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NAIROBI BECOMING
Security, Uncertainty, Contingency

Curated by Joost Fontein, Tessa Diphoorn,
Peter Lockwood, and Constance Smith

NAIROBI BECOMING

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Fig. 1. Detail from Hieronymus Bosch, *Ship of Fools* (1490–1500)

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spontaneous acts of scholarly combustion



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Peter Lockwood, and Constance Smith



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Like cities, all books, all exhibitions, all works are collective efforts. And, at their best, they are collaborative. This book is no exception. Collaborative, experimental, multi-vocal, and multi-modal, there are too many people whose contributions, inputs, imprints, and traces it carries to acknowledge them all here. Obviously, our collective thanks extend to the named writers and artists whose works are curated here. Their contributions speak for them, and for the enormous patience and generosity of spirit with which they have taken part in this project over so many years. We should also include all participants of the three exhibitions (*Remains Waste & Metonymy I, II, III*) held in Nairobi between 2015 and 2018, that lie in the background of this book and are a part of it, still, somehow. And thanks should go to all those who had a hand behind the scenes in making those exhibitions happen in the first place. And for all the seminars, workshops, conversations over Tusker, and much more, that also fed into the larger momentum from which *Nairobi Becoming* has emerged. A special mention must go, in no particular order, to Meshack Oiro, Syokau Mutonga, Craig Halliday, Dose-line Kiguru, Syowia Kyambi, Robbie Bresson, Damaris Muga, John Kanyingi, Nicholas Gakuu, and Fabian Ongaya, who all played significant roles in those exhibitions and events, often on the fly, with almost no budget and much creative improvisation. We also want to extend our gratitude to all the artists of Kuona Trust, Maasai Mbili, and Brush Tu who became involved and helped the exhibitions gain traction in Nairobi's sometimes ca-

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it. This took time and several false starts, interspersed with long stretches in the slow lane, punctuated with intermittent periods of high activity. Special thanks to the punctum books team, and especially Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei, for their enthusiasm for this project from the very beginning, their critical input, and reflections at key moments, and for seeing us through to this end. We are grateful to Morten Nielson for his insightful commentary and suggestions after reviewing an earlier draft, and particularly for the critical enthusiasm with which this was delivered.

With so many collaborators and contributors, the last phase would always be difficult, but also crucial. Its stoppages were extended by the Covid pandemic, but, like Nairobi itself, the process continued, evolved, and fractured, coherent, but in movement, becoming. A key tenet of this book about Nairobi is that the city is never finished. And so too this book is incomplete. To everyone who has and continues to take part in its unfurling, this book is for you. For Nairobi.

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Introducing *Nairobi Becoming*

*Tessa Diphoorn, Joost Fontein, Peter Lockwood,
and Constance Smith*

A Guide to Walking Nairobi (Doseline Kiguru)

For most of us who live in Nairobi today, our first arrival point was Machakos Bus Station. In this station, popularly known as Machakos Airport, you will find buses and minibuses to almost any location in Kenya. They are not luxury buses, but the prices are fair. When you arrive here, be careful of petty thieves, and learn that the noise and chaos might lead you to a destination you did not plan. The noise from vendors, from *matatus* (shared minibuses), from touts, from different churches' loudspeakers, from billboards, from street preachers, and hawkers, and everything in between, may at first bother you but before long you will not even notice it. When you arrive at the bus stop, it would be most ideal if you do not have any luggage, but who comes to Nairobi from upcountry without bags of farm produce and other luggage? So, the best option to ensure part of your luggage does not end up "lost" is to pay for the services of a *mkokoteni* (handcart). They are usually large enough to carry all your luggage. And if you have small kids, it would be safer and more convenient to also place them in the *mkokoteni*. If you talk to

your *mkokoteni* pusher nicely, he or she can also allow you to sit on it as they pull you and your luggage out of the “airport.” If not, then you have to walk-run beside the *mkokoteni* pusher all the way to your next destination — probably to Ngara Bus Station, from where you will take a *matatu* plying the Limuru Road route to your Ruaka flat in the outskirts of the city.

The *mkokoteni* pusher knows his way around town — do not lead him, but follow, and never lose sight of him. If he pushes his *mkokoteni* on the wrong side of the road where oncoming traffic seems to surely be colliding with him in the next moment, don’t even blink, just keep following him. Because in Nairobi there are the overall government and county council laws, and then there are the local laws. People on the streets follow the laws that suit and serve them at that particular moment. You will walk out of the “airport” into Landhies Road and then join Ring Road, past Kamukunji market and the police station. Later, just before you join Ngara Road, you will cross the famous Nairobi River. Very pleasing to the eye — or not. In all this, the trick is to focus ahead and act local. After getting your *matatu* at Ngara, and making sure your luggage is well secured, you can relax and wait to get home.

If you have a good amount of cash, you can buy anything your heart desires, from designer clothes and cars to *wagyu* beef and well-aged whiskey. However, for most of us, you need to know how to make your money stretch to the end of the month. For fruits and vegetables, you need to learn how to walk the local markets with your eye and fingers trained on identifying quality and freshness. The Ngara fruit and vegetable market has fresh produce and is close to town. Here everything is the right color — the correct green for peas or spinach or broccoli, the exact orange for carrots or oranges or butternut, and the best yellow for bananas or capsicum or beans. In this market, you don’t haggle about the price or touch the produce. You pay and go. If you want cheaper vegetables and fruits, you go very early to Gikomba market, next to the Machakos Country Bus Station. Or to Kangemi market on Waiyaki Way. Here, you can haggle

and fight over prices if that is your style. You can even take a piece of fruit in your hand and squeeze it. You will find both the fresh produce that would have been delivered to the market from the farm at dawn and almost rotten produce from a week ago. They all have different prices—your money determines what you get.

For fresh flowers, the best place to go is City Market right in the middle of town. Here, fresh bouquets upon bouquets are delivered every day from the flower-growing regions of Nakuru and Naivasha. As usual, you cannot drive through the market. You walk, your eyes darting from one vendor to the next, and once you have what you need, you can decide to venture farther into the market and browse in the art and curios corner, or farther into the meat market from where you can buy poultry, beef, goat, lamb, or seafood. The smell of fresh flowers, however, does not permeate deep into the market. The wonderful roses and lilies and carnations only serve to invite you into the market. Just a few steps beyond the flower vendors, the combined smell of meat and wood varnish merges and follows you throughout the market. It's both repelling and fascinating.

If your interest is clothes, your first stop is Biashara Street, just across from the City Market. It is on Biashara Street where all the baby clothes and baby products are found. Here, you can also easily find your favorite *lessos* (cotton cloth) and *vikois* (wrap skirt). You walk up Biashara Street and you are right in the middle of the city on Tom Mboya Street. Both Tom Mboya Street and Moi Avenue, two streets parallel to each other, are the hub of new imported clothes in town. There are stalls upon stalls, locally known as “exhibitions,” from where you can find your favorite designer and *desaina* clothes and shoes. Your Lacoste polo shirt might just be a “Le Costo” when you get home. In these streets, the exhibitions shine during the day, and at night the secondhand clothes and shoes vendors take over. At night you can actually get a secondhand Lacoste for an eighth of the original price. If you are more adventurous, go farther to Gikomba Market, which is the home of all secondhand items in

Nairobi. The other space to explore is Eastleigh, where you will find everything new from Turkey and beyond. The businesses in Eastleigh are mostly centralized on one long street. Leave your vehicle elsewhere because there is no parking available, and walk, preferably from the lower section of First Avenue to the top at St. Teresa Catholic Church. Carpets, shoes, handbags, clothes, spices, curtains, plastic wares — everything is on this street and cheaper than in the Central Business District (CBD).

And because these streets are designed and fashioned for walking, many times your nose will lead your feet to the numerous chicken and chips shops tucked in every corner of the city. Moi Avenue and Tom Mboya Street have the best chip shops. The streets are placed right in the middle of the city and are popular, especially with young people. If you are looking for quiet, comfortable lunch joints, then you should walk downtown or, better still, get into a vehicle moving toward the outskirts of the city. The chips and chicken shops do not even need to pay for advertising. You might be walking down Tom Mboya Street, probably looking for a shop that stocks phone screens for your cracked Techno or Infinix or Oppo cell phone, but your eye will be caught by the rotating chicken grills at the windows of every chips and chicken shop you pass. The smell of frying chips will call you in, and you will join the queue to the cashier, your money held tightly in your hand. The correct procedure is to pay at the cashier and then take your receipt to another counter where someone in a greasy white coat will measure out the correct quantity of chips for your money. Remember to also pay for tomato sauce or homemade chutney. You might not get a seat in the overcrowded shop, and you will eat standing up. And by the time you emerge from the shop, your clothes and your hair will be smelling like a fast-food kitchen.

Later, as you start to settle in Nairobi, you have to find a way to furnish your house. Your best bet is Muthurwa Juakali market. The best *fundis* (carpenter/craftsman) in Nairobi are found here, and you can either buy the wares already on display in the open-air shops or you can work with the *fundi* to design anything you like. All in all, when in Nairobi, walk like you know

where you are going. Any hesitancy marks you as a newcomer to town and therefore an easy target for pick-pockets and con artists. But if you are smart enough, there are many easy ways to make money on these streets. If you walk down past Moi Avenue onto River Road and down all the way back to the Machakos Country Bus Station, there are many makeshift stalls along the road where other smart people teach you how to double or triple your money. Also, people on these streets are sometimes really careless. You might be walking down River Road, past all the electronics shops, music blaring from every loudspeaker on sale, and then a young businessman walking hurriedly ahead of you drops a heavy envelope and keeps going. When you look down at the envelope, some wads of money would be peeping back at you. Pick up the whole envelope and stuff it in your handbag. But because there are so many people on these streets, someone else will see you and demand that you share the money or they will out you as a thief. You will agree to share the loot, but since you don't know exactly how much money is in the heavy envelope, someone suggests that you go count the cash in the public restrooms, away from prying eyes. The problem is that this other person is male, and you are female, or vice versa, and the public restrooms are gendered. The solution is that this other person has to trust you to go inside and count the money and then come back outside with their share. But this is the city, and they just can't trust you. So, they suggest that you leave something valuable with them — maybe your phone, wallet, or handbag. You do the math: your phone is probably worth only Ksh5000, your wallet or handbag has only Ksh2000, and so it makes sense to leave this with the gullible guy. You will go into the restrooms, count your money, and then disappear through the backdoor. Because you are smart. Welcome to Nairobi.

* * *

Why “Nairobi Becoming”?

Nairobi, it is often said, is a “fragmented city” (Charton-Bigot and Rodriguez-Torres 2006). It is certainly and unavoidably diverse, socially, racially, ethnically, materially, culturally, and religiously—a city that is disjointed and uneven, with gross differentiations of space, population density, and economic security across its different communities. But the notion of fragmentation also carries with it other qualities that pertain to Nairobi, most of all an edginess: a sense that the city’s diversity is devoid of the innocence that that term sometimes implies and is rather the result of myriad fraught histories of division and concentration, differentiation, and exclusion. Fragmentation also implies a temporality, the possibility that once there was a whole—coherent, planned, glued seamlessly into an identifiable, bounded thing—but that time of wholeness, if it ever existed beyond aspiration and imagination, has long gone. An even older everyday cliché about Nairobi is that “nobody is from Nairobi.” Likewise, if that cliché ever reflected a truth, it holds less water now. Plenty of people identify as Nairobians. And just as there are many Nairobians, so there are many Nairobis, coexisting in the very fabric of the city, in uneasy yet productive tension. For us, Nairobi’s fragmentation presents a challenge, one that lies at the heart of the “Nairobi Becoming” project—analytically, empirically, and methodologically. A challenge of coherence. This “fragmented city” does cohere, in multiple ways, times, spaces, at different temporalities of duration and transformation, from momentary glimpses of unspoken sociality to longer-enduring tropes of recognition and shared aspiration. In this sense, the city is a constantly shifting assemblage, coming together and fragmenting—sometimes painfully—in an ongoing process of becoming.

Like many cities, Nairobi is both characterized and hindered by recurring tropes and stereotypes that essentialize aspects of life while retaining a kernel of truth. When it comes to security, “Nairobbery” is another old cliché that emerged in the 1990s in reference to the crime that prevailed in many parts of the city,

particularly after dark, and that shaped perceptions of Nairobi as a city of crime. These imaginaries of fear were supplanted in the 2000s by references to Nairobi as a “hotbed of terror,” in the wake of attacks by al-Qaeda and Al Shabaab on the US embassy, Westgate Mall, and elsewhere (Glück 2017; Smith 2015). When Kenya was becoming a key ally in the US-led “war on terror,” experiences in the city showed that any coherence in shared experiences of fear, risk, and insecurity were fragmented by stark urban differentiations. In informal neighborhoods and other low-income areas, there is no greater fear than of the police and state security apparatuses themselves, which must be negotiated on the way to work, school, or leisure. As ex-pats, diplomats, and Nairobi’s growing professional classes imprison themselves behind ever-more elaborate security architectures and technologies, with high walls, razor wire, and alarm systems, the uniformed security guards that staff the gated communities are precariously employed and badly paid, struggling to manage their own aspirations and projects elsewhere. Meanwhile, Nairobi’s employers and employees, tenants and landlords, city dwellers and city officials are locked in ambivalent relationships of distrust, corruption, and deceit that conjugate through matrixes of legality, obligation, class, ethnicity, and prejudice. In multiple ways, therefore, questions of security, safety, and propriety turn on the vagaries of uncertainty, anxiety, and contingency in which everyone is immersed, and all are complicit.

Echoing the edgy, disjunctive city it explores, this book strives not for a single comprehensive narrative but to be several things in the making. It is a historically and anthropologically minded examination of a shifting cityscape, an experimental, collaborative exercise in curated juxtaposition and assemblage, and an interdisciplinary, subjunctive urban ethnography. In some ways, this emphasis on multivocality is not new. Anthropology has long been critical of the image of lone, intrepid researchers embedding themselves for years in a remote field site, trying to capture a “traditional” culture on the edge of an imagined abyss of transformation. Since the 1990s, at least, the discipline has embraced a proliferation of multisited ethnographies

emphasizing movement, flows, global assemblages, alienation, and aspiration (Ong and Collier 2005; Appadurai 1998; Marcus 1995; Ferguson and Gupta 2002). Not only has “the field” been brought “home,” but the old idea of “the field” is hardly recognizable. Fieldwork these days is rarely spatially or temporally contained, and neither are “informants” anywhere near as constrained into predetermined space and time as anthropology once presented them. Yet despite a profound (even debilitating) self-consciousness about the power-laden contours of its own knowledge production, and some early experiments in innovative and reflexive ethnographies (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Fabian 1983), anthropology often still seems to favor a single authorial voice and linear trajectories of argument, while ethnographic writing and editing tends to smooth out discordant elements rather than leaving space for juxtapositions, incompletenesses, and inconsistencies.

As we were thinking through how to trace Nairobi’s becoming, to try to apprehend a city that is always in motion, *security* emerged as a crucial analytical operator: a concept that refracted the seemingly diverse modalities of life in Nairobi through one lens. Empirically, security is crucial to understanding life in Nairobi in the straightforward sense that it is a heavily securitized city with a relatively high crime rate. But more than that, security, and the related domains of uncertainty and contingency, seemed to bring the dynamics of fragmentation and coherence to the surface in surprising ways. Security crosscuts Nairobi at different scales, linking anxieties about crime to the geopolitics of the war on terror, connecting the securitized spaces of elite shopping malls to the violence of police brutality, and revealing how the contingencies of infrastructural projects can undo or remake the possibilities of making life work. Attempts to secure space in one domain of Nairobi can thus fragment the very same concerns elsewhere in the city. Empirically and analytically, then, tracking security (and its associated uncertainties and contingencies) as it appears across the city offers a way into thinking both about Nairobi’s frictions and how the city hangs together despite them.

Methodologically, too, we have tried to do justice to this terrain by balancing an appreciation of the city's fragmentation with our own conscious creation of contingent coherence. Unlike other prominent African cities, and despite a wealth of historical and contemporary writing about particular aspects of Nairobi, there have been few attempts to synthesize a coherent collection that brings the diverse scholarship on Nairobi together into a single volume.¹ We understand that the lacuna of city studies of Nairobi might partly be the result of its complex multiplicities and its "fragmented" and emergent nature, which make producing a coherent city portrait a particular challenge. Yet despite its stark inequalities, its diverse neighborhoods, and inequities of planning and investment, Nairobi does cohere in particular moments and contexts of varying duration and scale. Rather than a conventional edited volume, this book seeks to explore the tensions of coherence and fragmentation to understand how the city "works" through its eclectic collection of different voices and interventions. Juxtaposing scholarship, literature, creative nonfiction, and visual art, we have arranged the contributions together around particular themes, but we resist the urge to develop a singular coherent voice. Meaning is partly produced through the way the contributions are assembled, as each piece resonates with those adjacent to it, sometimes with unintended effects. Security — in its various guises — is the linking thread, the point of articulation that connects apparently disparate elements of Nairobi life, from sex work to roadbuilding, goat markets to funerals.

This book began as part of a wider collaborative project entitled "Nairobi Becoming," which included a series of exhibitions and workshops exploring the city. These events, thanks to the involvement of artists and creative writers, have shown the possibilities of combining diverse media, voices, and approaches,

1 The recent publication of Ogot and Ogot's comprehensive *History of Nairobi 1899–2012* (2020) is a very welcome step in addressing this gap. See Charton-Bigot and Rodriguez-Torres (2006) for a deliberately "fragmented" attempt. See Smith (2022) for an annotated bibliography on Nairobi.

bringing together different forms and registers of intellectual production. Drawing on this experience, we have continued to utilize the term “curation” for our role in the making of this book. As curators, we have, where we felt it appropriate, highlighted particular crosscutting themes, not simply out of an academic desire for a degree of editorial control but also to allow the contributions to speak to those less familiar with Nairobi. Similarly, in this introduction, we explore how Nairobi’s complicated histories and spatialities have been seen through other lenses, positioning this project in relation to wider scholarly landscapes, as a way of approaching tensions between fragmentation and coherence and what this might reveal about Nairobi’s constant becoming.

If confronting Nairobi’s will to coherence amidst the strains of fragmentation is the empirical and analytical challenge of *Nairobi Becoming*, then through collaboration and juxtaposition, curation and contrast, and the messiness of assemblage, we have sought to chime with the fraught multiplicities of a city that somehow “works.” As such, this book is in part an exploration of the inevitable tension that exists between curatorial intent and the possibility of allowing each piece of work to stand for itself. Where is the coherence? Is it just a “will to” or “promise of” cohesion, order, and meaning? Or is there something about Nairobi’s frictions and fractures that also make it flow and cohere, that join the dots? Welcome to Nairobi. We hope to show you why it is such a good city with, in, and against which to do this.

* * *

Security, Uncertainty, and Contingency

Talk of “security” appears everywhere in the world today, across a broad diversity of guises, forms, and contexts (Neocleous and Rigakos 2011). Indeed, the very term “security” has come to mean so many things that it is often not clear what in fact is being referred to, or what purpose is being served (see Goldstein 2010; Diphorn and Grassiani 2019; Pedersen and

Holbraad 2013). The more obvious—and often highly politicized— aspects of security (violence, terrorism, crime) and responses to them (policing, private security, architectures, and legalities of security, also insurance mechanisms) are perhaps unusually important for understanding the character of Nairobi, given how frequently such concerns are in the foreground. But we also seek to explore how such obvious “security” concerns are entangled with other more quotidian issues in often divisive, exclusivist, and sometimes unexpected ways. It is clear that in the lived experiences of most urban residents in Nairobi and elsewhere across the region, these concerns are closely entangled with a complexity of other issues that relate to questions of security in broader and deeper senses. These stretch from questions of livelihood, food security, land tenure, and job security, for example, to questions of citizenship and rights, and from threats posed by lack of access to safe water, or protection from illness or misfortune, to the dangers of rumors, salacious gossip, or the occult. Questions of physical, social, economic, political, and even epistemological or ontological security are in this way profoundly intertwined.

In certain spheres, the notion of “human security” has come to be used to capture this complexity in a way that is commensurable—and maybe actionable—across diverse contexts, experiences, and lives lived. The “humanizing” of discussions around security, and the recognition of nuance and complexity that it offers, should be welcomed. Yet a danger remains that this nuance does not challenge the amplification of abstraction that has often fueled (or at least enabled) powerful and sometimes coercive interventions into urban lives through increasingly prevalent languages, practices, and technologies of security. Indeed, a deeper recognition of the complexity of what “human security” amounts to does not necessarily confront the insidious, multiple ways in which “security” increasingly intrudes upon everyday urban lives. It may even intensify and exaggerate these effects. The notion of “humanizing urban security” that we prefer therefore also refers to something else: to the growing demand for recognition not just of complexity but of common-

ality. As Achille Mbembe (2017, 182) puts it, “the desire for the fullness of humanity is something we all share,” and “whether we like it or not, the fact remains that we all share this world.” One effect of what we might call the “securitization of everything” (Andersson 2019) is the way in which difference, inequality, and exclusion — social, economic, political, ethnic, racial, and otherwise — characterize the world in which we live, across a range of scales. In the context of current debates about postcoloniality and indeed decoloniality, the quest to humanize urban security must therefore involve actionable recognition that “the desire to be protected, spared, preserved from danger” is universal. Humanizing urban security is therefore about recognition and inclusion, so that “to build a world that we share, we must restore the humanity stolen from those who have historically been subjected to processes of abstraction and objectification,” even if, as Mbembe warns, “the recovery of that share often happens in part through the proclamation of difference” (2017, 183).

The three themes of *security*, *uncertainty*, and *contingency* that we bring together in this book speak to this complexity of what human security could mean in diverse and rapidly transforming contexts across Nairobi. We are interested in how seemingly conventional human security themes, such as safety and physical security, livelihoods and housing, are crosscut by uncertainties and contingencies that resonate across diverse scales and registers, including less material but equally real threats, such as corruption, scandal, mistrust, and rumor. There are also the problematic spiritual securities offered (but rarely delivered) by unscrupulous pastors and new churches demanding heavy monthly commitments through tithing and other such mechanisms. We ask how the promised spiritual security of prayers offered at a “good” funeral might determine how people live now? We are interested, too, in questions of ontological security: How can Nairobians create desirable futures from a present where the forces that structure and determine the world remain opaque? And what about future-proofing, confidence in tomorrow, and the aspired-to security offered and desired in the form of jobs, homes, and education? How are they linked to notions

of morality and social (im)propriety? In a different register, how confident can Nairobians be in the infrastructures that manage the inflows and outflows of substances (food, water, rubbish, sewage, blood) that constitute individual and collective bodies and shape the body of the city itself in deeply uneven forms? A seemingly straightforward theme of attaining financial security through land title — a dream that captivates so many Nairobians — is complicated not only by deeply unequal access to financial mechanisms (such as loans and insurance) but also to peculiar measures of confidence and certainty (on investment and return, for example) and, in Nairobi particularly, is undermined by a long history of land-grabbing and misappropriation by civil authorities, public servants, and political and business elites. Such forms of security may well be contingent on, or challenged by, membership of political parties, churches, community groups, medical societies, burial groups, cooperatives, SACCOs, or *chamas*.² How, in short, can we approach questions of security in Nairobi in a way that incorporates all the vectors and matrixes of (un)certainly and contingency that people inevitably inhabit, in diverse yet often shared ways across Nairobi?

Insofar as the concept of security evokes a “no-go world,” to borrow the words of Ruben Andersson (2019), a Nairobi both interconnected and gated, a whole city yet one riven by fears and desires for protection and separation, the use of the term “security” in this book allows us as anthropologists to both assemble and traverse its axes, shifting scales to reveal a city fragmented by past and present forms of ordering, separation, and securitization inseparable from its colonial history and neoliberal present. As such, we use security as an ordering device, a curatorial tool, to explore how it is that Nairobi can be made sense of through its analytical prism.

