 150). That is why the Katakwi-Napak border re-demarcation ought to have sought opportunities for enhancing interactions while deflating the differences it created.

Conceptualizing Borders as 'Social Spaces':

The inability to conceptualize borders beyond fixed physical lines blurs imaginations about processes, institutions and practices within which groups and communities continuously negotiate the physical borders, as dictated by survival needs in particular geographical spaces. The reality of borders should allow them to be re-imagined not merely as 'imaginary' or 'real' lines on the ground that serve as 'artefacts' but as 'tools that frame social and political action' (Laine & Casaglia 2017; Kolossov and Scott 2013; Parker & Vaughan-Williams *et al.* 2009; Newman 2003; 2006).

It is argued in this paper, like Kolossov and Scott (2016, 8) that borders need to be conceptualized as lived 'social spaces' of never-ending relational networks that exist in a dialectical relationship with, on one hand, communities and groups that inhabit and/or are affected the borders, and on the other hand, 'the territorial state spaces defined by the borders'. The bounded spaces in which physical borders exist cannot be considered as the limit that defines the society and the different categories separated by the borders.

The pervasive obsession by political leaders and administrators with erecting concrete border pillars and placing beacons to determine the correct location of physical borders privileges what Lapid (2001, 8) described as a 'territorialist epistemology' rather than understanding the complex dynamics engendered by borders in their entirety. Borders should be considered as an 'embodiment of a diversity of social, political, economic and cultural experiences of interactions within which human behaviors and action are shaped', without discounting existence of borders as 'hard territorial lines separating countries, tribes and ethnicities', or borders as spaces of 'flow, mobility and uncertainty' (Haselsberger, 2014; Kolossov and Scott 2013; Parker & Vaughan-Williams *et al.* 2009; Agnew 2008; Newman 2006; 2003).

The physical lines that delineate borders are fixed or temporary. They may be clear or unclear. They could also be an inconsequential or ephemeral inconvenience (Kolossov and Scott 2013, 6; Parker & Vaughan-Williams *et al.* 2009, 583). They could be visible or invisible, but omnipresent in ways perceived by Balibar (1999). Whatever they are, these borders order the daily life practices of those who inhabit borderlands by either strengthening or fragmenting their belonging to, and identity with, places and groups (Newman 2006, 143).

Beyond, on one hand, the 'fixity', 'physicality' and 'visibility' of borders, and on the other hand, borders as markers of exclusion and signifiers of difference; borders also need to be understood as 'mental' maps and 'virtual' images (see Newman 2006, 146-8; Parker & Vaughan-Williams *et al.* 2009, 586) with potential to create opportunities for mobility, inclusion and cohesion (Spierings and van der Velde 2013, 6). Rather than consider them only as visible manifestations of physical features sometimes represented by concrete pillars and beacons which represent physical outcomes of decisions made by technocrats and state agents, borders also embody 'processes' and 'practices' that affect the day-to-day lives of those who inhabit borderlands at various levels. This makes borders a form of an institution and a resource that possesses internal dynamism capable of causing changes in its own right.

Notwithstanding being state spaces mediated by power, borders also entail systems, processes and practices that are social constructs (Newman 2006, 150). For being both physical artefacts and social constructs, border presents with both visible (spatial) signatures and aspatial qualities (Konrad 2015, 4). While it is agreed that the process of bordering is a technical and political process, it is also as much a social and cultural process, which is inherently dynamic. It is not worthwhile to depict borders as simply lines that delimit 'territorial space' within which the physical limits of border communities is exclusively defined, since a border can be anywhere anytime; and within communities there can exist 'virtual' borders defined by socio-cultural, economic, political and other differences (Kolossov and Scott 2013, 6).

Concluding Remarks:

Borders are not just fixed physical lines separating entities or communities from others. They also embody a diversity of social, political, economic and cultural experiences of interactions within which human behaviors and actions are shaped and influenced. While it is important to appreciate borders as instruments of political authority, they are also social constructs. Instead of being concerned with only where the actual line of the borders is located, it is also important to appreciate the implications of the complexity of the institutions, processes and practices engendered by borders in terms of how they affect the lived realities of border inhabitants.

It is important to understand the dialectics entailed in border dichotomies in order to reveal their complexities. Borders simultaneously exclude and include at the same time. Borders exhibit both 'visible' and 'invisible' characteristics. They also manifest 'hard' as well as 'soft' tendencies. Borders can become 'barriers' for interaction as well as 'bridges' for inclusion. The process of creating, opening and demarcating borders dichotomizes them as a space for engagement in ways that portend forms of energy that need to be harnessed to make the most of existing borders rather than seek to create new ones.

If any re-demarcation of borders creates 'new' and 'old' borders, then, any such undertaking has to be managed transparently in order to take into consideration all manner of interests. If it is poorly handled, it undermines the ability of communities settled on both sides of the 'new' and 'old' borders, to invest in reducing their vulnerability to adverse conditions, such as is endemic in Karamoja. Resource-based conflicts are likely to intensify in contested border areas. This will undermine resilience in border communities, leading to unsustainable livelihoods.

This means in the case of Alekilek border, government should consider staying the status quo to allow a better understanding of the complex historical and contemporary dynamics around not only Karamoja's border with Teso, but also with the equally contested borders with Lango and Acholi in order to eclipse the potential of re-bordering process lending themselves symbolically and physically to insular ethnic stereo-types that could pit communities on opposite sides of the common borders in violent confrontations against each other.

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