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## Oil Movements: the Production and Government of Petro-(im)mobilities in East Africa

### Summary

East Africa's oil industry is shaping into a sector of significant politico-economic importance. Discoveries of commercially viable hydrocarbon deposits in Uganda's and Kenya's Lakes Albert and Turkana Basins respectively, have influenced ambitious infrastructure developments that start from but go beyond the two countries. This places the region in a geopolitical resource spectrum, marked by two multi-billion-dollar infrastructure projects. Uganda is fast tracking the development of the East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP) project between Hoima and Tanga; as Kenya develops its multi-model Lamu-Port-South Sudan-Ethiopia-Transport (LAPSSET) corridor, with an oil-pipeline component to move the country's oil from Turkana to Lamu port. Each of these projects forms part of national development visions, that are well-knitted into a complex network and interconnections of international, transnational and local actors. These interconnections highlight the significance of performing mobilities. In this project, we explore how "oil movements" viewed within the perspective of these two projects, shape multiple (im)mobility landscapes, practices, relations; and how these landscapes, practices and relations are rendered (un)governable.

### PROJECT TEAM



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### Key Questions

We pose three research questions:

- What power infrastructures govern the relational production of petro-(im)mobilities within the two East African projects?
- How do the material constituents of the projects influence the perception and performance of subaltern mobility practices along the two infrastructure corridors?
- In what ways have the different interpretations of the infrastructures influenced the modes of (im)mobility relations and performances among different "infrastructure communities" within the project areas?

### Methods and Concepts

Our empirical approach builds a data base constituted of recorded face-to-face conversations with government officials; development policy analysts; local community members and leaders; and other key stakeholders in the development of the two infrastructure projects. We also examine the changing ontological contours in specific areas where footprints of the project are evident. For the pastoral com-



Promotion of the East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP) at the village of Ruzinga in the district of Kyotera

munities in Kenya's Turkana region, we posit the development of the LAPSSET to their seasonal peripatetic tradition. Pictures and maps are useful data, adding to audiotaped and transcribed conversations. We are heavily inspired by Michel Foucault's concept of governmentality and Jørgen Ole Bærenholdt's coined term "governmobility" as an alternative way of seeing and explaining specific contexts of power relations that are integral to multiplicities of mobilities.

### Vision

The wider vision of this research project is to develop a theoretical understanding of how different kinds of mobility infrastructure projects are interpreted by different actors in real time and space. This enhances the understanding of relational features of such projects with pre-existing realities of those that the projects directly affect. We, therefore, do not envision this as an oil-movement research, but a research on the production of mobilities resulting from unique interpretations of resource frontiers by different actors. In other words, this empirical inquiry into East African "oil-mobilities" promises to generate new theoretical insights that could help explain how strategic natural resources influence the production and government of patterns of movement and ways of resisting or performing such movements.



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EACOP Survey Team Locating the ROW in the Forest (Hoima, 2019).

### Contribution or Relation to the Cluster's Aims & Goals

Whereas mobility is itself integral to constellations of multiplicities, the nodes of mobility (i.e. the underlying frames around which (im) mobilities occur) should be viewed in terms of their specificities. Oil, in this case, is a specific substance that influences mobility (and thus

multiplicity) in different ways. Approaching East Africa's multiplicities as founded around governing movements and stasis of people, things, ideas and practices resulting from oil extraction provides an opportunity to link the already fluid dynamics of (im)mobilities of African societies to crucial forces of globally sensitive substances such as oil. From an interdisciplinary point of view, the project envisages triangulating epistemological perspectives drawn from political sciences, geography, economics, and gender studies, as it explores East Africa's oil-(im)mobilities as a function of governmental power in the production and control of multiple spaces of (im)mobilities. The project has deliberately chosen to associate with a specialist in gender and natural resource management in Uganda, as a way to incorporate a gender element in the analysis of oil-(im)mobilities in East Africa. Not only is this in agreement with the Cluster's agenda of Reconfiguring African studies by creating platforms through which research informs policies, it is also our conviction that bringing together this team of researchers from Kenya and Uganda enhances a continuous cooperation with African and Africa based academics.

### Further Links / Key References

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