2 SACCO stands for Savings and Credit Cooperative and is a popular mode of saving and acquiring credit outside of the formal banking sector. A *chama* is a rotating savings-credit group, usually within friendship or kinship circles.

* * *

Ordering the Colonial City

Since its late nineteenth-century beginnings in the British East African Protectorate, when Nairobi began as a depot on the colonial railway from the East African coast to Lake Victoria, Nairobi has transformed to become the largest and most powerful urban center in the region. Nevertheless, its colonial origins continue to inflect the way that lives are made in the city, with British authorities and modes of ordering urban life casting a long shadow. Colonial policies sought to discipline bodies through the ordering of urban space, a form of governance that was at once material and ideological. The racialized delineation of “European,” “Indian,” and “African” areas not only partitioned the populace into distinct spaces but also demarcated differential governance and access to resources and opportunity (Werlin 1974; Harris 2008; Otiso 2009). In reality, however, such categories were never able to accommodate or fully encapsulate the enormous diversity of Nairobi’s inhabitants, traders, and settlers, who included from the earliest days, as Ogot and Ogot (2020, 7) have put it, “a great number of dubious characters,” such as “speculators, fortune hunters, Japanese and Syrian prostitutes, and desperados of the worst kind from the Boer war.” In Nairobi, as in many other colonial cities, discourses of safety, public health, and security went together (Achola 2001; White 1990, chap. 3). Often justified by colonial authorities in terms of hygiene or fire risk, the demolition of the Indian “bazaar” in the city center and the demolitions of “African villages” were always as much to do with urban control as they were overcrowding or disease (Hake 1977; Myers 2003). Central to this transformation were imperial techniques of visibility: mapping and surveying and methods of surveillance built into the design of urban space (see Joyce 2003).

Perhaps most significantly for our thematic concerns, Nairobi’s history as a segregated city means that any sense of urban belonging cannot be assumed. The capacity to dwell in the colo-

nial city was subject to gendered and racialized ordering and strict regulation (White 1990; Harris 2008; Smith 2019). Up until World War II, colonial policy was marked by decidedly hostile attitudes toward urban presence in the city space at all: Nairobi was considered as primarily a European domain (with some commerce provided by Indian-origin residents), with “Africans”³ regarded as fundamentally rural in nature (Ranger 1993; Spear 2003). Although they were permitted to enter Nairobi to provide essential labor, notably for the railways and in domestic service, in the colonial imagination, urban Africans were not meant to exist at all. Men were only tolerated in the city as temporary migrant laborers, and their wives and children were expected to remain on the rural reserves (Hake 1977). Colonial pass laws regulated this movement of bodies: instituted in 1920, the *kipande* was an identity document that also acted as a record of employment and pass system for African men of working age. It could be checked at any time, and a valid *kipande* was necessary to enter certain parts of Nairobi.

This insecure presence in the city was further reflected in the insecurity of housing arrangements. Formal accommodation — when it could be accessed — was in dormitory accommodation calculated in bed spaces; there was no provision for family housing for Africans. Such policies, John Lonsdale (2001, 212) has observed, “were designed to constrain single men to generally brief periods of work in towns, as distinct from living out their lives there.” In reality, however, there were always considerable African — male and female — populations in the city, even if this was at odds with colonial law. It was this presence — far too many to be housed in the meager accommodation that was then available — that generated the development of distinctive African communities in the interstices and outskirts of the city, notably the vibrant and increasingly significant neighborhood of Pumwani (White 1990). Nevertheless,

3 “African” in this context was a colonial racial category, used generically and often interchangeably with “native,” to refer to those indigenous to the land colonized by British power.

such spaces were generally framed in terms of illegality by city authorities, meaning they were often at risk of demolition and the possibilities of making a life in the city were profoundly insecure. This insecurity continues, with the fear of bulldozers and demolitions remaining all too real for residents of popular settlements (see chapter 1).

In the run up to World War II, poor urban living conditions contributed to the increasing politicization of African communities, which led to labor unrest and several general strikes in Nairobi and Mombasa (Stren 1978; Cooper 1983). Facing widespread urban insecurity, municipal authorities were finally forced to acknowledge the sheer numbers of Africans living in urban areas, and several reports were ordered on the conditions of housing, welfare, and employment. By the mid-1940s, the Nairobi City Council began to imagine a new future for Nairobi, in which housing—identified as one of the causes—also became seen as one of the cures for urban insecurity. A new master plan for Nairobi presented spatial design not only as a way of controlling urban space but also as a means of cultivating new kinds of persons (Thornton White, Silberman, and Anderson 1948). It incorporated new plans to reform, rather than restrict, African residence in the city, with an extensive housebuilding program (Harris and Hay 2007). Underlying these plans was the colonial conviction that intervening in the design of urban life could produce more compliant, governable subjects and a stable, secure colony (Lewis 2000; Smith 2019).

Such convictions were short-lived, however. By 1950, spiraling economic grievances, land dispossession in the Central Highlands and growing political organization had laid the foundations for radical action against British rule in what became known by colonial authorities as “Mau Mau” (Throup 1988). In response to this rising instability, in October 1952 the governor of Kenya declared a state of emergency, and Nairobi, and Kenya more widely, was reshaped by a new order of brutal militarization and securitization. In an attempt to purge Nairobi of insurgents in one fell swoop, emergency forces implemented Operation Anvil in 1954. This saw the mass screening, arrest,

and detention of thousands of suspected Mau Mau fighters, the bulldozing of informal settlements, such as Mathare (perceived as a Mau Mau stronghold), and the forced deportation of ethnically Kikuyu, Embu, and Meru families and individuals to rural “reserves” (Bennett 2013; Anderson 2005). Within two weeks, an estimated 50,000 people had been detained or deported (Elkins 2005, 148).

The violence of securitization in Nairobi during this period is hard to overstate, and the ongoing investigations into British war crimes during Mau Mau is a crucial reckoning with this history. At the same time, we should not overemphasize the foresight of colonial urban governance for ordering and securing the city. The events of the “Emergency” were in many ways reactionary rather than strategic, indicating fundamental failures of the imperial project to recognize a rising tide of anger and discontent. Historians of Kenya have observed how the colonial police force’s ability to order daily life in Nairobi was always circumscribed by their limited control over the city (Throup 1992). Attempts to reform housing for Africans were also as much a reaction to expanding unregulated settlement and urban unrest as they were preconceived ideological strategies of imperial order (Lonsdale 2001). Nairobians have long pursued alternative trajectories within formalized processes, in ways that undid official procedures and created room for maneuver (White 1990; Frederiksen 1992). In such ways, since the beginnings of the city, Nairobi has always been shaped “from below” through land disputes, informal construction, citizen resistance, subverted policies, and incremental processes of reconfiguration — as much as it has been driven by state-led planning (Smith 2019; Manji 2015).

Nevertheless, as the brief history outlined here suggests, security has been built into the shape of Nairobi from the very beginning, shaping infrastructures of exclusion and differentiation. For the waves of African migrants who sought new opportunities in the colonial city, any association of Nairobi with “home” was fundamentally insecure, and sometimes subject to forceful prevention, whether by segregation, pass laws, demoli-

tions, or suppression. Nairobi's coming into being was therefore not a narrative of urban dwelling and belonging, so much as a contested and contingent process in which room to maneuver and spaces of opportunity had to be carved out, sometimes in the face of extraordinary violence. This history has cast a long shadow, inflecting more recent histories of slum demolition, the violence of infrastructural development and neglect, and methods of policing urban bodies and urban spaces that are evoked throughout the contributions in this book.

* * *

Policing the City

Like most African cities, policing in Nairobi is not solely a state affair, but one that includes a diverse range of initiatives and actors of which the state is one among many. State policing, much like in other British colonies, emerged in Kenya under British colonial rule and became institutionalized through two distinct police units: the administrative police (AP) and the regular police (RP). With different mandates, these police units operated distinct from each other, and this is still evident today, despite the structural changes that have been implemented since the establishment of the new Kenyan constitution of 2010, such as the recent merging of these two units. Such policies point toward ongoing reforms of state policing that fundamentally aim to transform the state police (Akech 2005; Osse 2016), and to attempt to shed its reputation as a corrupt, underresourced, and ineffective force that is incapable of dealing with crime in the city (Omenya and Lubaale 2012).

Yet despite the extensive police reform project, largely backed by extensive international funding, the notion of a democratic service seems far from achievable (Osse 2016; Diphoorn et al. 2019). This is most clearly evident in the excessive force used by police officers during the presidential elections of 2017, further highlighting the politicization of policing, but perhaps even more so in the prominence of extrajudicial killings that terror-

ize many inhabitants of the city (Jones et al. 2018; MSJC 2018; van Stapele 2016, 2019). This issue — of the lethal work of “killer cops” — reoccurs throughout our book, and highlights the insecurity and fear held by many inhabitants and their hostile relationship with Kenyan state representatives.

In the wealthier parts of the city, and increasingly elsewhere (see chapter 4), citizens engage more frequently with the 300,000 employees working for the 4,000 companies that make up the private security industry that patrols these neighborhoods and determines levels of access to particular areas (Colona and Diphhoorn 2017; Mkutu and Sabala 2007). This enormous industry, which has only very recently been subjected to state regulation, experienced an exponential growth after the high-profile Westgate Mall attack in September 2013 (Soy 2014). This reaffirmed the globalized nature of security and the insecurity of terrorism that had already plagued Nairobi since the 1998 bombing of the US embassy (see Gluck 2017).

The Westgate attack, and various others, were high-profile international media spectacles and local tragedies that defined discourses, practices, and visions of security. For example, shortly after Westgate, the government launched the *nyumba kumi* initiative, a Tanzanian-imported experience that aims to bring security to the level of the household by creating clusters of ten houses, *nyumba kumi* — as the name implies in Kiswahili, *nyumba* (house) and *kumi* (ten) — run by local residents and stakeholders. It has faced many obstacles since its implementation: in addition to being unevenly enforced, many regard it as a form of local surveillance exercised by the state (Brankamp 2020; Kioko 2017) in ways that echo techniques of surveillance used during the authoritarian regime of President Moi in the 1980s and '90s. Furthermore, *nyumba kumi* was often implemented in neighborhoods that already hosted other forms of civic policing. In addition to the state-led local peace committees and community policing programs (see Diphhoorn and van Stapele 2021; Kioko 2017; Ruteere and Pommerolle 2003; Ruteere 2017; Skilling 2016), there were also a range of civic-led actors that somehow operated under the banner of safety and secu-

rity, including gangs, vigilantes, (Agade 2018; Anderson 2002; Chulek 2019; Mutahi 2011; Schuberth 2014), and more notorious players, such as *mūngīkī* (see Rasmussen 2010). In chapter 4, various contributions underline the complex configurations and relationships that exist across this pluralized security landscape, ranging from collaboration to competition to outright terror.

In many of these constellations, we see echoes of Kenya's brutal colonial and postcolonial history (Katumanga 2005). Take the urban legend Patrick David Shaw, a white settler who became a member of the Kenya police reserve and established a ruthless and terrorizing reputation for "dealing with crime" in the 1970s and '80s (see *Business Times* 2018). Both detested and revered, Shaw's brutal tactics underscore that "killer cops" are not a recent phenomenon. Rather, authoritarian tactics continue to define much of contemporary policing that creates social and imagined borders within and across communities, creating outsiders and dangerous "others" — so-called thugs — and result in prolific ethnic profiling. This was evident in Operation Usalama Watch (Carrier 2017), a military and police operation carried out in April 2014, when security forces raided Eastleigh and subsequently harassed and detained an estimated 4,000 people without charge, confining them in appalling conditions. Such practices echo the deportation camps that defined the Mau Mau era, and also Moi's notorious use of detention and reputed torture, further affirming the recursivity of impunity and authoritarian rule, and how order is often enforced through spatial restrictions, enclosures, and enclaves.

* * *

Fortress Nairobi

A consistent theme in Nairobi's becoming has been the way security and exclusion have always gone together and are built into the very fabric of the city through forms of securitized architecture and design. In the colonial period this took the form of racial segregation and systems of surveillance that

demarcated differential access to urban areas, but the contemporary city has seen the increasing privatization and enclosure of both domestic and supposedly public spaces, notably in the form of gated communities and private shopping malls. In part, this is a response to anxieties about crime and the perceived failures of urban policing. At a time when many Nairobians feel that “the government is unable to guarantee their security” (Olima 2013, 298), neighborhoods have been increasingly left to manage security for themselves, resulting in a proliferation of walls, fences, private security personnel, neighborhood watch programs, and even vigilante operations (Colona and Diphooorn 2017). In such attempts to create sealed, impermeable space, we see how older anxieties about security are reworked: the racialized colonial “other” is refigured as a criminal “other” as new forms of exclusion and segregation are woven into the built form of the city (Bremner 2004).

But fortified constructions are not simply utilitarian responses to urban crime, or only a manifestation of “urban fear” (Low 1997, 2001). Architectures that incorporate security features are also markers of status and prestige. The most elaborate domestic fortifications are visible in Nairobi’s most upmarket neighborhoods, where an atmosphere of airy leafiness combines with formidable security infrastructure. The streets may be lined with jacaranda trees, but buildings are often barely visible behind high concrete walls topped with broken glass or razor wire. Real estate advertisements often mention both in the same breath: “mature gardens, secure entry gate, and separate guardhouse” read the particulars of one property on Peponi Road. In this way, security is not only about exclusion, but also exclusivity, of having “made it” in Nairobi.

As the city expands and transforms, the aspirational desire of such securitized, enclaved zones appears to be intensifying. Like many cities around the world, Nairobi has recently sought to reposition itself as a “world-class” city, attractive to new sources of global capital. “Vision 2030” has been the Kenyan government’s strategy for achieving this, a vision premised on massive urban infrastructure projects and new forms of urban planning

that takes new metropolises such as Dubai and Kuala Lumpur as its blueprint (Murray 2015). In Nairobi, this vision has so far remained on the drawing board, with little manifestation on the ground. Nevertheless, masterplans and computer-generated renderings of gleaming skyscrapers and luxury neighborhoods shape desires for certain modes of living before such spaces even exist, visions of exclusive urban futures in which securitized architectures are a crucial component. Intended to be managed by security and technology corporations, such as Cisco and G4S, this “world-class” envisioning imagines a future Nairobi where companies act as proxies for civic administration, managing urban security, infrastructure, and other facilities for urban elites, while lower-income citizens make do with an increasingly decrepit urban landscape elsewhere (Moser 2015). Sealed off from the urban populace immediately surrounding it yet connected to other global cities, such fantasy enclaves reproduce the spatial logics of the colonial city, perpetuating a segregated urbanscape — this time underwritten by neoliberal global capital.

* * *

Nairobi Futures

Amid Nairobi’s landscape of exclusion and segregation, new opportunities for accumulation have emerged that are transforming the city once more. Vision 2030 heralds an image of a futuristic Nairobi yet to come, but this image extends older hopes and aspirations for “development” that continue to structure Kenyan political discourse and wider hopes for social mobility and middle-class status (Ferguson 1999; Smith 2008). Such aspirations have risen markedly since 2002, the de facto end of the Kenya Africa National Union (KANU), the one-party regime of Daniel Arap Moi and its oft-cited era of corruption (Blunt 2019). The Nairobi we see today has been transformed by a period of growth that began at the turn of millennium, when economic liberalization paved the way for a new type of

city to emerge, one structured not only by colonial legacies but also by economic liberalization and new flows of global capital. This new era of economic growth and rising hopes for prosperity interacts with existing inequalities, producing new forms of anxious aspiration as ordinary Kenyans attempt to build middle-class lifestyles while staving off downward mobility and mediating economic uncertainty (Kroeker 2018; cf. James 2015). This “new Kenya” is marked by unequal and divergent capacities to create and dwell in the future, through access to land especially. During the presidency of Uhuru Kenyatta (2013–22), concerns about government borrowing increased. Amidst growing concerns about the economy, and about what post-Kenyatta politics might look like, Nairobian began to critique Kenyatta’s government exactly by referencing the Moi era, and framing deepening corruption and political problems in terms of a return to the troubles of the 1980s (see Owaahh.com, n.d.).

Nairobi has long been a city of enclaves. The postcolonial geography of Fortress Nairobi has inherited racialized, spatial forms of territorial exclusion. But in contemporary Nairobi, a new and intensified process of enclosure is taking place, as elites, offshore businesses, and ordinary Kenyans compete in attempts to acquire land, a sure source of future profits gleaned from rents. Nairobi is increasingly defined by widespread hopes to profit from the new “gold rush on land,” to participate in rentier capitalism. Shaped by new forms of real estate speculation and anticipation of a growing middle class, the city now expands outward into its once rural peripheries. Farmland on the city’s outskirts is turned into urban sprawl, pasted over with enormous China-funded shopping centers, cinemas, restaurants, and nightclubs catering to members of Kenya’s nouveau riche with disposable cash. Privately built, cheap concrete housing blocks continue to rise across the city, creating new urban satellites from which people are forced into lengthy commutes into Nairobi town by *matatu*. Meanwhile, cranes tower above Nairobi’s upmarket areas. The old townhouses are torn down, replaced by apartment blocks that stand empty, fueled by global

networks of money laundering and land speculation (Pitcher 2017).

Land has long been a scarce and valued store of wealth in contemporary Kenya. Take a walk through Nairobi's suburbs and you will see the words "THIS PLOT IS NOT FOR SALE" painted on the walls of compounds. Such signs aim to warn potential buyers about the activities of unscrupulous brokers, speaking to anxieties over land tenure created by the ambiguities of Kenya's opaque land bureaucracy. Access to land has fueled some of Kenya's oldest and ongoing political conflicts, dating back to the enormous expropriation of land by European and Boer farmers at the dawn of the colonial period (Lonsdale and Berman 1992). Independence scarcely addressed the land question in Kenya, with little meaningful redistribution. Enormous inequalities in access to land linger, dividing rural smallholders and landless slum-dwellers from the landed business and political elites that possess enormous ranches in central Kenya and the Rift Valley (Manji 2020). But land poverty persists; more recent economic liberalization has allowed a raft of overseas actors to use land speculation to pass money through Nairobi's housing sector, driving up prices, and intensifying forms of residential capitalism in the city (Pitcher 2017).

The urban landscape shifts in response to flows of international capital, but attachments to land continue to shape the life projects of Nairobians, many of whom come to the city in order to earn money to purchase plots "upcountry." In a world of uncertainty, land is a vital anchor. Not simply a tangible store of wealth in a world where banks are unreliable (Bohannan 1955; Guyer 2004), land is also an existential anchor for Kenyans — a place to be buried, a home, and a gift to one's family at the point of death and inheritance (Shipton 2007, 2009). Despite its increasingly commodified status, the acquisition and maintenance of land remains a vital activity of making the future material. The expansion of Nairobi's road network — especially with the introduction of the new northern, eastern, and western bypasses that connect the city to its metropolitan environs — has fueled desires to become rentiers for Kenyans who own land on

the city's outskirts, as discussed by Peris Jones in chapter 1, in the section "Building the City and Bending a Road." For peri-urban families, having a "rental plot" on one's land is now becoming a standard part of the mixed livelihood strategies that have characterized Kenya for a century. Desires to become rentiers "at the bottom of the pyramid" reflect land's value higher up the chain. The Kenyatta family, one of the largest landowners in Kenya, recently made plans to convert part of its 11,000-acre estate on the northern fringes of Nairobi into a new "Northfields" city, composed of enormous new housing projects, a business park, new shopping centers, and an industrial park (see *Business Daily* 2016).

Political and business elites have long engaged in "land-grabbing," scooping up enormous tracts of land across Nairobi and beyond through their exploitation of a weak property regime and a dysfunctional land registry. Meanwhile, aspiring Kenyans are confined to long periods of economization, saving money to purchase a plot of land or enhance their holdings. Theirs are lives of low wages, earned through logics of sacrifice that involve delaying consumption to save money in SACCOS that in turn provide loans for purchasing title deeds. The enormous neighborhoods that have sprouted up on Nairobi's edges, such as Thika Road and the town of Ongata Rongai, are home to millions of Nairobians who spend their lives hustling to both cover rising rents and save for familial futures, for the education of children and wealth in property. These future-making efforts take place within a wider context of economic and existential uncertainty—corruption and fraud, the insecurity of the urban environment, or the uncertainty of buildings themselves (see chapter 1).

Land remains a crucial resource for future-making in Nairobi, but the establishment of Nairobi County as a jurisdiction under the 2010 constitution is now also shaping the city's political futures. As a city of opportunity, one that attracts "hustlers" from across the country in the hope of achieving prosperity, Nairobi's politics reflect its inequalities, and popular politicians have risen to the fore who tap into the widespread

hopes of working Kenyans to access the wealth of the state, as Gabrielle Lynch discusses in chapter 4, in the section “Nairobi Politics: The Hustler versus the Suit.” Mike Sonko, the former governor of Nairobi, swept to power in Kenya’s 2017 elections on the promise of opening up Nairobi to “hustlers” — allowing hawkers to operate on Nairobi’s streets without fear of police brutality. As it happens, Sonko’s administration was short-lived. The Covid-19 pandemic allowed Uhuru Kenyatta’s government to strengthen its control over the city once more, seizing control from Sonko and creating Nairobi Metropolitan Services (NMS) staffed with military personnel (Baraka 2020). Some Nairobians saw this as a thoroughly illegal and unconstitutional seizure of power, but others praised the order that the NMS brought to the city’s municipal services, contrasting it with the neglect and corruption of the brief Sonko era. The pandemic era of curfews and centralized government power in Nairobi led many to become wary of forms of securitization and military rule that harked back to the one-party state of Moi. Such sentiments of fear remind us again of the historical continuities of security and their embeddedness within the urban social fabric.

* * *

Thinking about African Cities and Urban Lives

Reflecting on how dynamics of securitization have shaped the contours of the city, we seek to engage with recent notable trends in urban anthropology and the study of African cities. On the one hand, there is now a large body of work on African cities that emphasizes the importance of the unofficial, the provisional, the “informal,” and ephemeral as defining features of African urbanism (de Boeck and Plissart 2004; Guyer 2004; Simone 2004; Nuttall and Mbembe 2008; Lindell 2010; Hansen and Vaa 2004; Mcfarlane 2019). This body of work emerged in response to an overemphasis on crisis and breakdown, which dominated academic and public debates about African cities since the 1980s (see Roitman 2017), and therefore tended to

focus on the ephemeral, the informal, the spiritual, the invisible, and the intangible, and in so doing sought to offer voice to diverse urban experiences across the African continent. A particular concern has been for the transitory nature of life and work in the “informal economy” (Hart 1973; Kinyanjui 2014), which has been seen to confine Africans to lives of brute short-termism created by low, piecemeal wages. In seeking to recover an appreciation of African agency amidst the pressing economic emergencies that structural adjustment created on the continent, a wave of urban studies and anthropological scholarship identified the ingenuity and resourcefulness of urban Africans living on the economic margins of the informal economy (see, e.g., Ferguson 1999; Simone 2004; see also Adebawwi 2019; Thieme 2018; and Di Nunzio 2019 for more recent iterations of these arguments). These accounts have provided a complex portrait of how Africans have continued to adapt to economic shifts over the decades, finding room to maneuver and to endure in the face of chronic economic crisis. In the last few years, a growing number of scholars have begun to critique this focus on ingenuity and agency, arguing instead that the contexts of extreme economic insecurity need to be examined more fully. This has brought renewed attention to questions of inequality, exclusion, and the political economy of African cities in the context of postcolonial and deeply rooted neoliberal economics (Rizzo 2017; Wiegratz 2016; Wiegratz, Martiniello, and Greco 2018; Lockwood 2020a). These more materialist-inclined scholars have moved away from themes of ephemerality and informality to emphasize the extreme abjection, poverty, and exclusion that the so-called informal economy reinforces and depends upon.

