

## **'Grey Areas': How Beninese Policemen Conduct their Work and Shape the Police's Image**

Annika Witte<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz, Institut für Ethnologie und Afrikastudien, Mainz, Germany

annika.witte@gmx.net

The police represents a part of a state's executive bureaucracy, in some aspects a street-level bureaucracy, with the policemen perceived as 'bureaucrats in uniform'. The proposed paper addresses the multiple ways of functioning of the Beninese police. The discussion is based on an anthropological investigation of the police in 2009 (which was part of the 'states at work'-project and has been thoroughly analyzed in a master thesis). So far there has been little published about the Beninese Police. This paper provides insights into an important state institution that constitutes the most average and daily contact of citizens with the state. Moreover, it stresses a deviation of the police in its day-to-day actions from its own ideal-type as manifested in official and internal documents. The paper elaborates on how policemen act in various 'grey areas'. This metaphor alludes to actions being placed on a continuum of formality to informality, legality to illegality and of state-run to private. The paper presents informal strategies adopted by policemen in order to work around a lack of materials and personnel and the opacity of the organization. Such strategies include selective rule enforcement, individualized rule interpretation, a blurring of competences and corrupt practices. In line with other well-known research literature on corruption, this paper does not regard these strategies as dysfunctional. It supports a differentiated view in order to integrate positive as well as negative effects of these routines on the bureaucratic organization itself and also on its image among Benin's citizens. The paper includes some insights into the relationship between police and citizens. It briefly deals with the image the policemen's actions actually produce among the population. The metaphor of the 'grey areas' extends on the privatization of the police and the state security forces in general. In order to enable a better understanding of the police's conflicted image, the paper takes into account the history of the Beninese Police and the existence of several security forces with different allegiances within the Benin state. These forces appear to be rather in competition with one another, than to exert a real sense of partnership in crime prevention and detection.