This book deliberately positions itself between these broad trends—seeking both to give voice to multiple and diverse experiences of African urban living and to recognize and critically examine broader structural inequalities and recursive patterns of exclusion and abjection in African urban contexts. Working with what Wale Adebawwi has called “the political economy of everyday life” (2019), this book examines how Nairobi’s past and present becomings have shaped “the capacity to

live,” how amidst zones of violence and exclusion, Nairobians have cultivated domains of certainty in which lives can be made better. Our approach is less concerned with inventiveness and agency than with an attentiveness to how Nairobians cultivate the capacity to live, appreciating its inherent materiality and sociality, and carving out security on Nairobi’s uncertain frontier through carefully accruing trusting relationships, turning the city’s strangers into known neighbors (chapter 3).

Beyond these two trends in African urban scholarship, however, *Nairobi Becoming* also deliberately positions itself in engagement with theoretical approaches toward the study of affect, materiality, and the senses. Scholarship on African urbanism has persistently de-emphasized the role of materials and things in the ongoing becoming of African cities, arguing that “the hidden,” “the invisible,” and “the spiritual” play a more significant role in everyday urban lives and politics than sensorial, experiential, and material engagements with the flows and exchanges of objects, substances, artifacts, and visible stuff that constitute the emergent fabric of cities. Although certainly “materialist” in orientation, those approaches emphasizing the political economies of deepening inequity and exclusion heralded by neoliberal reforms, too, have often eschewed deeper exploration of the diverse materialities of urban living in Africa. Importantly, our purpose is not to ignore or sideline the informal, the ephemeral, and the invisible aspects of urban lives, so much as to understand their inevitable materializations and manifestations in substantial and sensorial forms, including through institutions and social formations as much as through landscapes, architectures, bodies, and flows of materials.

It is in taking on the challenge of exploring the material and affective dimensions of urban lives that *Nairobi Becoming’s* collaborative approach of multiple scholars and artists was built, on the principle that artistic registers of intellectual engagement are often more finely attuned to the sensorial dimensions of urban life. We also see ourselves in close conversation with more recent bodies of work in anthropology and African studies that explore infrastructure; architecture, building, and design

(Buchli 2013; Ingold 2013; Marchand 2009); ruins, waste, and decay (Edensor 2005; Stoler 2013; Gordillo 2014; Navaro-Yashin 2009); and monumentalism, heritage, and public art (Lowenthal 1998; Meskell 2012), to name only a few — all which have engaged with the “materiality turn” in the social sciences and humanities to productively explore how accumulations, transformations, flows, and technologies of stuff and materials are central to understanding African cities.

In adopting an attentiveness toward materiality, object agency, and affect, and not least the conceptual and experiential consequentialities of stuff, we bring a historical and political sensitivity. This book discusses the colonial and postcolonial powers that have shaped Nairobi’s complex trajectories of becoming and painful histories of exclusion, but it also emphasizes the excessivity of material transformations beyond the “mark of sovereignty” (Navaro-Yashin 2009). That is, the constraints of human, institutional, and political capacity to arrange, assemble, and police the form and substance of the city. Nairobi’s goat markets, for example, draw migrants from the Horn of Africa, creating new livelihoods and possibilities outside of “official regulation.” And in downtown Nairobi, protestors take on the state as a collective expression of the frustrations of citizens, who are looking for answers in response to its wanton necropolitics (Mbembe 2003) and the police’s long-standing practice of carrying out extrajudicial killings in Nairobi’s poorest neighborhoods (see chapter 2). These practices speak not only to the situated becomings of humans and stuff, but — in their capacity to defy territorialization — to related questions about the capacity of scholarship to grasp these multiple evasions and enunciations through conventional textual description and analysis. Engaging with Nairobi’s many vectors and velocities has provoked us not merely to adopt a conceptual flexibility at the level of academic knowledge but to reconceptualize the form that “scholarship” might take. This takes place at a time of critical questions about the “decolonization” of knowledge production and intellectual exchange, and how knowledge is made and heard beyond the confines of the academy. Though undoubtedly crucial, we also

recognize the long histories of these debates, rooted as they are in much older debates about postcoloniality and the politics of representation.

Such discourses are well developed in Kenya, notably through the work of writer and scholar Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, whose pioneering book *Decolonizing the Mind* (1986) takes on the insidious ways that coloniality shapes a sense of history and identity through language. As Ngũgĩ has it, language is both the way in and the way out of this challenge. Even as we try to pick up Ngũgĩ's gauntlet, however, the assemblage of contributions gathered here also points to a need to move beyond his emphasis on language (and particularly academic language) as a sole or privileged route into and out of the challenge of opening up other ways of knowing and making sense of the world. Bringing together critical, open-ended engagements between visual artists, creative writers, and other intellectuals-in-the-world, on the one hand, and academic scholars, on the other, to a discussion about Nairobi, is itself a potentially productive "decolonizing" move insofar as it brings nonverbal, sensorial, affective, and other material and metonymic registers of intellectual work into conversation with the semantic forms still privileged in the work of an earlier generation of postcolonial thinkers. The approach adopted by *Nairobi Becoming* has therefore sought to develop new forms of collaborative knowledge production that engage with these current debates, without being constrained by conventional scholarly vocabularies, literary and academic impulses toward narrative closure, or artificially imposed, editorial coherence. We feel that such modes of procedure neither reflect the rough edges — the edginess, if you will — of Nairobi nor do justice to the multiplicity of ways in which order or meaning could be made of its many pasts, presents, and futures. If — as one reader usefully suggested — a tension between *editing* a coherent narrative of the city and *curating* a disparate, multifaceted assemblage of its parts (in order that each might potentially reach beyond itself to say something more) lies at the center of this book, then that is both deliberate and productive,

and perhaps exactly what a city like Nairobi offers us to think with.

* * *

Experimental Collaborations

This book emerged out of a collaborative project involving a broad community of scholars, artists, writers, and intellectuals working in and on Nairobi, all who sought to explore the city's complex, multiple, coexistent histories, ethnographies, portraits, and biographies. The project *Nairobi Becoming* was hosted at the British Institute in Eastern Africa in Nairobi between 2015 and 2018. The project involved a series of collaborative exhibitions, seminars, and other events in partnership with other Nairobi-based institutions, including the National Museum of Kenya, members of Kuona Trust, Kwani Trust, and the Goethe-Institut, among others. This book follows on from those earlier activities and brings together the works of twenty-seven contributors to that wider project in its aspiration to present an open-ended, multivocal ethnographic portrait of the city of Nairobi.

From the outset, the project sought to adopt a collaborative and multidisciplinary approach. Although always conceived of in this way, since the very earliest *Nairobi Becoming* conversations between Joost Fontein and Neo Musangi in 2015, what this has meant in both practical and conceptual (not to mention ethical and small “p” political) terms has necessarily been as emergent, multiple, and mutable, and sometimes as fraught, as the city itself. This is, perhaps, the nature of experimental forms of collaborative intellectual engagement and production. The finished “product,” this book, has taken its current form in part only because we chose to stop and to take stock; to fix it, artificially, even if only for a moment. It could have continued transforming and mutating, as unfinished as the city of Nairobi. And perhaps in the way that books and other “products” of intellectual and creative endeavor usually continue to take on or pro-

voke new meanings and interpretations, this book and its many contributions too will continue to transform and emerge, that is, to become (Bheil and Locke 2017). That would be cool. This approach was always understood as inherent to Nairobi Becoming's purpose, in part because we believed the peculiar problems raised by such an approach resonate with the empirical complexities of the city itself. But now we reflect, albeit briefly, on the processes, successes, and difficulties that were involved in putting this book together.

The most significant of the activities carried out between 2015 and 2018 under the Nairobi Becoming umbrella was a series of collaborative exhibitions: *Remains Waste & Metonymy 1* (2015); *Remains Waste & Metonymy 2: Sensing Nairobi* (2017); *Remains Waste & Metonymy 3: Kikulacho Nairobi* (2018). These took place within and across Nairobi, sometimes very explicitly, so that on occasion we imagined (or fantasized) that what we were doing was part of, and reflected upon, the city's becoming in very real ways. The *Sensing Nairobi* exhibition in February 2017, for example, involved simultaneous co-events at three different locations across Nairobi (BIEA in Kileleshwa, Maasai Mbili in Kibera, and Mathare Social Justice Centre in Mathare) that were "beamed" "live and direct" across the city using live streaming technologies. (This was long before Covid-19 made live streaming a normal thing for such events). These exhibitions deliberately brought together multiple, diverse voices, practices, intellectualisms, and forms of creative and critical intervention, including visual artists, creative writers, political activists, and creative intellectuals of other shapes, forms, and persuasions, from across Nairobi, across Kenya, across the region, and beyond. This imperative ran through Nairobi Becoming's many events and was, we felt, "multidisciplinary" in the very best sense of that term.

The initial exhibitions of the Nairobi Becoming project emphasized critical engagements between scholars and visual artists, but creative writers became increasingly involved, particularly in the third exhibition (*Kikulacho Nairobi*), and have found a prominent place in this book. We want to emphasize

the capacity of fiction writing to provoke perspectives on the city often obscured from the gaze of scholars. Global inequalities in higher education have often meant that historically Africans have been unable to “write back” on the same terms as European and American scholars who dominate the academy internationally. But Africans have hardly been silent. As Francis Nyamnjoh (2011) has noted, anthropological scholarship has consistently failed to recognize the knowledge that Africans have produced about their own contexts in genres outside formal scholarship. This book emphasizes the capacity of fiction to disturb. For example, and without spoiling its ending, Doseline Kiguru’s short story “Sikuku,” in chapter 3, describes the travails of young women in Nairobi’s rentier economy and the hope of intimacy in an alienating city, in a way that many “conventional” ethnographic accounts might struggle to do. The same could be said of Billy Kahora’s “interludes,” scenes from the city that evoke local knowledge and imaginaries of the city’s origins, its boundaries, hidden places, and unseen interactions, not least the big cats that on occasion prowl its peri-urban peripheries to the southeast.

It is through its collaborative exhibitions, and the curation-cum-editing of disparate forms of creative and intellectual production involved in the making of this book, that Nairobi Becoming has sought to engage with recent debates about “decolonizing” the production of knowledge about Africa. This “decolonizing spirit” manifests itself in (at least) two dimensions. First, in the rather obvious but nevertheless fundamental and *still* urgent requirement (given how far there is yet to go) that representations of and knowledge about lives, places, and meanings to do with the African continent, or indeed any geographical place, should necessarily, a priori, involve, thoroughly and from conception through to completion, the active and decisive participation of people from those places. Although this should be an undisputable given, too often academics based in institutions beyond the continent continue to ignore this basic imperative — whether willfully, because it is deemed of secondary priority to personal career goals or to the research itself, or

because, in practical terms, it can be very hard to achieve, however willing one might be.

Although challenging conventional asymmetries in the politics of knowledge production was a core imperative for *Nairobi Becoming* from the start, in the long process of collating, curating, and revising this book, we have become more aware of the practical reasons why, still too often, scholars based beyond the African continent, especially those with secure employment in academic institutions in the Global North, end up being those who lead such research collaborations. This has very much to do with the global political economy of higher education, marked as it is by stark inequalities between northern and southern institutions. The consequence is a relative sort of privilege, meaning that salaried academics based at northern institutions have the opportunity to devote the time and energy necessary to see complex projects such as this book through to completion. This is different from the situation of academics on lower and precarious salaries in institutions in the Global South, who are often forced to take on more remunerative consultancy work or are inundated with enormous teaching loads. It is also different from that of the emerging class of postdoctoral cohorts across the board, struggling in highly competitive contexts with multiple research grant and job applications and immense pressures to publish quickly, all while saddled with enormous student debt from undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. It is true that academics have, perhaps, become accustomed to earning nothing, or next to nothing, from their research articles and books (a situation the publishing industry, for its own reasons, has sometimes taken advantage of) because their rewards come later in the form of secure jobs, promotions, and increased salaries. Yet this clearly does not apply evenly to all academics. Often far worse still are the difficulties that self-employed or “informally” employed artists, creative writers, and other noninstitutionalized intellectuals face in participating fully and equally (and to the degree that they might wish) in such collaborations, and how frequently they still face expectations to give of their time, work, and effort for free by well-meaning but

ill-informed “principal investigators” with secure, salaried jobs in universities, NGOs, and other organizations elsewhere.

These are very real practical problems that we faced as Nairobi Becoming moved from exhibitions and events in Nairobi to the more time-consuming and less immediately rewarding work of compiling this multiauthored ethnography. In such contexts, it is not surprising that securely salaried academics are often willing take on more of the burden of completing collaborative writing projects (see, e.g., Theime, Ference, and van Stapele 2021), however much this might undermine the imperative to “decolonize” knowledge production discussed above. This was a real conundrum that we faced in the long process of compiling this book, which was marked by the stepping back of several key Nairobi-based participants who had been deeply involved in conceptualizing and activating Nairobi Becoming and its exhibitions in the 2015–18 period. Although in collating, curating, and editing the contributions here we have made every effort to maintain an accurate reflection of the broad diversity of contributions to the wider Nairobi Becoming project from which it derives—and are confident that Nairobi’s intellectual and creative diversity is reflected to some degree in it—nevertheless the dominance of white scholars based in institutions in the Global North on the final editorial/curatorial team is hard to avoid. The work of bringing together a myriad of diverse contributions in the experimental form of a multiauthored ethnography (rather than a more conventional edited collection) is, in and of itself, no solution to the wider inequalities that pervade academic knowledge production about the Global South, Africa especially. But it does represent an attempt to reconceptualize what academic knowledge can be *despite* them.

Furthermore, “decolonizing” knowledge is not simply about opening up participation in academic registers of knowing to those hitherto and normally excluded from it. Much more critically, it is about challenging established and normative parameters of what knowing and what intellectual engagement, production, and exchange might involve. The promise of “decolonizing knowledge” in this guise is not simply, therefore, about enabling

Africans to take center stage in the production of academic knowledge about Africa, or Nairobians about Nairobi, or anyone about anywhere, but rather about challenging what might constitute and qualify as recognizable forms of intellectual work and ways of knowing in the first place. The urgency of this kind of “decolonizing imperative” is not simply about questions of equity and inclusion, however important those certainly are. It is also, or rather, a question of making knowledge about, and representations of, places such as Nairobi richer, more diverse, and textured, more multiple and open-ended, and thereby ultimately more informative, more critical, and more substantial. The “decolonization of knowledge” in this sense is very much about making knowledge *better* by opening it up, by making academics of all backgrounds, in all kinds of institutions, in Nairobi, across Africa, and in the Global North, aware of the limitations of conventional repertoires of academic knowledge. That is why the *Remains Waste & Metonymy* exhibitions (some works from which appear in this book) were such a crucial aspect of the Nairobi Becoming project, and in the making of this book. In particular, those exhibitions sought to engage critically, and sometimes playfully, with the possibility of non-metaphorical or maybe “less” metaphorical or representational forms of knowing, deploying modes of metonymy and presence (visually, through sound and performance, or through creative text) to do the intellectual work that highly refined, exclusivist academic languages often struggle with (Fontein 2018). This is why this book includes visual and fictional contributions, not to “illustrate” arguments made in the text, but rather to make contributions in their own right through modes of critical intellectual endeavor that are not reliant upon, or limited to, semantics, texts, or narrative forms.

Collaborative writing and multiauthorship as methods of inquiry can be very difficult but also enormously rewarding and productive, particularly for negotiating the multiple poles of meaning-making that constitute a highly complex entity such as Nairobi. There are numerous definitions and contested understandings of what “multiple authorship” can amount to. Collab-

orative writing can take on different forms (Ritchie and Rigano 2007; Onrubia and Engel 2009), and in writing and curating this book, we have used diverse strategies at different times, and for different sections. In many of the chapters, we engaged more in turn writing, which entails each author contributing different parts of a text that a lead author(s) then brings together. With some sections, there was more *lead writing* taking place, whereby one person took the lead in drafting the text and other participants amended it. With this introduction and the epilogue, the four curators of this book primarily engaged in *writing together side by side*, that is, the four (Diphorn, Fontein, Lockwood, and Smith) of us coming together and negotiating text as we write, and *parallel writing*, that is, where we each had a designated section we wrote simultaneously and then pasted together for further coauthoring and curating. The creation of this multiauthored book thus occurred through divergent paths and strategies, which we feel also matches the juxtaposed tension between coherence and fragmentation that lies at its heart.

More importantly, however, this book's multiauthorship is not limited to writing — we deliberately bring other visual and performative forms of knowledge production and “authorship” into engagement with textual and narrative forms. We therefore approached collaborative writing and multiauthorship in a double, if not a triple, sense. Collaborative writing can be a tool with which to scrutinize qualitative research relationships and the ethnographic process (Saldanha and Klopfler 2014), but it also provides reflexivity on writing itself. This is the double effect, acknowledging how writing can “subjectify” an experience and yet “at the same time the printed text itself objectifies our experience” (Ritchie and Regano 2007, 8). The triple effect occurs when writing is brought into critical engagement with other forms of intellectual work beyond the constraints of the textual, thereby showing how multiauthorship can enable multidimensional perspectives that enrich learning and understanding. In its most basic sense, the collaborative approach brings a pooling of different experiences and knowledge that in combination can create new meanings and new forms of knowing. This is

the second, more profound “decolonizing” imperative discussed above, to which the Nairobi Becoming project and this book have sought to contribute, using collaborative multiauthorship’s “potential to disrupt, challenge, and open possibilities both in the academy and the wider world” (Wyatt and Gale 2014, 295).

This form of multiauthorship, broadening intellectual collaboration beyond the limitations of text and writing, also brought unique challenges to the making of this book. During the long series of discussions involved, stretching over four years, and becoming more online and remote as continents, time pressure, and then Covid-19 forced physical separation upon us—a far cry from the productive material engagements and shared proximities that characterized Nairobi Becoming’s workshops and exhibitions between 2015 and 2018—we often discussed these challenges in terms of a tension between the demands of curation and cohesion. As Morten Nielsen put it in his insightful peer review of an earlier draft of this book, if “items that lend themselves to curatorial experimentation must have an inbuilt capacity for differentiation,” and “can be treated as phenomena that seem to transcend the particular circumstances of their enunciation or writing without losing consistency and significance,” and therefore “end up [...] *differing from themselves*,” then “there cannot be any final or even organic consistency to the analytical account that emerges from the practice of curation. The stability that is momentarily established across the curated elements is always on the verge of collapse because this kind of meaning-making (or any kind of meaning-making, for that matter) is first and foremost aesthetic.”

This profoundly productive and contingent aspect of *curation* was central to Nairobi Becoming’s events and exhibitions and lies at the core of this book as a curated collection. And yet we also experienced an editorial (and perhaps peculiarly academic) pressure to smooth off the edges of the book’s diverse contributions into a more or less cohesive, even linear, narrative. This tension between editing and curating remained and remains, in the end, unresolved and incomplete. It indexes what we identify as a core, productive, methodological, and analytical problem

lying at the heart of this book: how to write a multiauthored, kaleidoscopic, and open-ended, and yet coherent and cohesive, historically informed ethnographic portrait of an African city in the twenty-first century, in a way that echoes the empirical realities of a city whose coherences emerge fleetingly *through*, *despite* and yet *because of* its fraught multiplicities, diversities, and fragmentations.

This quickly became a very practical and conceptual concern, which sometimes threatened to scupper the whole endeavor. Should chapters bringing together numerous different contributions of diverse shape, style, length, and content be edited and revised into a single-voiced narrative and argument? Or should they be left wholly alone, separate and isolated, only to be brought into coherence by the authoritative intervention of each chapter lead through short introductions, sectional headings, linking paragraphs, and closing remarks? Or should we dispense with such editorial interventions altogether in preference for a more curatorial approach that sought, through contingent assemblages, tensions, and juxtapositions of different contributions, to make each speak to more than itself in unconstrained, and perhaps unexpected, ways? And if so, to whom and how should chapters and sections in which many people at different moments over this book's long gestation have contributed be attributed? How to preserve diverse voices, styles, and arguments, and at the same time offer the coherence and narrative progression that readability and, some might suggest, kindness to readers demands, and upon which, perhaps, the possibility of effective communication and sharing collaborative knowledge depends? To fall in line with the ethos of this book, we have not chosen one strategy, but have welcomed diverse means of curation. In chapter 3, for example, contributions from authors have been minimally edited by the chapter's curator, but in chapter 4, the curator took the liberty to add a few sentences throughout and within the various contributions to ensure a smoother flow. To ensure that readers know whose voice they are reading, and to give credit to authors' contributions, we have also decided on a specific way of defining and representing authorship. Sec-

tions that are italicized and have a named author in parentheses are provided by one specific contributor, and sections that are not italicized and without a name were primarily written by the curator of that chapter. For this introduction, for example, the opening section was provided by Doseline Kiguru, and the rest of the chapter was co-written by the four curators of this book.

We have thus settled on something of a fudged, incomplete muddle between editing and curating. The readers and the many authors of this book can determine the success of this. In indexing these questions repeatedly, however, and in reworking the content, style, and shape of each chapter and the whole book, again and again, and doing so with a shared spirit of critical camaraderie and willingness to listen and learn as well as to create and produce, we have gained some insight into what the promise of “decolonized” collaborative knowledge could look like: open, emergent, and multiple, messy and fraught, unfinished, contradictory, and contingent, and yet full of promise, of life, and excitement. Much, we think, like Nairobi itself.

* * *

The Book

We have assembled and curated the multiple contributions that constitute this book through four substantive chapters, each of which deals with issues related to security, uncertainty, and contingency in Nairobi through focusing on particular themes. Chapter 1, “Nairobi-scapes,” curated by Constance Smith, explores the landscapes, architecture, and geographies of the city. Chapter 2, “Bodies and Corporealities,” curated by Joost Fontein, looks at these entities in and of the city. Chapter 3, “Making Lives,” curated by Peter Lockwood, explores diverse social relations and socialities that emerge in and through the city. Chapter 4, “Regulating Relationships,” curated by Tessa Diphorn, examines institutions and their role in making Nairobi. Interweaved between these chapters, Billy Kahora’s fictional contributions, “Work/City in Progress,” reflect the

emergent properties of Nairobi in ways that further enrich our understanding of Nairobi's becoming.

Chapter 1: Nairobi-scapes

The shifting landscape of Nairobi has long been shaped by spatial and physical interventions in the name of security. Accumulating in the urban landscape over decades, these endurances from the past have powerful afterlives in contemporary Nairobi. In this way, Nairobi's securitized histories have left their mark on Nairobi, from the clearances of "dangerous" areas of Nairobi during the Emergency in the 1950s (Annie Pflugst), to the politics of land-grabbing and the accumulated risk of fragile architectures (Joost Fontein and Constance Smith). Two paintings from Elias Mung'ora's *Footprints* series suggest how history can endure into the present, leaving residues like footprints in the sand that remake urban places through accumulated traces. The creation of a physical boundary around Karura, Africa's largest urban forest, allows us to explore how notions of "public space" are refracted by claims for security, and how these can intensify uncertainty and insecurity for those prohibited access (Teresa Mbatia and Beppe Karlsson). James Muriuki's intervention took water samples from three sites on Nairobi River, showing how the water changes character across the city, a vital urban tributary but also one made fundamentally insecure through contamination, effluence, and waste. Meanwhile, the opaque deviations of a road construction project through the informal settlement of Mathare generates existential and pragmatic insecurities, as a lived sense of place and plans for the future are literally bulldozed (Peris Jones). Collectively, these contributions highlight how experiences of diverse insecurities and uncertainties are powerfully located within the fabric of the city, drastically reconfiguring materialities and meanings of Nairobi's emergent landscapes.

Chapter 2: Bodies and Corporealities

The contributions brought together in this chapter are concerned with the bodies and bodily processes that constitute

Nairobi. This chapter does NOT try to offer a typology of different bodies in and of the city. Rather, we seek to think about the bodily and corporeal processes, practices, objects, and relationalities that pertain in complex ways to questions of security, certainty, and contingency in Nairobi. We are interested in how the “body of the city” and those of the people (and animals) who live, work, and move through it are intertwined and entangled. The flows and blockages, material exchanges and transformations, movement and containment of bodies have always been deeply imbricated in the constitution, transformations, flows, and blockages of cities. These corporeal and bodily processes take place across scales — from individual bodies to collective bodies of bodies, however contingently (or not) these are constituted.

Thinking about the materials that enter and make up bodies and shape what or how they do (food, water, drugs, air, diseases, other bodily substances), and the materials that exit bodies (shit, sweat, blood, piss, semen, etc.), reveals how processes of provisioning, containing, and managing the transferal of substances into, out of, and across bodies are key to stabilizing and securing them, and in turn to constituting security and certainty in the city. Individual and collective bodies are intertwined with the transforming and expanding body of the city through these processes, which like everything else in Nairobi are rarely uniform and often highly exclusionary, inequitable, and differentiated/ing. Entangled with such inflows and outflows of corporeal substances and materials are bodily practices, gestures, and performances (walking, dancing, marching), often entangled with artifacts, adornments, and technologies (clothes/uniforms, weapons, makeup, cars). Bodies are constituted through practices, technologies, and things, interwoven with the in/outflows of materials and the changing geographies of the city.

The contributions assembled in this chapter are organized into four sections in order to engage with these questions. The first section, “Corporealities and Material Flows,” includes two pieces by Joost Fontein exploring water and cholera in Mathare, and Kiamaiko’s goat market. The second section, “Col-

lective Bodies of Movement, Protest and Exclusion,” includes two photographic essays by Annie Pfingst and Craig Halliday (with some images contributed by Al-Amin Mutunga): Pfingst examines the forced relocation, dispossession, and detention of thousands of people from Mathare by Operation Anvil during the “Emergency” period of the late colonial period in the 1950s; Halliday deals with protests mobilized by civil society activists in 2017 against extrajudicial killings by the police. The third section, “Making Selves: Precarity, Gender and Performance,” includes contributions by Doseline Kiguru, Naomi van Stapele, Tessa Diphorn, and Peter Lockwood, who explore Nairobi bodies and corporealities through lenses of performance, precarity, violence, gender, and sexuality. If all of these contributions show, in diverse ways, how bodily performances, individual and collective, are key to processes of making (or denying) secure bodies and certain livable lives, then the two interventions in the fourth section, which examine the production of dead “thuggish” bodies (Francesco Colona) and the funeral of a prominent Nairobi man brought home to Meru for burial (Mark Lamont), focus attention on how material, performative, and semantic processes of death are also caught up in the constant becoming of the city.

Chapter 3: Making Lives

In a moment defined by rising desires for prosperity, for middle-class lifestyles and their material trappings, this chapter explores the experiences and narratives of Kenyans as they attempt to make better lives in the postcolonial city, the constraints they face, and the opportunities they carve out. Recent anthropological and African Studies scholarship has sought to emphasize the short-term temporalities that characterize life in the city, the survivalist modes of “hustling” that involve thinking “only for tomorrow,” but this chapter emphasizes the role of aspiration in directing long-term aspirational projects, and the work Kenyans do to navigate modes of uncertainty, insecurity, and outright violence that attack these projects of life-making. This chapter draws attention to the economic dimensions of (in)security,

and the mediation of contingency with recourse to narratives of success among Kenyans who “hustle” for piecemeal wages in the informal economy (Peter Lockwood) and the networks of solidarity that Kenyans create in savings cooperatives (Mario Schmidt), but it also remarks upon the way the city’s racialized geographies shape such practices of making lives, creating islands of whiteness in the city (Joshua Doble). The chapter also explores the flip side of making lives — the politics of death that pervades Nairobi’s informal settlements, and the extrajudicial killings that stop young lives in their tracks (Wangui Kimari). Kimari’s contribution is a stark reminder of the state-driven violence that continues to characterize life on the margins of postcolonial Nairobi: for young men, making life is foreclosed by their ongoing criminalization. With Doseline Kiguru’s story “Sikuku,” the chapter concludes and turns once more to the capacity of the city to surprise, its tendency to generate strange and intoxicating encounters.

Chapter 4: Regulating Relationships

Next, the focus shifts to the ways in which institutions, in their diverse shapes and contours, govern, order, and regulate the interactions, relationships, and daily lives of Nairobians. The contributions curated in this chapter explore how institutions determine access to a variety of political, economic, and social resources, and thereby shape, frame, and steer experiences of security and certainty. Through their role in governing and ordering, institutions bring together and structure dimensions of social life and set rules, frameworks, and systems in play in which practices and performances are enacted, permitted, and constrained. Through this ordering, institutions simultaneously divide and unite people and regulate various relationships. Essentially, institutions, in their complex forms, regulate a range of relationships, and this chapter attempts to show how this occurs in a myriad of ways. By drawing from qualitative (and often ethnographic) research, it shows and discusses the narratives of young men intimidated by police officers (Pete Lockwood), bureaucrats (Tessa Diphorn), political parties (Gabri-

elle Lynch), private security companies (Jean-Baptiste Lanne), trusts and associations (Craig Halliday), trade unions (Meghan Ference), gangs (Naomi van Stapele), and NGOs (Beppe Karlsson and Naomi van Stapele). With two visual contributions added by Dennis Muraguri and Gado, this chapter sketches the ways in which authority and power are exercised and how relationships are regulated in relation to matters of security and uncertainty in Nairobi.

Epilogue: Recursive Becomings

Reflecting the necessarily open-ended character of a book with “becoming” in its title, in the epilogue we consider what Nairobi Becoming now looks like from the vantage point of 2022. Covid-19 and other happenings have generated new terrains and dispositions of security, uncertainty, and contingency, while also recursively churning up much older stories about this city on the edge. We reflect upon some of the key issues threaded through the four main chapters, and entangled across their diverse contributions, and consider how our experiment in collaborative intellectual engagement has also acted as one more intervention into the work in progress that is Nairobi.

Nairobi-scapes

Curated by Constance Smith

At first glance, “security” nearly always appears as a geographical proposition. Control over space, and movement through it, is crucial to security in its most conventional guise. It is apparent, for example, in widely discussed (and criticized) techniques to restrict mobility, enhance surveillance, and construct new borders, most obviously since 9/11 and the “war on terror” (Maguire and Low 2019). But this geographical dimension to security is not a just a feature of global events since 2001, when security became the justification for both a litany of militarized misadventures and dramatically increased scrutiny of daily life. As Michael Foucault and many others have examined, from the panopticon and the prison to racial segregation and antisocial architecture, technologies of security are experienced in spatial registers (Davis 1990; Robinson 1998; Browne 2015; Foucault 2019). In Nairobi, the architectures, techniques, human and financial resources, and apparatus devoted to “security urbanism” in the city have a long and problematic history. Rooted in colonial urban design and the use of urban space as a means to regulate and control, security is literally built into the city’s urban form (Otiso 2009; see also Smith 2015, 2019; Glück 2017).

Geographies of security also encompass protection from apparently nonhuman others — disaster and disease, for example. Flooding and flood prevention are nodes of considerable activity in Nairobi, often framed as a “natural” risk to secure lives in the city. It is well known that Nairobi has a perennial problem with flooding. Every year during both the short rains (November–December) and the long rains (March–May), deluges bring the city to a standstill. There are surges in waterborne diseases, such as typhoid and cholera, and homes, bridges, roads, and sometimes lives are washed away. Such disasters are of course far from natural: they are intensified by economic differentiation, the management of infrastructure and resources, and related spatial politics that privilege certain ways of being in the city while neglecting others. Poor sewerage and drainage, illegal building in river zones, haphazard planning, and corrupt and inefficient state regulation unable to keep up with the city’s formidable pace of construction all make Nairobi’s issues with flooding far from a natural security concern. Equally important is Nairobi’s topography and how this coalesces with climatic events in relation to the social, racial, and class divisions of the city. The higher, steeper lands to the west, which are dominated by wealthier demographics, suffer far less from flooding than the lower, flatter, poorer, and industrial areas to the east.¹ This entanglement of topography, climate, and social differentiation has its roots in colonial segregatory urban planning that designated the breezy, higher elevations for European settlement, areas deemed to be healthier, safer, and less prone to malarial mosquitoes. The current spatialization of flood risk, and the associated uncertainties it provokes, is just one example of how securitized histories endure deeply and problematically into the present.

This chapter considers some of the spatialized dimensions of security in Nairobi and how these have become enfolded into the landscape, marking the city with enduring traces. We

1 For a case study mapping how this plays out in practice, in action, see Taylor 2016. See also *Nation* 2016.

consider too the reverberations of security interventions: the contingent assemblages and domino effects that reshape urban geographies—and urban lives—as different spatial, political, and temporal registers become entwined. In relation to the exclusionary politics of security, we see how methods to impose order on urban territories have cumulative and interlocking effects, where security in one domain turns out to increase the insecurity of others, most often those who are already marginalized. The violence and debris of such interventions can reverberate powerfully across space and time (Stoler 2016). Most notorious in Kenya, but by no means the only example, was the brutal reordering of rural and urban landscapes that took place as part of British colonial attempts to quell the Kenya Land and Freedom Army, known as Mau Mau. The state of emergency declared by Governor Evelyn Baring in 1952 saw the militarization and securitization of Nairobi, including the creation of camps, new regimes of surveillance, and the forced deportation of certain categories of Nairobi residents based on their ethnicity (Throup 1992; Elkins 2005). In this chapter, Annie Pfingst draws on archival sources to evoke and reflect on these “emergency landscapes” and the enduring scars that carceral geographies generate. We see how regimes to secure colonial order introduced violent uncertainties and structural exclusions that drastically reshaped communities and neighborhoods.

In more recent decades, security has continued to underlie many interventions into Nairobi’s geography, whether overtly or more insidiously. Insecurity, then, is not necessarily about lack—that is, an absence of measures to order, contain, or secure—but can be provoked by effective and extensive measures themselves. Though in some ways obvious, this is important because much work on risks and insecurities in African cities often attributes insecurity to an absence of effective governance, systems, or urban planning (IFRC 2010; Satterthwaite 2011). We should be wary, then, of the way in which apparently straightforward categories of risk, such as urban disorder, disease, or poor-quality housing, can be used against the very

communities they are purported to assist. Security is in this way always political — along with the contingencies and uncertainties in which it is embedded.

Several contributions here consider how urban planning and development — and their purported attempts to secure mobility, land, or housing — can remap insecurities and create new forms of spatial violence and lived uncertainty. These interventions have accumulated in complex ways, creating a meshed material landscape of insecurity. Reflecting on a recent spate of collapsed buildings, Joost Fontein and Constance Smith unpick some of the ways in which diverse kinds of risk and uncertainty have become embedded in the fabric of the city. When buildings fall, not only are these terrifying risks actualized, but the murky political economy that enables such landscapes is also made visible (Smith 2020). Two paintings from Elias Mung'ora's *Footprints* series explore how not only buildings but other kinds of human occupation leave residues that act like footprints in the sand. Here we see how urban landscape is generated through accumulated traces. Ephemeral residues of precarious lives speak to the insecurity of presence and settlement in Nairobi, made more uncertain as the city grows. Nairobi's recent construction boom, and the continuing inadequacy of services, such as sewerage and waste management, have generated other kinds of trace and detritus that have seeped into the watery geography of the city. This underlies James Muriuki's explorations of Nairobi River. Taking water samples from three sites along the river, Muriuki traced how water quality changes character across the city along a vital urban tributary, but one also made fundamentally insecure through contamination, diversion, and effluence.

Large infrastructure projects have mushroomed in Nairobi in recent decades, and the hubris of these schemes has often served to increase uncertainty and insecurity for many, undermining urban spatial justice (Manji 2015). Peris Jones considers the politics of the “Missing Links” road project, routed to go through the settlement of Mathare, and how it tipped precarious livelihood strategies over the edge even while ostensibly promis-

ing to bring “development” and economic benefit. But we also see how within such heightened insecurity there can be room for opportunity. Making a life in Nairobi is in part about seeking room to maneuver within even the tiniest spaces, and contingent possibilities can stem from conditions of insecurity, as new trajectories open up.

Inevitably, though, it is those who wield the most influence who have the advantage, particularly when it comes to land. As Fontein shows, the politics of land and disputes over tenure and title are foundational to understanding not only Nairobi’s geography but the unstable terrain of everyday life. The case of a land grab at Langata Primary School in 2015, a controversy that quickly escalated into protests and disproportionate police intervention, highlighted how public amenities are at risk of illegal encroachment, and how security incidents can cascade outward as vested interests attempt to shore up their claims through corrupt and sometimes violent accumulation. Attempts to secure Nairobi’s natural resources, such as forests and green space, are also a part of this story. Teresa Mbatia and Beppe Karlsson examine the securitization of Africa’s largest urban forest, Karura, located within the urban territory of Nairobi. Their analysis of Karura’s perimeter fence reveals how materialities of enclosure and conservation can enact other kinds of exclusion and uncertainty. Collectively, these diverse cases reveal not only how (in)security is embedded in—and constitutive of—Nairobi’s urban landscape, but how insecurity and uncertainty accumulate over time, generating contingent and unpredictable trajectories.

* * *

Emergency Landscapes: Nairobi under Colonial Rule (Annie Pfingst)

On April 24, 1954, the British Colonial Administration threw military cordons around east Nairobi, specifically the Eastlands

communities of Pumwani, Bahati, and Kariokor. The action, codenamed Operation Anvil, was authorized under the provisions of the state of emergency promulgated in October 1952 to secure public safety, the defense of the territory, the maintenance of public order, and the suppression of mutiny, rebellion, and riot in the face of what the colonial regime framed as the disorder and lawlessness of Kenyan Mau Mau rebellion.²

The District Commissioner's Office, Thika, issued the following recommendation for the geographical boundaries of the cordon within Nairobi:

Recommendation that the Anvil Special Legislation scheduled:

a) area bounded as follows:

Commencing at the intersection of the Kamiti River with the main road Nairobi/Thika, thence by the Kamiti River downstream in a generally south easterly and easterly direction to its junction with the Nairobi River, thence by the Nairobi River upstream in a generally south westerly and westerly direction to its junction with the Kiambu Administrative District, thence by the Thika/Kiambu District boundaries in a generally northern direction to the starting point.

b) Thika Township.³

Nairobi was considered a center of resistance and agitation against colonial rule—an overcrowded urban space of unemployment and lawlessness, of strikes, boycotts, trade unions, and communism—unruly, criminal, and disloyal—subject to search and cordon operations, racial segregation, expulsions and prohibitions, and collective punishment (Anderson 2005, 193–94). By early May 1954, under the Emergency Control of

2 The National Archives (TNA) TNA CO 822/443, Proclamation of State of Emergency in Kenya, 1952.

3 TNA FCO 141/5698, District Commissioner's Office Thika to Joint Anvil Area Commanders, April 5, 1954.

Nairobi (Evacuation Order) 1954, Operation Anvil “picked up” around 30,000 Kikuyu, Embu, and Meru men from east Nairobi for “examination” — just over half from the African Locations, the rest from the peri-urban and industrial areas, from the European and Asian residential areas, and from Kiambu District.⁴ Of those detained, 19,000 were sent for further screening⁵ to the hastily constructed tent and wire “Reception Centre” at Langata in the west of the city, to the holding and transit camps at Mackinnon Road, Manyani, Langata, Gilgil, Thika, and Athi River, and for detention to the works camps of Manda Island and Takwa; 2,150 women with 4,000 children were repatriated to the districts of the Central Province; furthermore, 1,050 women with 2,000 children were repatriated to the reserves at their own request.⁶

Over a period of a month, following previous evacuations, the colonial violence of military operations reconfigured the city: tenancies were terminated on grounds of unpaid rent or absence,⁷ those not in employment were denied access to housing, and leases on buildings and businesses were terminated. Operation Anvil, extended to other parts of the city, including Eastleigh, was seen to succeed in “cleaning” Nairobi, reducing the Kikuyu population and disrupting the organization of resistance, thereby restoring, in colonial terms, the rule of law, preserving the security of the city, and maintaining the queen’s peace in the colony.⁸

As the colonial state of emergency assembled and reassembled landscapes of interrogation, removal, and detention, it inscribed spatial divisions disrupting and determining the

4 TNA FCO 141/6573, to Secretary of State for the Colonies from Acting Governor, May 11, 1954.

5 TNA DO 35/5352, Inward Telegram to Secretary of State for the Colonies from Acting Governor Kenya, no.504, May 9, 1954.

6 TNA CO 822/796, to the Secretary of State for the Colonies from Kenya (Acting Governor), May 9, 1954.

7 TNA FCO 141/5698, District Commissioners Office to Joint Anvil Area Commanders, May 26, 1954.

8 TNA CO 822/796, outline plan by joint commanders para. 31, Detention on a community basis, p. 21/22.

ethnic, trading, and residential landscapes of Nairobi. Geographies of resistance were overlaid by colonial geographies of surveillance and punishment, separation, and control. Operation Anvil encapsulated the violence of colonial territoriality and the racialized frame of the British settler colonial project over Kenya. In transferring and transporting those removed from Nairobi, the Emergency administration mapped the carceral geography from Nairobi across Kenya to the north and west, and east to the coastal region.

* * *

Nairobi's colonial history of controlling urban risk through spatialized mechanisms, including urban planning, emergency measures, and segregated infrastructural allocation, has left its mark on Nairobi, creating residues that continue to modulate the texture and character of the city. In more recent years, Nairobi's construction boom, a rapidly growing population, and the continuing inadequacy of infrastructures, including sewerage and waste management, have generated other kinds of offensive residue that now run deep into the city geography. James Muriuki has explored the character and effects of some of these through his encounters with Nairobi River. Originally consisting of an audio installation and three photos, this work took water samples from three sites along the river, alongside three audio recordings made 5 cm below the surface. The river is no longer a secure water source for the city: notoriously polluted, it has become a repository for building waste, human effluence, and much besides. Muriuki set out to explore whether, as the water quality of the river changes, it also modulates the water's sound.

* * *

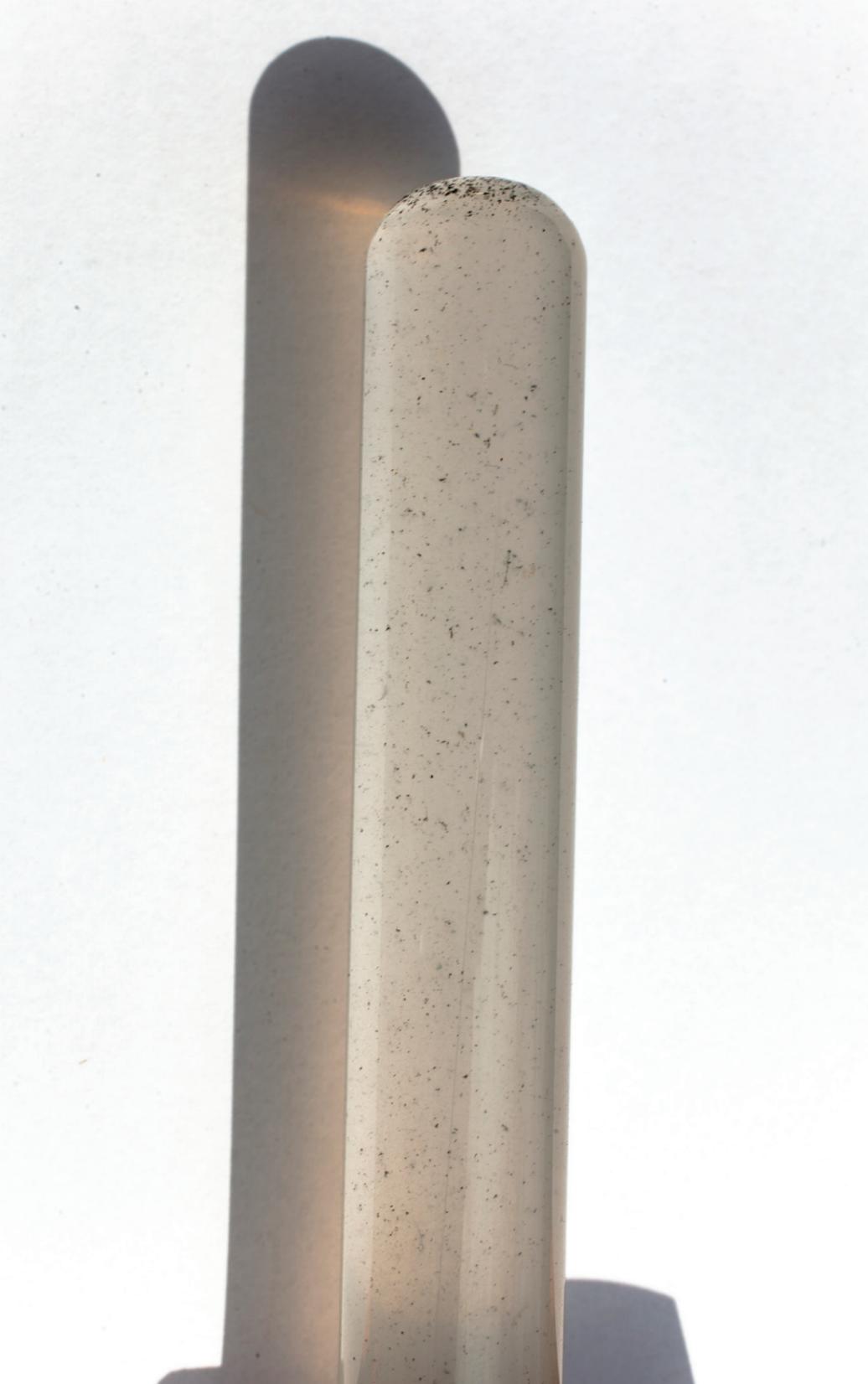
Untitled (James Muriuki)

Fig. 1. James Muriuki, *Untitled 1*, 2017, 120 × 80 cm.

Fig. 2. James Muriuki, *Untitled 2*, 2017, 120 × 80 cm.

Fig. 3. James Muriuki, *Untitled 3*, 2017, 120 × 80 cm.







Nairobi's watery geography is constitutive of (in)security in the city in diverse ways, from the visceral effects of flooding, drainage, and pollution to the challenges of accessing drinking water in a city where potable water is a scarce resource and subject to intense political maneuverings and abuses of power (MSJC 2018; Mwau 2013). Water is thus part of Nairobi's landscape insecurity, and it also interconnects with other forms of risk and uncertainty, from threats of disease to personal safety and access to land. In this way, diverse risks accumulate and materialize within the city's substance in powerful ways, and are distributed and intensified by differentiations in wealth, power, and resource. This has recently been made tragically clear in a series of building collapses that has literally shaken Nairobi's foundations.

* * *

Risk Accumulation and Fragile Architectures (Joost Fontein and Constance Smith)

Fear of violence and robbery has long been a preoccupation among Nairobi's wealthier and expat communities, as much today as in the colonial past, but lived experience of insecurity encompasses a much wider range of threats and contingencies, particularly for those outside of the exclusive areas of the city. This is not to suggest that for Nairobi's poorer communities — which make up the vast majority of city residents — threats from violence and robbery are uncommon. Far from it, in fact, for without the benefit of private security guards, architectures, and technologies, and often facing the extrajudicial actions of a hostile police force, the threats posed by violence are an everyday reality (Jones et al. 2017). Such anxieties are also entangled with a wide range of concerns and insecurities that are not necessarily experienced as discrete events, but that accumulate in significant ways, opening up important questions of scale and temporality. City life can expose residents to a multitude of hazards, insecurities, and risks, including everything from disasters

arising from extreme weather events, conflict, and violence, to a spectrum of infectious and parasitic diseases, “everyday” risks to personal safety such as accidents and fires, and threats to land tenure, property, education, or livelihoods. Recent work in the field of disaster risk reduction (DRR) is now investigating the complex ways in which a whole spectrum of risks can accumulate, and the impossibility of separating environmental events from sociopolitical factors. In this mode, disasters are regarded as

“un-natural” events that are (re)produced and intensified by the process of risk accumulation and its underlying economic (e.g., urbanization of poverty), social (e.g., socio-spatial fragmentation), political (e.g., limited democratization and decentralization), institutional (e.g., limited institutional capacity) and fiscal (e.g., investments in buildings and infrastructure in hazard-prone areas) dimensions. (Adelekan et al. 2015, 37)

Significantly, evidence suggests that the cumulative effects of everyday hazards and smaller events are actually greater than those resulting from supposedly “serious” disasters—that is, events that meet official criteria for being defined as a disaster (Bull-Kamanga et al. 2003; UNISDR 2013).

Such research is important for our exploration of the varied terrain of security and uncertainty in Nairobi because, although DRR studies can often take a rather normative approach to the management of risk (for example, assuming that urban governance will impartially seek to mitigate risk, rather than opening up new forms of insecurity, as further explored below), it nevertheless clearly highlights the distribution of urban insecurities, and how these can be unevenly experienced among different urban communities (Pelling 2003). In this way, insecurity (or risk, or uncertainty) is not a static category, but contingent, shifting, and emerging in relation to a whole range of dynamics. Insecurity can be compounded by gender and class, or security of tenure, distinctions that also affect the terms of engagement

with different forms of security provision (Jones and Kimari 2019). It is well established, however, that poorer neighborhoods are disproportionately affected by insecurity of all sorts (Hardoy et al. 2013). This is in part because insecurities and risks can accumulate at a greater rate and scale with little in the way of mitigation.

As the value of land increases even in Nairobi's informal settlements, so the commercial—if unauthorized—rental property market has started to build upward: corrugated-iron, single-story structures are being replaced with multistory tenement blocks built with little regard for regulations and planning. The result is extremely high-density vertical neighborhoods of structurally precarious architecture, in areas that were already lacking in basic services, such as running water, sewerage, or adequate electricity (Huchzermeyer 2008). Not only has this intensified health and fire risks and worsened air quality, but such neighborhoods are fundamentally unstable: the city has been rocked by a spate of building collapses across the last decade, as inadequate foundations, inappropriate building materials, regulatory inadequacy, and an illicit construction industry converge in a particularly aggressive form of residential capitalism (Smith 2020). These insecurities are entrenched and compounded by larger structural and political concerns. In Nairobi as in many African cities, planning policies and building regulations are antipoor in the sense that they have the effect of excluding low-income groups from security of tenure, quality housing, or access to services (Watson 2009), while the property sector is marked by a “revolving door” between politics and business, implicating politicians in land acquisitions, procurement, contracting, and the extraction of profit (Pitcher 2017). For the tenants of these precarious buildings, risk accumulation is therefore an all-too-real aspect of daily life, one that is managed by hundreds of thousands of Nairobians daily, but that is exposed to wider public scrutiny when a tower block collapses.

On April 29, 2016, a seven-story building collapsed in the Nairobi neighborhood of Huruma, in the east of the city. Fifty-one people were killed in the tragedy and 140 people were res-

cued alive from the rubble in the twelve-day rescue operation that followed. Media reports suggested that in defiance of official regulations, the building had been constructed too close to Mathare River, which compromised its foundations, and sub-standard building techniques and poor-quality concrete had further undermined the structural integrity of the building (Mutambo 2016). This tragedy received much local and international attention, provoking a quick governmental response both during the rescue operation itself and afterward. In an unusually fast response from the government, the interagency National Disaster Management Unit was mobilized, and a host of politicians and other dignitaries visited the site, along with several international and local NGOs. Many civilian well-wishers assisted in the rescue or made donations of food and supplies to assist the many families made homeless by the disaster. The day after the collapse, President Uhuru Kenyatta visited and immediately ordered the arrest of the building's owners (Agutu 2016). Amid a fervor of complaints about the poor regulation of construction across the city, and suggestions of corruption and graft in official regulating bodies, the Board of Registration of Architects and Quantity Surveyors distanced itself from the tragic event. The Board claimed “technicians” were “at fault as they play a key role in the construction of residential flats,” and added that “the organization keenly monitors the practices of registered members” and “none of our members was involved with the Huruma building” (quoted in Vidija 2016).

For their part, officials from both the National Construction Board and Nairobi County government quickly claimed that the collapsed building—along with several others in its immediate vicinity—had been condemned for not complying with building regulations, but the order to demolish had been ignored or not followed up. Officials blamed “greedy rogue developers cashing in on the city’s acute housing shortage” for “cutting safety corners to maximize profits, corrupting government officials and endangering thousands of innocent lives,” but many Nairobians blamed corruption at local, county, and central government levels (Gathara 2016). Media censure was

also leveled at unscrupulous landlords, the city's galloping land market (fueled, some claim, by illicit money laundering), and even tribalism, particularly in the context of national elections the following year (see, for example, Agutu 2016; Gathara 2016). Online reactions also evoked a very Nairobi brand of dry cynicism, such as "Kumuseno," who commented, "Why are they wasting time blaming each other when they know that nobody shall ever be held liable for the deaths? JUST BLAME THE TENANTS AND LET'S MOVE ON TO THE NEXT DISASTER!" (commenting under Vidija 2016).

President Kenyatta ordered a survey of at-risk buildings, and in the audit that followed, more than 200 buildings across Nairobi were condemned and marked for demolition, including 58 in the Huruma area (*Ebru News* 2016). Some of these condemned high-rise residential buildings were evacuated, and demolitions began. Nevertheless, in the months that followed, several more buildings collapsed, including one immediately next to the collapsed building in Huruma, which had fortunately already been evacuated. But many demolition orders were delayed by court proceedings, and by the fact that residents, with nowhere else to go, were often reluctant to leave condemned properties, despite repeated warnings by officials. Such delays and the continuing failure to comply with building regulations meant that since April 2016, building collapses have continued, causing many more deaths and devastating effects on local neighborhoods. In June 2017, in the wake of another collapse, Nairobi governor Evans Kidero stated that "the Kenyan capital had at least 30,000 to 40,000 buildings constructed without approval and at risk of failure," while the National Construction Authority estimated that 58 percent of buildings in Nairobi were unfit for habitation (*New York Times* 2017). Building collapses often provoke community responses, such as in Embakasi in June 2017 when angry residents protested the slow pace of rescue operations. Instead of reforms or restitution, however, the protests were forcibly dispersed by police using tear gas. More often than not, and echoing Kumuseno's comments two years earlier, tenants are blamed by officials for refusing to evacuate buildings marked for demo-

lition, despite the fact that, being in the middle of a housing shortage, many have nowhere else to go. Nairobi's collapses, and the wider politics in which they are enmeshed, make visible not only the fundamental insecurity of housing in the city but show how risk accumulates in the very fabric of the city itself, undermining the foundations of everyday life.

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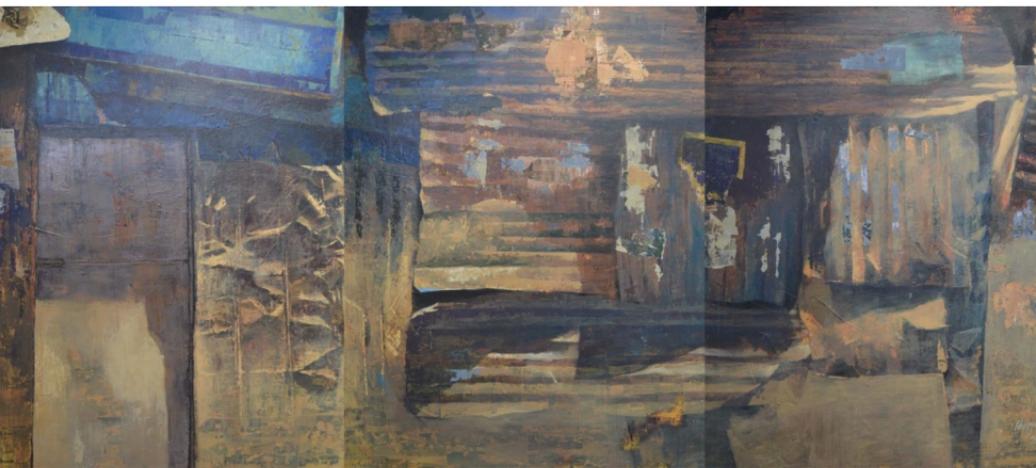
The Huruma collapse and its associated politics point not only to spatial and structural insecurity in Nairobi but also to temporal uncertainty. A seemingly solid concrete tower block may be drastically transient, but, as Smith and Fontein have just shown above, its rubble can be the site for emergent kinds of politics and action. Even when they fail, buildings can be affective, their remains becoming enfolded into the remaking of the city. The evocative paintings of Elias Mung'ora explore how all kinds of human action leave traces behind them, accumulated layers that generate a kind of sedimented history. These marks represent "footprints" in the city, including pasted posters of walls, scratches, dents, and layers of cheap construction materials, such as tarpaulin and mabati (corrugated iron). The red "X" is a familiar mark across Nairobi, denoting a structure that has been designated by city authorities as illegal and marked for demolition. These spaces nevertheless continue to function, at least for the time being, despite the uncertainty they face.

* * *

Footprints (Elias Mung'ora)

Fig. 4. Elias Mung'ora, *Footprints 1*, 2017, mixed media on canvas.

Fig. 5. Elias Mung'ora, *Footprints 2*, 2017, mixed media on canvas.





Hotel

Hotel

NOC

If transient structures and building collapses illustrate some of the material politics of uncertain landscapes in the city, then the geography of security in Nairobi is also about what makes it possible for life to exist and to thrive. This can stretch from food security and safe accommodation to livelihood possibilities, well-being, and the realization of desired futures. Through this broader lens, the differentiating dimensions of security discourses, practices, and mechanisms take on new forms and guises. Questions of geography appear different too. The complex interplay of different strategies for dealing with risk and insecurity, and how these might relate to the challenges of self-making and belonging, are part and parcel of making everyday life possible. Efforts to produce certainty and stability for some can cause new insecurities to reverberate for others. Meanwhile, the temporal politics and visions for Nairobi's future intersect in powerful ways with endurances from the city's past. Spectacular skylines and satellite cities are conjured in digital renderings of Nairobi as a "world-class" city, all the while intensifying uncertainty for those who must endeavor to make life work in its shadow.

* * *

Urban Visions (Peris Jones and Constance Smith)

In the seductive art and science of building the "good" city of tomorrow, there is the inconvenience of encountering the actually existing or "real" city of today. In 2007, the Kenyan government launched a series of infrastructure-led megaprojects under the umbrella of "Vision 2030," a development blueprint intended to secure the future prosperity of the country. Nested within this larger vision is "Nairobi Metro 2030," a strategy that promises to reinvent Nairobi as a "world-class" city and project it on to a global stage (Smith 2017). Notable for its return to elitist, colonial visions of metropolitan development, Vision 2030 imagines a tabula rasa for a new Nairobi, a city of gleaming high-rises and unencumbered with the challenges of Nairobi's current urban

fabric (Moser 2015). Amidst glossy pictures of pristine roads, a pristine couple, and a pristine white house, there is a quote from Walt Disney: “It’s kind of fun to do the impossible” (Government of Kenya 2008, 46). Albeit, of course, hard to deny, that being the point, it is the residents of the here-and-now city who must meanwhile eke out an existence and seek a future against the insecurities of the everyday. It is these messy spatialities and complex dynamics of uncertainty and aspiration, of what security means and does in everyday life and how one might seek to actualize it, that are often sidelined in state-led interventions to secure the city.

In their recent work on “new urban worlds” in Africa and Asia, Pieterse and Simone (2017) have emphasized how uncertainty can itself constitute an urban resource, offering new opportunities and enabling new constellations of thought and action (see also Smith 2019, intro.). Whether in its expanding peri-urban neighborhoods, marginalized settlements, or post-colonial suburbs, Nairobi is experiencing enormous transformations in its built environment, along with enhanced possibilities for consumption, aspiration, and desire (Lockwood 2020a). Simultaneously, the urban majority are constantly striving to put together some workable form of income and habitation that is rarely fixed in terms of practices, locales, or organizational forms. The urban and infrastructural fabric is therefore one of the key battlegrounds for securing one’s future, for finding possibility and building new horizons. It is a battle because it sets the seductive personal and collective aspirational power of transformation against the uneven costs and benefits experienced by residents. It is a battleground because the conflict is grounded within the microgeographies of power and influence in urban space. When these worlds collide, when development is “delivered,” it may come as little surprise, therefore, that it can hurt some more than others. The city is fitted for the affluent minority: roughly 60 percent of Nairobi’s population occupies just 6 percent of the land (Urban Pathways 2019). Such communities are still not recognized as an equal and integral component of the urban landscape. Instead, slum “imaginar-

ies” (Roy 2011) powerfully serve to render them therefore as spaces of interest—whether for global capital (Harvey 2008) or other national or local interventions, such as profiteering or investment (Pitcher 2017). Within such imaginaries there is little room for the political agency of slum dwellers. Things are presumed to be doable to slums, with little account taken for life on the ground.

But, as Huchzermeyer (2008) reminds us, there is no easy reductionist outsider/insider binary at play. Residents of informal neighborhoods may often be subject to coercion, violence, or eviction, as apparatuses of corporate and political elites exert their control over urban spaces and materials, but urban majorities are not necessarily unified against them. These are also spaces in which experimentation and strategies for claiming and living in the city take shape. That is, even within such neighborhoods, all kinds of competing claims and reconfigurations take shape. Such claims are, in essence, about seeking security: security for life, livelihoods, and a future within opaque and informal hierarchies of power, resources, and voice.

In this way, land, housing, services, and justice are not only unequally accessible to urban residents but are subject to hijacking at ground level by local affiliations, gangs, and vested interests (Jones and Kimari 2019). These may also be in collusion with formal authorities or seek shortcuts to avoid addressing certain areas or issues. Such occlusions and entanglements need not be criminal in nature. As they seek urban vantage points, Nairobians generate a multitude of interconnections, creative acts that affect one another, but that are not all orchestrated in the same direction or purpose. Over many years, residents have become economic beneficiaries by controlling services and resources: electricity, water, land, security, illicit alcohol production, drugs, education, and, not least, shack farming and lucrative earnings from rent. These assets have created complicated webs of vested interests in which powerful individuals, land cartels, gangs, churches, and others become, in the local idiom, the “big fish” eating up the little fish. As one resident in the informal settlement of Mathare shared: “There are owners of the ghetto;

you don't want to mess with them. A single call from him causes chaos. Even if we were born here, we are not the owners; we are just stepping on their soil. The big bosses control the illicit brew, and even own the valuable businesses. We are just small fish in the big pond" ("Gathure," in Jones and Kimari 2019).

But many residents — even the “little fish” — are implicated in these complicated micropolitics of asset accumulation and livelihoods: whether acting as brokers/intermediaries, as “goons” (hired muscle), or especially in striving desperately to get some of these assets to lessen insecurity. Lifelong residents of informal settlements, who were once called “squatters,” and sometimes still are, can also gain valuable income from building and renting out *mabati* structures. Maintaining these advantages is often at the cost of any civic or public good. There is a constantly shifting slum-scape: one day a new ablution block built to service thousands of people and constructed through fundraising might be pulled down for someone else's private business interests; on another, new road construction means kiosks have to be relocated, or a land grab leads to the dislocation of a marketplace upon which hundreds depended for a living based on the small markup in reselling vegetables. Thus, although there is a chronic distortion in the distribution of land and housing, further maneuvering is possible. Precarity and threat of eviction underlie day-to-day strategies, but others may benefit from such dispossession.

* * *

The gleaming skylines of Vision 2030 seem to reimagine Nairobi from ground zero, as though extant communities, histories, and materialities were absent. The dialectic of the future city and the existing city and whose security is lost or gained in the process of change mobilizes contradictory tensions. This gap between current realities and assumed possibilities of the city *to be* shape the scope and nature of planned change, but also the form and direction of its interventions, which rarely end up following their preconceived course. This is vividly illustrated by Nairobi's

current predilection for transport infrastructure projects, such as the case of the “missing links” road in the low-income neighborhood of Mathare.

* * *

Building the City and Bending a Road (Peris Jones)

Although few of the spectacular, digitally rendered skylines of Vision 2030 have actually materialized, nevertheless this master planning has provided the impetus for major infrastructural interventions, particularly the construction of new highways. In official literature, this is explained through emphasis on mobility—the alleviation of Nairobi’s serious problem with traffic jams and improved road safety. Such infrastructural emphasis has been a historical feature of Nairobi’s urban planning, but the city has long been marked by lopsided provision of trunk roads and infrastructure skewed toward wealthier areas (Hake 1977). After some initial investment in the postindependence era, by the 1980s and ’90s citywide physical conditions deteriorated badly (Hornsby 2013). Rapid urbanization has always accentuated the inadequacy of services, and the commensurate road and transport structure required to cope. Infrastructural proposals for new highways also often promise more aspirational forms of mobility too, imagining new forms of modernity and arrival on a global stage (Harvey and Knox 2015). In the context of Nairobi’s infamous traffic jams, arguments for new infrastructure therefore surely sound compelling. Making and remaking the city is imbued with an impetus to secure infrastructure and effective transport described as integral to “mobility” and “connectivity,” to open up the city, and ultimately to achieve “world-class” status. This is made explicit in the city’s Nairobi Integrated Urban Plan (NIUPLAN), which links improved transportation infrastructure with a more secure socioeconomic future. Identified as a key means of delivering the “world-class” city, transportation is to be “an enabler to building a robust, internationally competitive, dynamic, and inclusive economy” (NCC 2014).

Traffic decongestion sounds like a win-win, wasting less of everyone's time and generating economic growth. There are also many good reasons for improving safety and security associated with transport in Nairobi, not least because Kenya has one of the highest rates of road traffic deaths in the world, at nearly 30 per 100,000, the majority of which occur in Nairobi County (Cummings and Obwocha 2018). It is therefore difficult to argue against better road infrastructure. And yet, around 50 percent of all journeys in Nairobi are made on foot, and only 13 percent of Nairobi residents use a car to get to work (Cummings and Obwocha 2018, 11). Upon closer inspection, the gap between claims of collective benefits and the reality is seen most alarmingly in statistics showing that in Nairobi, most traffic fatalities — a shocking 70 percent — involve pedestrians, and they are more likely to be killed or maimed along *high-speed roads*, such as Thika highway, than anywhere else in the city (Cummings and Obwocha 2018, 11). When roads are renovated and their width expanded in ways that prioritize the speed and mobility of cars rather than other road users, this does not decrease but increases pedestrian insecurity. For the lowest income — the least likely to have or use a car — this intersects with other aspirations, anxieties, and strategies through which they seek security for their livelihoods, homes, and futures. This is particularly salient to residents of the city's many informal neighborhoods, whose capacity to secure their future is frequently brought up short when their complexities of claims, interests, and ways of getting by collide with large-scale infrastructure projects. This was elucidated by many residents of Mathare during interviews about their experience of a major road-building project:

I miss old Mathare. You can't say you are developing somewhere where you are hurting people. You need to prepare for moving and it must be a fair transaction, otherwise it is not development. The key should be to think about others as human, and feel us, feel me, if it was you being evicted. I don't know any other place [...] I'll say this was our place. It's my home[...] That is what they should consider with Vi-

sion 2030. Take 15,000 KES [...] but where am I going? I've kids, but they [authorities] expect me to move elsewhere. All I want for them to see is that we are human as they are. We want to see a developed Mathare, but they can't have a process where it is hurting us and stigmatizing us. Just because we are slum people, why assume you can give me 15k [as compensation] but then it is ok to send the bulldozers?

(Joyce, former resident of Mlango Kubwa, Mathare)

Let me tell you what's going to happen to Mathare now. It's going to become a small island because of road designs they don't encourage a lot of interaction [...] and the moment you build this road the value of land in Pangani will double. Land prices will go up [...] Kibera is going to finish, and Yaya has to expand [...] and I saw KURA [Kenya Urban Roads Authority] guys on Juja surveying and it will be a dual carriageway or something when Outer Ring Road is finished — so this will be a small island.

(Simon)

In the vision for Nairobi Metro 2030, places such as Mathare are rarely, though nonetheless powerfully, mentioned. If talked about at all, slums are depicted as obstacles to be eliminated, especially if, it is claimed, Nairobi is ever to successfully rebrand itself and renew its image. The quotations above reflect experiences of a recent road construction that collided into a settlement at the far end of Mathare valley, in Mlango Kubwa, part of the EU and African Development Bank-funded Missing Links road project (see EU Delegation to Kenya, n.d.). These links were “designed to fill in the missing parts of Nairobi's road layout — mostly in the east — and ease congestion and improve safety for the city's commuters and pedestrians. Streetlights will be installed, and all the roads will have pavement constructed alongside the highway” (*Nation* 2014). Connected to this, 21 km of footpaths and cycle ways, it was claimed, would be built.

The process of the road's design, planning, and construction was full of deviations, uncertainties, and contradictions,

which gave rise to considerable uncertainty in the lives of local residents. At a 2012 presentation, the minister of transport included a map of the “missing link” roads, and at this point the road through Mlango Kubwa to Thika highway appeared to be straight (Sangira 2012). But in another presentation on June 17, 2012, the director general engineer, Joseph Nkadayo, said the road would come from Maternity Hospital at General Waruinge Street cutting through Muratina Road to join the Thika Superhighway at the Mathare Mental Hospital. This is not a straight route but instead zigzags across the slum. The discrepancy between the two routes suggests an intriguing puzzle about why and how roads can be bent. Some residents claim they knew nothing about the change until 2014, after enumeration of potential evictee claimants had started and the path of road became clearer. Other, more involved, residents were aware that by 2012, there would be a new routing, for which they had their own explanations: “We went to the town hall, but they were influenced. Rich people can buy everything. The road was diverted into poorer areas,” one said.

Residents shared rumors that the reasons for the road’s change, of course, related to Muthaiga Square, a new multi-purpose office, residence, and restaurant complex, allegedly owned by a prominent politician and the construction for which started as the road was being laid out. As the road enters Mlango Kubwa from Juja Road, the width suddenly alters, planned pavements and cycle lanes disappear, and irregularly acquired buildings and land deflect it from its originally intended course. This “low-level” rerouting was made more extreme by the Muthaiga Square development being sited where the planned road should be. The road was instead diverted to the other side of the complex, which meant demolishing even more mabati structures. The complexity of this rerouting is further heightened by strong internal dynamics. Extremely complicated local constellations are in place: the larger structure owners, the chief, local elders, an MP, badly informed residents and co-opted representatives, the Kenyan Urban Roads Authority, and not least, a visit by the president, who said he was bringing development to the slum

via these roads. In addition, other strong local economic interests were also rumored to be associated with a land cartel, which had taken land from occupants in the 1970s and was suspected of desiring the diversion so that it could receive larger compensation claims.

In any case, the bulldozers were coming to flatten *mabati*. On the day of the evictions, as through the whole process, there were diverse experiences, not least depending on how prepared people were. It appears that the “Cats” — the nickname for Caterpillar bulldozers — came at around 4 am, with a large contingent of armed policemen, which seemed to confirm that the planning process had been poor, since people were angry and resisting. After much remonstrating, they started to bulldoze by 5:30 am, quickly making their way down to the river. There, young men threw stones to ward off the Cats, to compel them back to the original line of the road, which would require breaking a wall into a formal structure, likely informally acquired. Stones were met with live rounds and tear gas from the police until resistance was crushed. This, then, was how the route of the road was really decided: through new insecurities of violence, anxiety about housing and the rights to a home at all. One resident, Wanja, had endured a lifetime of insecurity: she had lost a previous shack in fire, had been evicted prior to that, and now in her twilight years faced eviction again. She recalled her residency in this shack from 1982, the year of the birth of one of her granddaughters, and described the events of that morning as follows:

I was woken up at 6 am and that was first time I knew they were coming. They were too fast [...] it just happened. From when I was woken up, and preparing tea, they were already coming. I lost bags and jerry cans. I didn't have time to salvage many materials because they were too quick. And afterwards, some were destroyed, and others took advantage of the chaos. The police shot because of the reaction of the people. People didn't want to move, that's why the police came. Even though those given notice were told, they never

accepted that they had to move, so it took force to get them out. It was a painful experience[...] It was not clear to me what will happen. Then one minute I am making tea and the next minute bulldozers where there. Then it was painful to see my house down.

Another resident, Joyce, saw several structures she owned destroyed, for which she did not receive any compensation. Indeed, the compensation procedure and the participatory process were deeply flawed. But entangled in her financial insecurities were other anxieties about how road projects entrench difference between Nairobians, how they can divide communities — not only physically but socially and morally:

It is painful for me. I try to clear my mind. That love I had for that place was crushed. I didn't let it go. When it hits my head, or the issue of income does, then I wish structures were there [...] it is now only struggle and hustling. It is a process. Because of struggle through my life, even when I had several chamas [informal savings groups], it is now all gone. I hope life will become easier again. We saw Thika [road] built and happy it is but [...] I can't walk on (new) road because nothing for pedestrians, and so I ask myself how will it be? I won't be able to walk freely. It will be a main road and that is something I don't want to think about, I will have to watch my back and to let the car pass, and obey traffic rules; as long as people there won't change much; but now will have to keep watching, whereas I used to stop and chat, there, here [...]

In the end, residents estimated that approximately 300 shacks were pulled down and that more than one thousand residents were evicted as a consequence of the project. In the initial fallout from eviction was the trauma of losing or attempting to recover possessions and materials. Then was the issue of finding a new home. Most left Mathare, but some structure owners are still there, and some tenants moved in with relatives. After the bulldozers came, drains were filled with the excavated soil, resulting

in overflowing sewage. The only public toilet in that immediate vicinity had to be closed for six months because of the road construction, not only extremely inconvenient but posing serious health risks in the cholera season. In addition, for the remaining residents, was the heightened insecurity of having to deal with fast-moving vehicles with no proper reserve between the road and the houses. Pedestrian casualties make the claims of the EU ambassador for improved safety appear illusory. The promise to “open up” the city appears not to be of benefit to most slum dwellers, but rather quite the opposite — it has resulted in new opportunities for the better-placed to exploit the exchange value of land resources, opening up Mathare to new, even bigger fish.

* * *

The Missing Links project highlights how large-scale planning projects can tip precarious livelihood strategies over the edge. We see the intermeshing effects of spatial interventions, and how promises for more secure livelihoods and futures play out in the urban landscape in ways that actually generate heightened insecurities for many. Much of this precarity relates to uncertainty or informality of tenure, and the difficulty of making claims to a secure future where land is weaponized as political and economic resource. In such ways, land-grabbing and insecure tenure are at the heart of many of Nairobi’s insecurity-scapes. In January 2015, a further hostile and very public contest over land occurred, culminating in the tear-gassing of school children by police. This highlighted once again how state security forces are often experienced as a threat to security, and not protection from it.

* * *

Uncertain Plots: Securing Land in the City (Joost Fontein)

On January 19, 2015, pupils of Langata Primary School in the southwest of Nairobi began protesting against a wall that had

been built around the playground of their school by “professional land grabbers” over the preceding Christmas period. Reports suggested that the “land grabbers” were in the employ of a property developer linked to the hotel next door, owned by a very prominent politician (Ombati and Mosoku 2015). The land was being grabbed for the construction of a car park for the hotel, despite the school’s claims that they had owned the playground since the 1970s. The human rights activist Boniface Mwangi, taking part in the protest, told journalists that the developer on whose orders the playground was snatched was a powerful politician. “The governor, the senator, and other government officials are all scared of the politician, they cannot do anything to stop the playground from the being taken,” he explained (Gayle 2015). Few if any reports of the incident referred to the politician by name, but rumors around the city fingered the vice president, William Ruto.⁹ Carrying placards with messages such as “Land grabbing is terror against children” and “Kenya: the land of shameless grabbers,” dozens of children between six and thirteen led protestors who pushed open the metal gates blocking access to the playground, and once inside, toppled part of the wall constructed by the land grabbers. They were met by riot police equipped with batons, dogs, and tear gas. Images and video clips of pupils facing off riot police with runny eyes and spluttering coughs, smashing rocks at the gates and walls, and of three injured children being carried away amidst clouds of tear gas, quickly circulated on social media under the hashtags #OccupyPlayGround and #LangataPrimary, escalating the event as more civilians and activists joined the protest.

As outrage spread, critics quickly condemned the police response as grossly disproportionate, while police on the scene

9 Ruto later admitted he owned shares in the Weston Hotel, which lies next to Langata Primary School, but distanced himself from Airport View Housing Ltd., the company from whom he claimed he and his partners had bought the land. For their part, the directors of Airport View, who were all members of the wealthy Singh family, claimed they were being “unfairly tried in the court of public opinion” amid rumors of an official cover up of the vice president’s involvement (see Kimonye 2015).

explained that they had been deployed to “safeguard property,” claiming that rocks had been thrown at them, and adding that although it was “disputed land,” the protest organizers “should not use the children” (Gayle 2015). These excuses were met with further fury and indignation, as the chairman of the Independent Policing Oversight Authority promised the incident would be investigated because “teargassing children is inexcusable.” Later the Opposition leader Raila Odinga joined the fray, accusing the police of “brutality beyond words” and the developer of “greed beyond description,” adding that “it is difficult to believe that police can actually deploy against primary school children and lob tear gas at them to defend a land grabber” (Gayle 2015).

Land Secretary Charity Ngilu quickly stated that “from what she knows, the land belongs to the school” and the National Land Commission chairman Mohammed Swazuri agreed (*Business Daily* 2015). Nevertheless, Airport View Housing Ltd., the company linked to the Weston Hotel next to the school, asserted its contested claim to the title for the school land, and “moved to court seeking a permanent injunction restraining the Nairobi County government from interfering,” claiming that “the county approved the construction of the perimeter wall in December last year” (*Business Daily* 2015). If this pointed to the complex blame-game that would ensue, then comments from others, including prominent media personality Caroline Mutoko, indicated the class dimensions:

We would never grab school land in Westlands, Lavington, Turi, Brookside, Spring Valley, Peponi, ISK etc. [...] but we are more than happy to do so, in the very places our voters send their children to school. Worse still we don't think twice about teargassing them. I don't know how I will look my housekeeper, our security guards, the supermarket attendant or even the cops in the face today. These are THEIR children we tear-gassed today. I'm embarrassed for all of us. I'm sickened to my very stomach.

(*Kenya Today* 2015a)

Apart from the involvement and injury of children during this incident, the notoriety it very quickly attained had as much to do with the long-running political controversies surrounding land-grabbing in the city, and across Kenya, accusations of which had spiraled in preceding months, both in the city and across the country. Some of these reports referred to alleged regularization of old land grabs that had taken place during the presidency of Jomo Kenyatta, the then-current president's father, but others were more recent. The extensive coverage of the Langata case, locally and internationally, both highlighted and obscured the extent to which land grabs are remarkably common in Nairobi. Because many schools were established before land titles were issued, school playgrounds and playing fields have been particularly vulnerable to crude, corrupt, and sometimes violent accumulation by nefarious elites in the city, as have other "public" spaces, such as Karura forest (see Mbatia and Karlsson below, "Public Space: The Many Karuras"):

Most of the 205 primary schools in Nairobi have no titles and some have lost part of their land to grabbers. Previously, Governor Evans Kidero has promised imminent action to take back the excised lands but the process which is supposed to be undertaken together with NLC [National Lands Commission] is yet to commence. This is the latest of alleged high-profile land-grabbing cases in the last few months with others including the 500,000 acres in Lamu and 134 acres in Karen.

(Business Daily 2015).

In the immediate aftermath of the tear-gassing at Langata primary school, the government took rapid action to reverse various well-known, controversial land grabs, deploying the National Youth Service (NYS) with bulldozers and other heavy equipment to clear grabbed sites, instead of the discredited police. Ceasare Mbaria, director of surveys, promised to issue the school with a title deed within a week, but Charity Ngilu from the Ministry of Lands announced that the nys had been instructed to demolish

perimeter walls erected by land grabbers at several other sites around the city (Muraya 2015). These included land near the entrance to Wilson Airport, allegedly taken by the same people behind the Langata land grab, and a plot owned by the Presbyterian Church of East Africa in Westlands, next to Westgate Mall, which was a demarcated wetland that was to be turned into a park “named after the late environmentalist and Nobel laureate Wangari Maathai” (*Kenya Today* 2015b). Further demolitions, she promised, would “also take place in Mombasa, Nakuru, Naivasha and Kisumu’s Dunga beach [...] wherever public land has been encroached on” (*Kenya Today* 2015b).

These efforts were welcomed by many Nairobians, but most have maintained a level of skepticism that the demolition exercises were anything more than cosmetic responses to the crisis initiated by the police’s heavy handling of the children’s protest at Langata Primary. The wetlands owned by the Presbyterian Church opposite Westgate Mall are an informative example here, both of how land-grabbing often takes place and what happens when the government responds. When the land grabbers took the land, they did so by building a perimeter wall around the site, placing Maasai “security guards” there to hold and protect it. Like Kenya’s pandemic of extrajudicial killings by police in informal areas and slums (Jones et al. 2017; MSJC 2017; van Staple 2019), the building of walls and deployment of security guards for the purpose of land grabbing (which is common around the city) shows once again how security mechanisms can be the cause of great insecurity and uncertainty, for land, livelihoods, and lives. At the wetlands, these interventions pushed out informal flower sellers who were using the space and provoked a series of confrontations between them and the Maasai “security guards” living on the site. When the NYS were sent into destroy the wall and disperse its Maasai inhabitants after the Langata incident, more than 200 Maasai people were evicted from the site. Soon afterward, the flower sellers returned. Months later, however, a new privately funded road was driven through the wetlands, connecting Westgate Mall to Lower Kabete Road. There is no sign yet that the site will

become a public park in honor of Wangari Maathai, and for now the flower sellers remain at the site.

* * *

The controversies surrounding land-grabbing in Langata and in Westlands are just recent examples in Nairobi's long history of securitized struggles over land. Such struggles are framed not only by the deployment of police and other security personnel, but through material infrastructures that are intended to exclude, filter, and contain a range of human and nonhuman actors. In the case of Karura Forest on the edge of Nairobi, such techniques and infrastructures of security rub up against endeavors to promote urban conservation, leisure, and well-being. The building of walls, fencing, and controlled access to what is ostensibly public space demonstrates how security, exclusivity, and conservation can be implemented through the very same infrastructures.

* * *

Public Space: The Many Karuras (Teresa Mbatia and Beppe Karlsson)

Karura forest is one of the world's largest urban forests. Around 1,000 hectares, it is massive green space in the northwestern part of Nairobi, where you also will find the most affluent neighborhoods, such as Muthaiga, Gigiri, Runda, and Spring Valley. Today it is the wealthy elite groups of African Kenyans, Indians, Europeans, and various expatriates who frequent the forest to jog, walk their dogs, ride horses, cycle, have weekend picnics or a business lunch at the River Café that has recently been opened. Karura has not always been such a peaceful landscape. As recently as ten to fifteen years ago, Karura was considered a "forest of fear," a known hangout for criminals and a dumping ground for dead bodies. A critical event in this dramatic change of Karura was the fencing of the forest, a measure executed by

the new joint management regime under the Friends of Karura Forest and Kenya Forest Service that was established in 2009. Along with the construction of the electric fence around the forest, security guards were placed at all the entrances and patrols carried out inside the forest. Entrance fees were introduced, today KSH 100 for adult Kenyan citizens (50 for children), 200 for non-Kenyan residents and 600 for tourists. The fence produces a new geography; it disrupts flows and keeps unwanted things out and desired things in. Adjoining to or in the vicinity of the forest there are several villages and informal settlements or slums where people have long used the forest for their livelihoods. Some of these people are descendants of the original “owners” of the forest, those who controlled it before it was turned into a forest reserve in 1932. The fence hence facilitated the transformation of Karura into a “safe and secure place,” but in so doing it excluded the villagers and slum-dwellers who used to enter the forest to take water, collect firewood, cut grass, and graze cattle.

Depending on where one stands, Karura speaks in different ways. For some, the new joint forest management regime is nothing short of a success story. During recent years, 200,000 people have visited the forest each year. The management has carried out several successful biodiversity measures, most spectacularly the resettlement of a colony of colobus monkeys. The exotic tree species planted by the colonial forest services are now being replaced by indigenous trees. School classes and organizations come regularly to the forest and take part in environmental awareness trainings and outdoor activities. Jobs have been provided to local people, some trained and employed as regular forest guards, whereas other are employed on a daily basis to carry out planting and the clearing of bush in the forest. Tourists have also started to find their way to the forest, and Karura is now ranked by many travel sites as among the top ten things to do while in Nairobi. Trip Advisor, for example, says that Karura allows visitors to “experience the serenity of nature in all its diversity.” The Friends of Karura have been able to raise a lot of money through corporate sponsorship to finance these pro-

grams. Walking around in the forest, you are likely to run into signboards stating that such and such firm has planted a certain number of trees, or if you stop for a rest, it might be on one of the new benches with the Samsung logo. Many would take this as a sign of the success of the joint-management regime.

Tree planting also has a wider resonance in Kenyan society. For many Nairobians, to plant a tree in Karura is to celebrate and commemorate the heroic struggle by the late Wangari Maathai, who in the late 1990s saved Karura from aggressive land-grabbing that had been sanctioned by the (then) president, Daniel Arap Moi, when roughly 50 percent of Karura had been signed off secretly to private developers (Manji 2017). When the bulldozers and chainsaws began to clear the trees, Maathai organized a massive popular movement against the destruction of the forest and the stealing of public lands. With her Green Belt Movement along with women from the neighboring Mji wa Huruma village and students from Nairobi University, Maathai spearheaded the protesters, and they faced down massive police brutalities. Instead of resorting to violence, Maathai and her followers opted for the planting of trees and hence to turn these areas back into forestlands. Shortly thereafter, various professional bodies and civil organizations joined the demonstrations, and eventually they also got the backing by prominent civil bodies, including the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCK). President Moi had to abandon his scheme, but he still did not revoke the illegally issued title deeds. There were still cases pending in court where private developers seek rights over land in Karura.

In view of the popular struggle to save the forest, some people feel that Maathai's legacy has been corrupted and that Karura has become a recreation ground for the rich, and the Huruma women and others who risked their lives no longer have access to the forest, nor any say in its management. Groups of men and women are called in as day laborers, and they are also allowed to collect firewood on certain days of the week, yet all on terms decided over their heads by Friends of Karura Forest and the Kenya Forest Service. Several scholars have criticized the aliena-

tion of the local people, describing it as “eco-gentrification” and “elite capture,” and that it resembles earlier colonial policy where green spaces were reserved for white European settlers (Klopp 2000; Njeru 2013; Mbatia 2016).

With the fencing and the securitization and commodification of the forest, the access and the use by the urban poor have indeed been heavily curtailed, but the fence has also kept land grabbers and private developers out. The forest hence remains a public good and, further and more importantly, trees are still growing there; it is still a thriving forest. Keeping the forest ecosystem alive indeed benefits everyone in the city, both rich and poor, because it improves air quality and retains water, and it is also crucial in Kenya’s larger struggle to mitigate the effects of climate change. Having a forest in the city also provides aesthetic and psychological well-being and pleasure for people, not least for those who grow up in areas without much greenery.

The history of Karura is rife with contradictions and contingencies. Prior to colonial rule, the forest belonged to a Kikuyu clan, who preserved it as a sacred place, regulating human exploitation of grazing and cutting of trees. During the anti-colonial struggle, Mau Mau fighters were supposed to have hidden from British security forces in caves deep in the forest. These caves have become tourist attractions today, and guides tell stories about how the fighters managed to evade capture by knowing the ins and outs of the forest. Since independence, the original landowners have made claims to regain proprietorship of the forest, but, as with other areas turned into forest reserves under the British, the state still retains ownership under the jurisdiction of Kenya Forest Service. With the introduction of joint-forest management in Kenya and elsewhere in the world, the principle is to allow for larger involvement of local communities. This is also the basic premise of the Friends of Karura Forest/Kenya Forest Service partnership. The fence remains a securitized boundary of inclusion and exclusion, a physical manifestation of the terms by which such community involvement can take place. But as Karura’s history has shown, things are not static. For the forest to continue to thrive in the future,

it seems critical to open it to a more democratic management regime.

INTERLUDE

Kanaro, Nairobi River, and the City

Billy Kahora

The first thing every child in Mukuru Twin City asked when he or she saw Kanaro River Waterway was always the same: “Mama, where does that *bara bara* road go to?” And mothers would shiver and warn the little ones that they must never cross Kanaro alone. Every child learned to respect and fear Kanaro; they were told, *wengi wamebebwa na hawajaonekana tena*. Many had been carried away by the river, never to return. They were told that Kanaro gave and took away, like God. And every July when the rains came, and Kanaro swelled, proof came in the form of the body of a bloated *changaa* drunk washed up for all to see, an amphibious form covered in slime. Kanaro had been built to separate us from Buru Buru. We did not tell our children that. And so, before Sister Faith came upon us, this had long become one of the five myths across Kiambiu and Buru City; how our world began with a river, how Mukuru Twin City came from Kiambiu and Buru Buru Carton City and how they came from Kanaro, the large culvert sewage ditch that had become the river of life in Kiambiu. And how Buru Carton City rose from the wealth of Kiambiu. Then, Kwa-Maratathi rose from Buru Carton City and was destroyed after the Bio Bio War brought by the kanjo City Council. But Sister Faith now had shown us that

all this was not true. When Sister Faith came upon us, the water from Nairobi River that fed Kanaro and washed the shit from Buru Buru had become a trickle. And the giant letters etched in the cream concrete slabs of Kanaro — H.F.C.K. — were there for all to see and raise more questions.

We could no longer scare our children with tales that Kanaro gave and took away. We could no longer say Mukuru Twin City rose from the life of that Kanaro. So, we now told the younger ones that H.F.C.K. were the initials of the rich man who had built Kiambiu, which had become Mukuru Twin City, the rich man who had also built Babilon, Buru Buru. This rich man was so rich that he did not have a real name and he called himself Housing Finance of Kenya because he knew if he just used his own name he would be killed out of jealousy for his riches. Wee, one has to be careful. But the late night *wajuajis* in their drunkenness, because they had gone to *ati* university of Nairobi even if we could not see their degrees, over late night Kiambiu fires, lied that H.F.C.K., Housing Finance of Kenya, was *ati* a mortgaging building society that had built Buru Buru Babilon. When they were drunk, their English became that of the office and tie. They shouted that Housing Fuck of Kenya was the best way *serikali* GOK had to keep Kenya and its money colonized. Couldn't we all see that Babilon Buru looked like England. This was Kenya New. Kenya Njeru. The drunkard *wajuajis* said they knew that Babilon Buru had been built by money from the queen and the Bank of England because Kenya was still colonized. *Ukoloni mambo leo*. And they knew this because it was announced that the queen of England would come to open the new estate in 1980. There could be no *kienyeji* uselessness. Because the queen was coming, everything had to be done properly. After the white structures with the brick roofs and paved sidewalks came up, Kenya Njeru started on building a sewage where the Buru Buru shit would go. The Bank of England and the Housing Fuck of Kenya leveled part of the large valley next to it, where Kiambiu would rise, and dug one big riverbed that would become Kanaro. That is where all the shit of the people who wanted to be

like England would go. When the shit and the *mkojo* pee started to flow, it was linked to Nairobi River, and a river of wastewater with hundreds of tributaries was born. And thus, Kiambiu's river of life came to be.

The drunkard *wajuajis* said that Kiambiu had come from Kanaro, which had been a river of the shit from Babilon. So, before we became the *muingi* of the Tent we knew Mukuru Twin City, Kiambiu, and Buru Carton City came from the sewage plan that had been built by Housing Fuck of Kenya (H.F.C.K.) that had been given money by the Bank of England that was given money by the queen of England and that is why Prince Charles eventually came to open Buru Buru that we called Babilon. But this was all before Sister Faith came upon us and told us our true Genesis. And so, the first task of we the *muingi* of the Tent was to preach against this false myth about the origins of Mukuru Twin City.

Bodies and Corporealities

Curated by Joost Fontein

Here we are concerned with the bodies and bodily processes that constitute and are constituted by Nairobi. We are interested in how the “body of the city” and those of the people (and animals) who live, work, and move through it, are intertwined. The flows and blockages, material exchanges and transformations, movement and containment of bodies have always been deeply imbricated in the transformations, flows, and blockages of cities. Human bodies (in particular, but not exclusively) are the locus of multiple actions and experiences that constitute urban life and death. They do and are done to; are active and passive; are subjected to and objectified by processes of making and unmaking, inclusion and exclusion, creativity and violence; and they experience love, care, and pleasure as much as discipline and control. They are central to the questions of security, uncertainty, and contingency in Nairobi with which we are concerned.

In following this line of thought, we are in critical engagement with older discussions around the idea of cities as metabolic systems (Gandy 2004, 2005). These debates urge caution with notions of “urban metabolism” inherited from late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century urban planning, and with the corporeal metaphors that often continue to lie beneath more

recent approaches to understanding cities (Gandy 2005, 29–30, 40). One important point is that these older approaches often took “the body” and its “systems” as metaphors for understanding “the city”; here we seek to be more literal. Another is that modernist urban planning’s use of “the body” as a metaphor for understanding urban processes was always, in many respects, aspirational. It did have real material effects—the fabric of many cities was transformed, and notions of propriety and moral citizenship were reforged accordingly. But such totalizing visions are always incomplete, and usually have trouble accommodating complex histories. The “functionalist impetus” behind modernist understandings of cities “has consistently failed to grasp the way in which urban space is historically produced” (Gandy 2004, 364), and it cannot accommodate enduring structures of social and economic inclusion and exclusion. This is particularly true in colonial and postcolonial contexts, where “the reconstruction of the underground city” of water supply and waste-removal infrastructure, for example, “was only ever partially completed, with disastrous consequences for public health” (Gandy 2004, 368). Nairobi’s bubonic plague epidemic in the early 1900s is indicative here, as were similar outbreaks of disease in other colonial cities, including Baghdad, Bombay, and Lagos (Gandy 2004, 368).

The uneven patchiness with which recurring modernist aspirations for the “metabolic city” are actualized are particularly acute in rapidly urbanizing postcolonial contexts, such as Lagos, Mumbai, Kinshasa (de Boeck and Plissart 2004), and, of course, Nairobi. This is a “testament not simply to the technical and fiscal challenge inherent in the production of the bacteriological city but the legacy of an incomplete modernity,” which serves some and excludes many others (Gandy 2004, 368). More recent focus on flows, emergence, incompleteness, and the productive indeterminacies of urban forms — exploring “neo-organicist” conceptualizations of “thinking” cyber-cities, for example (Gandy 2005, 29–30, 40) — are a welcome antidote to older static, functional, and biophysical metaphors of “urban

metabolism,” but it remains important to retain focus on enduring structural facets of political economy and history in our consideration of the corporal and material flows, blockages, and disjunctures from which both bodies and cities emerge through incomplete processes of containment, entanglement, and transformation.

Our approach here builds on the point that, like cities, bodies never just *exist* or simply *do*. Rather, as Ingold argues, they move along “lifelines” in correspondence with each other, “doing undergoing,” “agencing,” and attentive within the world’s becoming (Ingold 2016, 9). As they emerge, they are politically and socially constituted and *made to do* through processes of self- and other-making, of entangled individual and collective action, that are enabled, afforded, and constrained through complex interweavings or meshworks (Ingold 2016, 10) of inflows/outflows of materials and substances; of practices, gestures, habits, and performance; and of objects, artifacts, and technologies, all in attentive correspondence with geographies and architectures of movement, containment, discipline, and control. If Ingold’s vision tends sometimes toward the smooth and the coherent, then Pinney’s (2005) and others’ (Fontein 2014, 130; Filippucci et al. 2012, 204) emphasis on the “excessivity of stuff,” and particularly of bodies and corporeality, reminds us that like all emergent human–thing relationalities, these interweavings and meshworks of in/outflows are rarely “smooth” and more often marked by consequential disjunctures, obstructions, fractures, and incoherence. Indeed “contained bodies” seem often only to emerge as an afterthought of political processes of stabilizing or “holding still” such emergent and incomplete interweavings and meshworks.

Bodies may therefore sometimes appear more like *happenings* or *events* than contained entities that already exist or from which action springs. This is especially clear with collective bodies. Think of a body of protestors moving down a street, such as the “Stop Killing Us” protest that is the subject of Halliday’s photo-essay, or Kiguru’s account of the *#mydress-*

mychoice demonstration, both of which happened in 2017 and are discussed below. We can also think of the late colonial state's Operation Anvil, during the "Emergency" period of the 1950s, when thousands of people were coercively removed from Mathare and other areas on the east side of the city, which Pflingst explores in her photo-essay *Dispossession*. Just as important here are more routine happenings of collective bodies, such as daily commuter traffic going into and out of the CBD. And exactly because the distinction between individual and collective bodies rapidly breaks down, such an approach must apply to "individual" bodies too. We prefer to explore the space between Ingold's notions of knot- or *meshworks* and the more historically contingent idea of *happenings* or *events*, rather than fall one or other side, exactly because the question of *intentionality* (or *attentionality* as Ingold [2016] prefers) remains open and ultimately indeterminate. This is particularly the case when considering the relationship between "individual bodies" and bodies of bodies. Agency (or "agencing") remains unclear and sometimes looks more like effect (or affect?) than cause. These "happenings"/"knotworks" link self to other, individuals to groups, and bodies to geographies in ways that deeply imbricate questions of security, certainty, and contingency with flows, blockages, and containments, and with bodily habits, gestures, and spatial, technological, and architectural possibilities and constraints.

For example, thinking about the materials that enter (food, water, drugs, air, diseases, other bodily substances) and exit bodies (shit, sweat, blood, piss, semen, etc.) reveals how processes of provisioning, containing, and managing the transferal of substances into, out of, and across bodies are key to stabilizing them, to making life possible (or not), and, in turn, to constituting security and certainty in the city. Two contributions by Fontein looking at water, sanitation, and cholera in Mathare and at Kiamaiko goat market, respectively, illustrate how the uncertainties that surround the contested flows and blockages of materials through and between bodies (human, animal, and microbial) can be full of subversive potentiality — productive of

new contingent order, relations, and possibility — all of which circulate around the making of life, and sometimes of death. This is picked up in Lamont's discussion at the end of the chapter of the 1998 funeral of a prominent Nairobi man returned to Meru for burial. Here flows of biomaterials and nonbiomaterials and human and nonhuman corporealities, encompassing both "cultural/rural" and "modern/urban" bodies, defy all forms of containment, stabilization, or the "managed transformation" that the making of life and death demand. The "smell of death" intrudes physically and morally, and also socially, historically, and culturally, and we can imagine, politically, into the emergent bodies of the present and of the future, underscoring, unnervingly, the profound contingency of all life and all bodies, and of the city itself.

Also entangled with such inflows and outflows of corporeal substances are bodily practices, gestures, and performances (walking, dancing, marching), often involving an array of artifacts, adornments, and technologies (clothes/uniforms, weapons, makeup, cars). Bodies/persons, individual and collective, are constituted through such practices and gestures, technologies and things as much as through (but interwoven with) the in/outflows and blockages of materials. Contributions by van Stapele, looking at the bodily praxis of and deprivations faced by male sex workers; by Diphorn, discussing the precarious working lives of private security guards; by Lockwood, looking at young male football players in Kiambu; and by Colona, focusing on young men killed by police in Mathare, all illustrate in different ways and with varying consequences how gestures, habits, and performances are involved in the individual and collective self-making, unmaking, and othering of bodies and persons in the city, sometimes in disturbingly violent ways.

Viewing collective/individual bodies in this way — as emergent happenings and complex interweavings, held still and contained, made and unmade, active yet acted upon, subjects yet subjected, and often objectified — means that we do NOT offer a typology of different bodies in Nairobi. Rather we seek

to think about entangled bodily practices and performances, corporeal flows and blockages, and objects, technologies, and relationalities that all pertain to questions of security, certainty, and contingency in the city. The contributions in this chapter are organized into four sections. The first, “Corporealities and Material Flows,” includes the two contributions by Fontein looking at El Niño and cholera in Mathare and at Kiamaikō’s vibrant goat market. The second, “Collective Bodies of Movement, Protest, and Exclusion,” addresses movements of collective bodies through two photo essays by Pfungst and Halliday, exploring the legacies of Operation Anvil in Mathare, and the 2017 protest against extrajudicial killing by police, respectively. The third section, “Precarity, Gender, and Performance,” moves toward the performative self- and other-making, unmaking, inclusion, and exclusion of individual gendered and sometimes “disposable” bodies, with the contributions of Kiguru, van Staple, Diphoorn, and Lockwood. The two contributions in the fourth section, “Making Dead,” explore how corporeal, social, performative, and semantic processes of self- and other-making continue through the practices whereby people are made dead. Colona explores the deeply uncertain “plasticity” of young male bodies in Nairobi’s “slums” constituted as “thugs” through their extrajudicial killing by police; Lamont examines the unfinished (Fontein 2022a) and uncontained material, social, and semantic work involved in the making (dead) of a “Nairobi man” returned for burial to Meru. Taken together the contributions in this chapter show how Nairobi’s bodies, as meshworks of material flows, performances, and social happenings, are linked to its emergent geographies, its multiple pasts, and to each other in uncertain, sometimes productive, and sometimes deeply fraught, but always incomplete ways.

Corporealities and Material Flows

There are many material in/outflows, blockages, and containments that co-constitute Nairobi and its bodies. Think, for example, of the politics of rubbish in Mathare and Dandora,

in the east of the city (Thieme 2013; *Daily Nation* 2015a); of the role that the accumulation of detritus plays in the making of places such as Kaloleni (Smith 2018); or of the recursive circulations of architectural materials — stone, wood, iron sheets, roof tiles — that make up both the substance of the city and the livelihoods and bodies that enliven it (Fontein 2017). Or think of the trade in *mitumba* (secondhand clothes), which illustrates graphically how global circulations of stuff too are part of the making of Nairobi bodies and subjectivities, not to mention abject informal livelihoods (*Nairobi News* 2014a).

But perhaps the most obvious place to start is water — the stuff of life itself, whose flows link climate, geography, and urban topographies to the very vitality, health, and productivity of its bodies (see *Untitled*, James Muriuki, in chapter 1). Indeed, nineteenth-century modernist “metabolic,” urban, and public health planning in industrializing cities in Europe was particularly focused on water supply and sanitation. Yet water is interesting stuff exactly because it is ubiquitous (Fontein 2015). Its properties and affordances far exceed the normative frameworks that tend to limit its salience to being a “scarce natural resource,” a public health concern, or a “human right.” Water’s many material qualities means that it matters in multiple ways that can be life-enabling or life-threatening across diverse regimes of meaning and rule governing life in urban contexts. Focusing on the nexus of weather, sanitation, and disease in Nairobi’s neglected “slums,” Fontein’s “Cholera in Mathare” below illustrates how material and corporal flows — and the processes that manage, contain, or not, such flows — are deeply imbricated in the production of different forms of privileged or precarious life. Access to safe, state-regulated controls over in/outflows of water, waste, and bodily substances are hugely differentiated across the city, and the scarcity of toilets, safe drinking water, and sanitation in informal areas such as Mathare generates deep (sometimes life-threatening) deprivations. But it also offers potentialities for new regimes of power, legitimacy, and sovereignty to emerge, as “reformed” gangs, community groups, NGOs, and city authorities jostle to assert control over service provision.

In “Kiamaiiko Goat Market,” Fontein continues this line of argument by exploring how animal bodies — goats in particular — too are part of the emergent meshworks of the city. The goats come from across Kenya and the region (as far as Tanzania, Ethiopia, and Uganda), as do many of the people working in Kiamaiiko, showing how regional movements of human and animal bodies are part of Nairobi’s emergent becoming. These geographical mobilities reflect pervasive livelihood and other insecurities across the region. But it was also the contingencies of Nairobi’s unruly urban expansion that enabled Kiamaiiko’s goat meat industry to thrive, drawing people to it. Here the movements of bodies and of bodily materials are intertwined, entangling human and nonhuman bodies and corporeal flows in ways that demand yet usually defy the stability and certainty that state regulation purports to offer. And as with water and sanitation in Mathare, uncertainty/contingency and potentiality/opportunity are again revealed as uncomfortable but close bedfellows.

Both discussions illustrate how the politics of life and of death — of bio- and necropolitics (Mbembe 2003) — are firmly intertwined. In Mathare, the productive potentialities of city authorities’ long neglect of water and sanitation intersects with a far less subtle politics of death as manifest in extrajudicial killings by police. This kind of necropolitics itself reveals (and reaffirms) the deficiency of state legitimacy — that is, its biopolitics — in some parts of Nairobi. In Kiamaiiko, official anxieties about uncontained outflows of contaminants from slaughterhouses echo the intersection of bio- and necropolitics in Mathare’s microbiotic struggles with cholera and other diseases. Yet here it is the mass, routinized, daily death of thousands of goats, and their transformation into meat for human consumption, that affords Kiamaiiko’s human vitality and diversity, making certain kinds of lives, livelihoods, and politics possible. In both cases, the uneven intersections of human and nonhuman life and death remind us firmly that not all bodies — human or animal — are equally constituted or constituted as equal in Nairobi’s becoming.

* * *

Cholera in Mathare (Joost Fontein)

El Niño arrived (in a way, at least, in Nairobi) in 2015. Anticipation across Nairobi was high in the months before the first expected deluge of the October to December “short rains.”¹ On May 12, 2015, *The Standard* carried an article entitled “How to Predict and Prepare for El Niño,” and the following month the government issued warnings that “El Niño rains are looming,” urging authorities and citizens “to be ready” (*The Standard*, June 8, 2015; see also Daily Nation 2015b; Kenya Meteorological Department 2015a; Ministry of Environment, Natural Resources & Regional Authorities 2015; County Meteorological Office, Nairobi 2015). The National Disaster Management Unit (established after the 1997 El Niño floods) was mobilized, and government (and international) funds assigned to counties, and within counties, to prepare for El Niño (*The Standard* 2015c, 2015d, 2015e; *Daily Nation* 2015c, 2015d). Nairobi’s CapitalFM radio station even started a Twitter handle, @ElNinoWatch984.

Many in Mathare remembered the devastating floods of the 1997 El Niño (*The Standard* 2015f, 2015g). Esther Wanjiru, a resident in the Kosovo area, recalled how houses near the river were swept away. One of her friends was killed trying to retrieve a box of money from his house.² The 1997 El Niño-linked floods caused about 2,000 deaths across Kenya through flooding and landslides (*The Standard* 2015f; Daily Nation 1998; *East African* 1998a, 1998b; *East African Standard* 1997a, 1997b), but in Nairobi, Mathare was worst affected. Unsurprisingly, for people there El Niño became synonymous with the threat of flooding. However, concerns in 2015 were not only about flooding. They were

1 Ethnographic material presented here was collected in 2016 by a team of researchers, including Joost Fontein, Syokau Mutonga, Lucy Wairimu, and Hannah Bornstein. Some of this material has been presented and discussed elsewhere (Fontein 2022b).

2 Interview with Esther Wanjiru, January 14, 2016.

also about cholera and other waterborne diseases.³ This too was based on memories of the malaria, Rift valley fever, and especially cholera that had accompanied the 1997 El Niño rains (*East African Standard* 1997c, 1997d, 1997e; *East African* 1998c, 1998d, 1998e). Esther Wanjiru described how in 1997 a class five schoolboy was infected by *kipindupindu* (Swahili for cholera) after eating an orange, immediately started feeling stomach pains, and later died in hospital. She described the fear and stigma that cholera provoked in 1997, which meant that often people “did not want it to be known” they had been infected, because others “would avoid shaking your hand to avoid infection.”⁴

The 1997 cholera outbreak was Kenya’s largest in recent memory, resulting in “26901 cases and 1362 deaths” (Mutonga et al. 2013). Like flooding, cholera is an unevenly distributed risk across the city. In Nairobi, as with Venezuela’s devastating cholera in the early 1990s (Briggs and Mantini-Briggs 2004) and Zimbabwe’s in 2008–2009 (Chigudu 2019), a complexity of social, microbiotic, material, infrastructural, and discursive factors are in play in how cholera affects different parts of the city. Key here is the material and corporeal nature of cholera as a disease that affords, and is afforded by, social economic inequalities, stigma, and prejudice, linking geography, class, infrastructure, and bodies in particular ways. Spread by contaminated water or food, cholera causes acute gastrointestinal infection leading to severe vomiting and diarrhea. Deaths from extreme dehydration can happen within hours but are preventable by the early administration of oral rehydration solutions, antibiotics, and, in severe cases, intravenous drips (Medecines Sans Frontieres 2015). Timing is key. In February 2016, Elizabeth, a clinical worker at a Cholera Treatment Unit (CTU) in Mathare North explained how a schoolboy got sick after eating a mango and was rushed to hospital, but died later the same day. We “admitted several kids from the same school,” she con-

3 This was also included in official advisories; see *Daily Nation* 2015e; *The Standard* 2015f; *The Star* 2015a, 2015b.

4 Interview with Esther Wanjiru, January 14, 2016.

tinued, explaining that “when kids come from school they like playing [...] on the road and [...] other kids help themselves on the road. In case it rains [...] they may end up touching or stepping on waste from a cholera-infected person and carry the bacteria to the house where they may end up getting infected.”⁵ Such accounts illustrate how cholera can result from the failure to contain and isolate flows of clean water, human waste, and food. Once infected, cholera exacerbates the failure to isolate clean and dirty substances by its effect of defying, dangerously, the corporeal containments necessary for bodies to function normally, through vomiting and extreme diarrhea, which is often white, watery, and described as “rice water.”⁶ Suffering cholera is undoubtedly a very immediate, visceral, and corporeal experience. Esther Wanjiru described being “so scared by the way I diarrhea-ed over the entire wall and [...] feeling very weak,” when she suffered cholera in 1997.⁷

The speed with which infection spreads means CTUs need to be established quickly when an outbreak is suspected, involving strict infection-control procedures to isolate leaky bodies and contain their dangerous flows of bacteria. We visited one CTU in Mathare North in February 2016 and were struck by the disciplined, sanitized nature of the place, defying its makeshift, tented look. Movement in, out, and through the unit was strictly controlled by chlorine-solution sprays and hand-washes. The eerie, empty beds of the then soon-to-be-closed unit spoke to the intense corporeality of cholera, which, clinical staff agreed, often reinforces stigma around the disease. Each bed had its own drip stand, and “ominous holes in the middle, to allow patient’s shit to be collected in buckets beneath.”⁸

In Mathare and other “informal” areas of the city, risks of flooding and of waterborne diseases are linked through the

5 Fieldnotes (Lucy Wairimu) “Mathare North CTU Visit,” February 12, 2016.

6 Fieldnotes (Syokau Mutonga) “CTU visit — Mathare North,” February 12, 2016.

7 Interview with Esther Wanjiru, January 14, 2016.

8 Fieldnotes (Joost Fontein), “Visit to CTU at Mathare North Clinic,” February 12, 2015.

inadequacy, decay, or nonexistence of water infrastructure, poor drainage, a lack of toilets, and inadequate clean water supplies (MSJC 2018). Keeping flows of human waste separate from clean water, avoiding the contamination of food, and keeping bodies clean can be very difficult. The threat of cholera is therefore, in many respects, an infrastructural concern. Residents of Nairobi's "slums" are particularly vulnerable. Without adequate state provision of water and sanitation, other actors often become involved in providing these services. When the Kosovo area of Mathare was first occupied in the late 1990s, there was no water at all, until a water pipe from Thika road was installed by a local Catholic church, St. Teresa's, which offered the water for free. During the 2000s, such water connections were taken over by *mūngikī*, a violent ethnic/political gang who charged "whatever they wanted" for water until they were violently driven away by police and other local gangs in 2007.⁹ With water sources inevitably inadequate for the rapidly growing area, many continued to draw water from Mathare's polluted river. It's only since the late 2000s that Nairobi Water began providing water, after being prompted into action by a local NGO called Pamoja Trust, which raised funds to construct water points.¹⁰ Water supplies remain patchy, and water points often become subject to power struggles between competing "community groups," so-called reformed gangs, or youth groups, and other forms of local "authority." Very few people have water piped into their homes, and many of those are illegal connections.

Sanitation is even worse with the massive shortage of toilets allowing rudimentary private providers to charge for the use of improvised toilets, the waste from which usually runs straight into Mathare River. When Esther Wanjiru moved to the Kosovo area in the late 1990s, there were no toilets at all. Likewise, Christopher Angwenyi described how "they used to go to trenches

9 Interview with Peter Otieno, Water Chairman, Kosovo, January 22, 2016; interview with "Nicholas," Shantit area, Mathare, January 22, 2016; and interview with Father Mwaura Kamau, Ruku Parish, March 23, 2016.

10 Interview with Peter Otieno, Water Chairman, Kosovo, January 22, 2016.

famously known as *athara*, where there were open spaces.”¹¹ “Sanitation,” a local “water chairman” Peter Otieno stressed, “is for the community to organize.”¹² With heavy rains, flows of clean water, food, and waste readily mix causing outbreaks of cholera, typhoid, and other diseases. This is exacerbated when water supplies are cut off, because, as Otieno noted, “it is difficult to keep clean with no water.”¹³ Therefore in Mathare “all the criteria for cholera are here,” Corrine Torre from Doctors Without Borders (MSF) explained.¹⁴

In the growing literature on Nairobi’s “slums,” emphasis is often placed on their “neglect” and “abandonment” by state authorities. These infrastructural inadequacies are often linked to the prevalence of extrajudicial killings, gang violence, unemployment, and poverty, to illustrate the extreme marginality of lives and bodies in these areas (Kimari 2017; van Stapele 2015). Yet it is clear that the inadequacy of state provision of basic water and sanitation has created opportunities as well as deep deprivations, especially for NGOs, community groups, churches and mosques, and various kinds of gangs, each of whom have, in different ways, become involved in controlling water-related services in Mathare. Water infrastructure — both clean water provision and sanitation — have become sites of struggle between such different kinds of “local authority,” which align, intertwine, and confront each other in complex, always shifting ways.

A particularly good example is how the water “kiosks” first built by Pamoja Trust in Kosovo, and then established across Mathare’s other eleven “villages” by Nairobi Water, have become central to struggles between “legitimate” community groups (such as that chaired by Peter Otieno), “illegal” gangs and youth groups (“reformed gangs”), and city authorities, such as Nairobi

11 Interview with Esther Wanjiru, January 14, 2016; interview with Christopher Angwenyi, Village elder, March 18, 2016.

12 Fieldnotes (Joost Fontein), interview with Peter Otieno, Water Chairman, Kosovo, January 22, 2016.

13 Ibid.

14 Fieldnotes (Syokau Mutonga), “Interview with Corrine Torre,” February 5, 2016.

Water. Such struggles illustrate how water's material properties, affording or constraining specific corporeal necessities, can shape particular kinds of opportunity and politics in contested, contingent, and emergent structures and practices of authority and rule. Why else would "reformed gangs" — normally associated (in Mathare and elsewhere) with illegal drugs and alcohol or protection rackets — concern themselves with water provision and sanitation? The entanglement of Mathare's long history of neglect with water's corporeal necessities for life and livelihoods affords opportunities that generate complex multilayered contests. City authorities may be historically responsible for these infrastructural inadequacies, but they are also only some among a much more diverse multiplicity of actors whose localized struggles center on and are afforded by the entangled flows, blockages, and containments linking the materialities of bodies and the city.

Anticipation of El Niño in 2015 made all of this much more urgent: there was the risk of dangerous mixtures of clean and dirty water and threats to the corporeal containment of bodies that life demands. As a result, the National Youth Service (NYS) established "El Niño preparation committees" of local "youth" to unblock drains to allow wastewater to flow and avoid contaminating water sources and food (*The Star* 2015c). Public health warnings were issued, and authorities advised people residing close to Mathare River (where the cheapest accommodation is) to leave their homes or risk being flooded out. Community health workers were mobilized to hand out pills to prevent cholera. Nicholas, a member of a "youth group" that controls water points in the Shantit area of Mabatini ward, explained how he had been drafted into an El Niño committee. His involvement drew on his local know-how, and it offered him a way to subsidize his weekly earnings. They were part of his "hustle." El Niño and the risks it brought clearly created opportunities for Nicholas and for others like him, such as Peter Otieno, Kosovo's "Water Chairman," both of whom were also registered "community health workers." The same was also true for the clinical

workers employed by MSF to manage its CTUs,¹⁵ and for people located much higher up in the city's and county's hierarchies. Rumors soon emerged that El Niño-related emergency funds had been stolen (*Daily Nation* 2015f, 2015g, 2015h, 2015i, 2015j; *The Star* 2015d; *The Standard* 2015h) and that resources donated by MSF, such as CTU beds and other equipment, went missing.¹⁶ Nicholas complained that their promised NYS payments had not come through, so they stopped work.¹⁷ It soon emerged that there had been another corruption scandal in the NYS, and money earmarked for El Niño preparations had disappeared (*Daily Nation* 2015k; *Saturday Nation* 2015).¹⁸ These misdirected flows of resources further illustrate how the El Niño hype had created opportunities for some, at the same time further threatening the management of dangerous water flows and putting the corporeal containments of Mathare's bodies at further risk.¹⁹

In the event, however, "El Niño never showed up,"²⁰ at least not in Nairobi (*The Standard* 2015i, 2015j). There was increased rainfall and some localized flooding elsewhere, but there were no major floods during the El Niño period in Nairobi.²¹ Those living by the river in Mathare had won their gamble. At least, so it seemed. In fact, the worst floods that Nairobi experienced that year (2015–16) had nothing to do with El Niño. Those came in April/May 2016, during the "second" rainy season, when there was an enormous deluge and Mathare was terribly flooded (*The Standard* 2016a, 2016b, 2016c). Houses by the river were washed away and hundreds made homeless (Ghetto Radio 2016; *Daily Nation* 2016). This was also when, in Huruma, not far away, a building collapsed, killing fifty-one people (see chapter 1).

15 Fieldnotes (Syokau Mutonga) "CTU visit — Mathare North," February 12, 2016.

16 Interview with Corrine Torre, MSF Eastlands, Nairobi, February 10, 2016.

17 Interview with "Nicholas," Shantit area, Mathare, January 22, 2015.

18 Ibid.

19 More recently, a very similar series of dynamics accompanied the measures put in place to address the Covid-19 pandemic in Mathare (see Gitonga and Fontein 2021).

20 Interview with Corrine Torre, MSF Eastlands, Nairobi, February 10, 2016.

21 "No Death, Damage from City Floods," *AllAfrica.com*, November 30, 2015.

In terms of cholera, there was a serious cholera outbreak in 2015–16, but it is unlikely that this was related to El Niño.²² This had begun in Nairobi in December 2014, long before El Niño concerns were raised in mid-2015, and then spread rapidly across twenty-one other counties (International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies 2015). The outbreak peaked in February 2015 (George et al. 2016), and by June, in Nairobi at least, it had been contained.²³ The silences that surrounded this earlier outbreak stood in marked contrast to the publicity that El Niño received later that year. Corrine Torre explained that city authorities' reluctance to grant MSF permission to open CTUS when the outbreak was first identified in late 2014 was caused by fear of adverse publicity. "They didn't want to inform the population" and delayed any response for six weeks.²⁴ Eventually, in February 2015, three emergency CTUS were opened by MSF, which stayed open until August 2015.²⁵ They treated thousands of cases. Torre estimated that by February 2016, 96 people in Mathare had died, out of 178 reported deaths across the country (George et al. 2016). MSF closed its CTUS in August 2015 but reopened them the following month amid growing anticipation of the pending El Niño. But by then the worst of the outbreak had already passed. "It would have been a disaster if El Niño had come," Corrine Torre stressed.²⁶

22 The World Health Organisation is careful about linking El Niño to cholera directly, noting that "evidence for an association between cholera and sea surface temperatures is limited but suggestive." However, attention was drawn to a possible link because of severe cholera outbreaks that occurred in East Africa in the context of the heavy 1997 El Niño rains, so that "increased attention is again being paid to the environmental determinants of this disease" (World Health Organisation 1999, 24).

23 Interview with Corrine Torre, MSF Eastlands, Nairobi February 10, 2016.

24 Ibid.

25 Four CTUS were set up by MSF across Nairobi (Medecines Sans Frontières [MSF] International 2015), with three in the wider Eastlands area, at Mathare North Health Centre, at Lucy Kibaki Hospital, and at Bahati Health Centre (interview with Corrine Torre, MSF Eastlands, Nairobi, February, 10, 2016).

26 Fieldnotes, (Syokau Mutonga), "Interview with Corrine Torre," February 5, 2016.

On our visit to the last CTU, just before it closed in February 2016, its beds were already empty. Its records indicated it alone had treated more than 1,000 patients in 2015.

The dangers of El Niño in 2015 did not materialize. The cholera and flooding Mathare experienced that year were not directly related to El Niño. The major cholera event of 2015 started long before El Niño, and the major floods took place afterward. Both are already perennial and endemic problems in Mathare and across Nairobi's slums. What El Niño did do was create opportunities for other, extraordinary, distributions of national and international resources, which some higher up in city hierarchies had better access to than others. El Niño's affects had less to do with the dangers of flooding and water-borne disease—these are insecurities that bodies in Nairobi's slums already face—and more to do with Mathare's "productive marginality" on the frontier of contested, contingent regimes of rule that circulate around the (failed) provision of basic services, including water, health care, drainage, and sanitation. This reflects the political materialities of water's uneven provision and containment, upon which the making and unmaking of Nairobi bodies, at the intersection of corporeal and urban flows, are predicated. It is possible that all the El Niño talk made visible, if only briefly, Mathare's long struggle for adequate state services. More likely, however, is that its endemic, recurring problems with clean water, sanitation, and flood control were hidden under the much hyped anticipation of an "exceptional" weather event.

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Kiamaiko Goat Market (Joost Fontein)

Between 2,000 and 5,000 goats are traded every day at Kiamaiko in the Eastlands area of Nairobi.²⁷ This makes it one of the

²⁷ Ethnographic material presented here was collected in 2017 by a team of researchers, including Joost Fontein, Mercy Gitonga, Lucy Wairimu, Ste-

largest goat markets in East Africa. Most goats are slaughtered almost immediately at one of seventeen slaughterhouses nearby, to be consumed in Nairobi, or for export to the Middle East.²⁸ The goats come from across Kenya and from neighboring countries, as do many of the people who work Kiamaiko's market and slaughterhouses, reflecting how regional movements of human and animal bodies are part of the emergent becoming of the city. The material processes involved in Kiamaiko's goat industry take different forms — from the changing topography of the market itself, as every lorry delivering goats deposits a new layer of soil from their point of origin (carried to protect the animals during their long journeys), thereby constantly reshaping the landscape with the substances of other places; to the transformation of goats into meat products consumed across the city. The stuff of goats becomes the stuff of food, and in turn the corporeality of human bodies contribute to city waste outflows, mingling sometimes with leakages of hazardous waste from slaughterhouses into Mathare River.

Questions of security, uncertainty, and contingency at Kiamaiko arise in multiple ways. Conditions of uncertainty and insecurity at the margins of the rapidly expanding city and economic informalization accompanying structural adjustment in the 1990s allowed a group of Somali traders known as “the Tawakal” to create the thriving goat market by imposing security guards to control the site, which had become a danger spot for muggers and petty criminals.²⁹ This provided confidence for regional traders delivering lorries of goats for the proliferating slaughterhouses. It also drew goat traders away from other sites,

fano Pili, and Yayo Zhang. It was part of a collaborative exhibition (*Mbuzi na Mbuzi*) and short film about Kiamaiko (*Mbuzi za Nairobi*) that was shown at the *Remains, Waste & Metonymy 3: Kikulacho Nairobi* exhibition in Nairobi in 2018, curated by Joost Fontein, Craig Halliday, and Doseline Kiguru. Some of this material has also been discussed elsewhere (Fontein 2023).

28 Interview with Muktar Mohammed Omar, Ndur Abdi, and Abdifalah Dugow, of the Tawakal, December 8, 2017.

29 Ibid.

such as at Dandora and Kariobangi.³⁰ Yet it was also the security offered by Muungano Women's Cooperative's long occupation of the land that made the market site attractive in the first place. This cooperative of 105 "traditional" dance groups had been granted it as a *shamba* (farm) in the 1960s by President Jomo Kenyatta. In the 1990s, increasingly hemmed in by the city, they struggled to formalize this presidential grant into secure title deeds, and for that reason they welcomed renting the land to the Tawakal.³¹

As more goats came, so did more people, particularly Borana and Burji from northern Kenya and Ethiopia, Somalis from the northeast, and Maasai from Tanzania, all drawn to the opportunities for wealth and social mobility that came with the goats.³² This social diversity links people, geography, goats, and meat in surprising ways: the physical characteristics of different goats (tall, leggy, lean, white goats come from the northern drylands with Somali, Borana, and Burji traders; and short, black, and brown "chubby" goats come with Maasai traders from the south) are believed to determine the quality of the meat, the forms of cooking it is best suited to, and therefore the clients most likely to purchase it.³³ Up sprang a plethora of slaughterhouses, butcheries, and other goat-product outfits (processing goat skins, intestines, heads, and feet, for example) and also eateries offering specialist Ethiopian, Borana, Burji, and Somali dishes alongside the *nyama choma* (roast meat) prevalent across Nairobi.

30 Ibid. Interview with Muhidi Abdi Boshe, member of Umjoja Goat Centre Society, December 6, 2017.

31 Interview with Jessica Odhiambo, Secretary of Muungano Cooperative, October 13, 2017.

32 See, for example, Reuters 2017.

33 Goat and meat traders working in Kiamaiko have quite ethnically determined understandings of what "type" of people prefer what kinds of meat: "Yes there is a difference. The Somalis don't eat intestines. They must eat the meat. Intestines are normally eaten by Kikuyus. It is the Kikuyus who like the intestines. The Luos like the heads" (Interview with Muciri Maine, October 10, 2017).

Apart from Nairobians' appetite for *nyama choma*, it was a lack of state regulation, expanding residential construction, and increasing mobility of human and animal bodies that enabled this vibrant diversity. But this also worsened security. The wider Kiamaiko area (except the market, which is firmly under Tawakal control) has become known for muggings. It also fueled underlying ethnic and religious tensions,³⁴ which can emerge during election periods, or other times, such as in May 2019 when traders were "forced to shut their businesses as police engaged two religious [Christian and Muslim] groups fighting over the right to conduct prayers in the area" (*Daily Nation* 2019; *Daily Active Kenya* 2019; *The Star* 2019).

Kiamaiko's migrant bodies come to escape political insecurities elsewhere or seek new economic opportunities.³⁵ Often they begin by scratching out meager hand-to-mouth lives, but some do so successfully and become wealthy, especially those able to negotiate stable connections with higher-end "hotels" (restaurants) and transporters bringing in goats from "upcountry." Like Mathare's reformed gangs and community groups "hustling" water and sanitation higher up the valley, Kiamaiko's goat "hustlers" are often involved in different deals simultaneously: organizing goat transports, or dealing in goat heads, feet, or skins, at the same time as working for slaughterhouses or supplying meat to carefully cultivated clients.

The mixture of opportunities and difficulties that Kiamaiko's traders face are compounded by changeable market rates, which can fluctuate enormously within a day, but also according to more predictable weekly, monthly, and seasonal rhythms, such as those linked to such religious festivals as Eid and Christmas.

34 Jessica Odhiambo pointed to ethnic tensions between Borana, Burjim, and Somali groups (Interview with Jessica Odhiambo, Secretary of Muungano Cooperative, October 13, 2017), which may also have played a part in rivalries between the Kiamaiko market and attempts to create a new market at Umoja, in Korogocho (Interview with Muhidi Abdi Boshe, member of Umjoja Goat Centre Society, December 6, 2017).

35 This was true of very many traders we talked to in Kiamaiko. See also Reuters 2017.

As with flooding and cholera in Mathare, these fluctuations are also weather-related. During drought, for example, goat prices characteristically drop as pastoralists “upcountry” sell more stock because of lack of grazing. To become successful, or to even just secure enough to support children and relatives, often requires years of work and learning trade skills, how to read the market, and building up social and financial capital. Risks can be high because margins are low. If daily price fluctuations are misread, a trader can be out of pocket quickly, reducing their ability to participate profitably the following day. As Adimew Girasa described, “this business is like a dollar, it fluctuates [...] in the morning you might get a customer buying 1 kg of meat for 250 shillings, but later on you might get the same 1 kg of meat going for 400 shillings.”³⁶

Often those who have just arrived have to negotiate adversity for a long time before climbing the hierarchies of specialized microtasks and piecework available in Kiamaiko’s goat industry; boys cleaning lorries and grazing goats can eventually become skilled slaughtermen or even slaughterhouse foremen, or independent goat skin dealers, or join groups specializing in particular goat products. Some tasks appear gendered. For example, it is mainly men who become specialists in slaughtering; women predominate in selling goats on behalf of transporters. But everybody aspires to become meat dealers for Nairobi’s high-end hotels, where much immediate profit can be made, while dabbling in a diversity of other tasks on any day of the week. Adimew Girasa described how he arrived in Kiamaiko in 2001 from Ethiopia via Moyale, age nine or ten, having hitched a lift on a cattle truck. It took him ten years to climb the goat trade’s hierarchy of microjobs to become a specialist slaughterman working at a slaughterhouse, enabling him to marry and support children.³⁷ It had clearly been a tough journey, and

³⁶ Interview with Ade Girasa, October 11, 2017.

³⁷ Fieldnotes (Joost Fontein), “Interview with Adimew Girasa,” October 11, 2017.

when we asked him about where he hoped to be in the next ten years, he struggled to hold back tears.

Being a slaughterman is a very skilled job to do quickly, efficiently, and safely. That all goats are slaughtered according to Halal rules, regardless of one's religious loyalties, is an ecumenical aspect of Kiamaiko's goat trade worth remarking upon, even as special requests such as preparing goats "Nigerian style" (roasted unskinned with intestines in) are also easily accommodated. It takes time to develop slaughtering skills, or to know how to identify goats most likely to offer the "soft meat" that is highly desirable among Nairobi's *nyama choma* enthusiasts, and most "training" is done on the job or with help from others. But apart from such specialized skills, learning how to read the market's fluctuations, and accumulating capital, another key aspect of success in Kiamaiko's goat trade is establishing social connections and trustful relations with other dealers and clients. The better connected one is, the more opportunities there are for profitable trading. These connections often depend on trust. Indeed, in many ways most of Kiamaiko's businesses run on trust — money is often advanced from one's own pocket, or from clients, to purchase particular kinds of goat in return for promises of so many kilograms of meat to be delivered later that day, or to order goats direct from transporters "upcountry" or across borders. Fluctuating prices and availability means it can be hard to deliver on promises made earlier. As a result, most dealers are constantly on their phones, communicating with suppliers, clients, and potential clients. The scale of deals also vary vastly, from one or two goats sourced for a particular client, to lorry-loads carrying up to 220 goats at a time. Building "trustful" connections with clients takes time and can involve incurring short-term losses for the promise of longer-term gain. Kiamaiko's goat trading can be capricious, and "trustful" relations are much more easily lost than they are established and require constant work to nurture and stabilize.

Trust, and the social connections dependent on it, often turn on tensions of visibility and invisibility. For example, negotiations around the purchase/sale of particular goats on the market

are usually conducted in secret, and yet once a deal is struck, this is publicly marked by a highly visible, exaggerated handshake, performed so that everybody can see.³⁸ The goats themselves might then be marked with particular symbols indicating their owners. In all of Kiamaiko's seventeen slaughterhouses, slaughtered goats are hung so as to be easily seen by clients and dealers, but also by the state-employed *daktari* (veterinary inspectors) who visibly stamp slaughtered animals to certify that they are safe for consumption. That stamp matters. Condemned meat cannot be sold and, along with goats that have died in lorries coming to Nairobi, is supposed to be burned at defined spots on the market grounds or taken away by vets to specified "condemnation pits."³⁹ Doubtlessly, it sometimes finds its way back for sale, in back streets, away from plain sight. It is the need for state-sanctioned approval made visible by the vets' stamps that make the slaughterhouses key players in the complex divisions of roles, tasks, responsibilities, and profits in Kiamaiko's goat industry.⁴⁰

If the nexus of visibility, invisibility, and trust affects all relationships in Kiamaiko, then it takes on more significance in some than others. Relations between meat dealers and their butcher and "hotel"⁴¹ clients are particularly valued, and dealers might hesitate to share their contacts with other dealers for fear of having their clients poached, unless significant trust between them has already been established. If competing dealers are not always to be trusted, the same could also be said of clients, who might fail to honor previous agreements for goats or meat that the dealer has already purchased with his own funds. As a result, dealers often hesitate to upfront their cash

38 See *Mbuzi za Nairobi (Goats of Nairobi)*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HAXsoifpSyo>.

39 Interview with Ephantus Njogu Njeri, Inspecting Officer, Veterinary Public Health Department, November 13, 2017.

40 Fieldnotes (Joost Fontein) "Interview with Adimew Girassa," October 11, 2017; "Interview with Ade Girasa," October 11, 2017.

41 "Hotels" in local parlance can refer to roadside eateries and restaurants as often as it does Nairobi's high-end hotels.

unless they are flush and ready to take such a risk, or if they are confident about their clients. Relations between slaughtermen and slaughterhouse “foremen” are also subject to similar uncertainties, especially as slaughtermen sometimes work “freelance” across different slaughterhouses or have their own “side hustle” dealing with particular clients. Foremen are responsible for recording all goats slaughtered within each slaughterhouse, and this is to make the activities of slaughterhouses transparent (i.e., visible) to state regulators and vets, but also, perhaps, a mechanism whereby slaughterhouse owners can monitor their foremen. Slaughtermen, meat dealers, and goat traders are all quite visible in Kiamaiko, but the business interests, syndicates, and cartels that lie behind the slaughterhouses are often hidden from view and difficult to identify. Yet at the same time, their ethnic origin or religious affiliation is often plain from the names of slaughterhouses (many of which are Burji or Somali) prominently displayed above their streetside entrances.

Unlike Nairobi’s Burma market, where much of the city’s beef is sold and which has its origins in older, colonial attempts to regulate the meat industry and food safety,⁴² Kiamaiko emerged in the minimal presence of state regulation. As with water and sanitation in nearby Mathare, this created opportunities that the groups such as the Tawakal and the cartels behind Kiamaiko’s slaughterhouses have exploited with great effect. It gave traction to Kiamaiko’s expanding goat industry and impetus to the numerous migrants drawn by its promised livelihood opportunities. Rather belatedly, since the 2000s, city and government authorities have repeatedly tried to assert authority over Kiamaiko’s goat market and slaughterhouses. As the underregulated expansion of the city east and northward continued, a proliferation of new high-rise flats locked in the open field of the market with its border of goat pens and *mabati* (corrugated sheets) housing, and Kiamaiko was redefined as a residential area.

42 Interview with Ephantus Njogu Njeri, Inspecting Officer, Veterinary Public Health Department, November 13, 2017.

Muungano's decision in 2018 to sell its *shamba* (farm) would perhaps have inevitably resulted from this urban expansion, but it was undoubtedly also spurred by the city's repeated attempts to relocate the market and slaughterhouses to new sites across the city. As many of Kiamaiko's slaughterhouses, butcheries, and eateries occupied the ground and first-floor levels of new high-rise residential flats, environmental officials' worries about leakages of slaughterhouse pollutants and animal waste coagulated with rising consumer concerns about food safety, and city planners grew anxious about the incongruity of animal trading and slaughter taking place within designated (human) residential areas. All of this likely got further traction amidst the deepening intrigues surrounding the secretive and less-than-visible business interests lying behind the slaughterhouses. Since the late 2000s, an area of vacant land several kilometers away, off Kangundo Road, has been demarcated by city authorities for a new, relocated, goat market. But so far all attempts to implement this long-discussed move have been unsuccessful. Suspicions and rumors abound that influential interests behind the slaughterhouses delayed the implementation of this move.

Much remains uncertain about the future of Kiamaiko's goat industry. It remains unclear what interests might be served and who will be excluded. It seems likely many of Kiamaiko's "invisible" cartels will prevail. Even the county commissioner for Huruma was doubtful in February 2018 that Kiamaiko's market or its slaughterhouses would be successfully moved. He described attempts to close the slaughterhouses in political terms rather than the National Environment Management Authority's (NEMA) environmental concerns.⁴³ Yet only a month or two later, NEMA suspended all of Kiamaiko's slaughterhouses, citing dangerous leakages of contaminants into Mathare River (CapitalFM 2018; *Business Today* 2018).⁴⁴ During this month-long stoppage, trading at the market continued, but goats were

43 Fieldnotes: (Mercy Gitonga) "Interview with Moses Oruma, Huruma County Commissioner Office," February 9, 2018.

44 The issue arose again later in the year (see *The Star* 2018a).

sent for slaughtering and processing to a new, large, partly government-owned, meat-packing complex (confusingly called NEEMA) established at Lucky Summer, in which the Tawakal too has invested, alongside companies such as QMP (Quality Meat Packers Ltd.).⁴⁵ It is from here that growing meat exports to the Middle East derive. Yet, four weeks later, Kiamaiko's slaughterhouses reopened and business was back to normal. By the end of 2018, NEMA intervened again, giving "Kiamaiko goat market traders one year to find an alternative site for business" because "the popular market is not suitable for hygienic slaughter" as it "lacked water, lavatories, and lights" and "there were no county health offices at the market" (*The Star* 2018a). A report by the Trade Committee to Nairobi's County Assembly also raised questions about the lack of tax payments by traders, and a "pending court case concerning the ownership of the market was also discovered."⁴⁶ A final resolution of that case remains uncertain, as does what it means for the Muunango Cooperative's claim to the land, the Tawakal's control of the goat market, the livelihoods of Kiamaiko's many traders, and NEMA's efforts to relocate its market and slaughterhouses elsewhere. In May 2021, a new facility for "local" goat trading and slaughter, next to NEEMA's new meat packing complex, was opened by President Kenyatta. A year later, Kiamaiko's slaughterhouses again received notice to close and move to the new site, but it was successfully challenged in court.⁴⁷ At time of this writing (July 2022), the case remains unresolved and goat slaughtering continues in Kiamaiko. These continuing uncertainties reflect the consequential yet productive contingencies that have long been part of the meshwork of material and corporeal flows and blockages that make up Kiamaiko's goat industry, the politics it

45 Interview with Muktar Mohammed Omar, Ndur Abdi, and Abdifalah Dugow, of the Tawakal, December 8, 2017.

46 "Kiamaiko Goat Market to Close over Hygiene, Ownership Issue," *The Star*, December 12, 2018.

47 "Kiamaiko Slaughterhouses Obtain Court Orders Barring Closure," *The Star*, April 7, 2022.

affords, and the lives of those who come there from across the region to forge a living.

* * *

Collective Bodies of Movement, Protest, and Exclusion

If material/corporeal flows, blockages, leakages, containments, and transformations are key to stabilizing bodies, lives, and livelihoods within the city, then how flows of collective bodies are managed (or not) is also important for understanding nodes of security, certainty, and contingency in Nairobi. The example of Kiamaiko goat market illustrates powerfully how regional movements of human and animal bodies into the city are part of its emergent becoming. Equally important, however, are flows of human bodies *within*, *across*, and *out* of the city; whether the routinized movements of daily or seasonal traffic or the exceptional moments of collective action or violent eviction. The shape, layout, and architecture of the city were planned from the very beginning to enable the movement of some bodies and the containment or exclusion of others. At certain junctures, such as during tense election months, or the Mau Mau emergency of the 1950s, authorities intervene with draconian measures to curtail the movement of some bodies, particularly those mobilized collectively in the pursuit of political ends, or even enforce the evacuation of entire populations of bodies deemed a threat to “order.” Conversely, efforts to resist official measures of containment and control—from peaceful protests to the extremes of postelection violence—often mobilize collective bodies to deliberately target geographies of movement, such as when makeshift roadblocks of burning tires impede flows of people in ways that mirror police check points, but are also supposed to defy them (Lynch 2015). At the same time, more quotidian blockages in the city’s transport arteries are the subject of enormous official effort and expense, as roads across Nairobi are upgraded to allow traffic to flow, and to enable the aspirations of a growing middle class (for car ownership and suburban

residence) to be realized, often at the expense of others dispossessed of their homes, neighborhoods, and livelihoods through the clearances that road expansions also often entail.

Both contributions in this section are about movements of collective bodies and speak to how some bodies have been repeatedly subjected to violence, dispossession, and exclusion by state forces in Nairobi, spanning across the colonial and post-colonial periods. They show how state-orchestrated violence is at once both collectivizing — targeting specific groups of bodies again and again — and deeply individualizing, as some are excluded from the rights and opportunities that others enjoy, and particular bodies are left nursing injuries, loss, and extreme poverty that can have deep, continuing personal and social legacies. The photographic essay by Annie Pfingst on Mathare highlights how historical violence against groups of bodies during the late colonial removals of Operation Anvil in the mid-twentieth century continue to have salience through ongoing economic marginalization manifest in the dilapidated, ephemeral fabrics and insecurities of slum living. Here resistance amounts not so much to protest, riots, or marches, which always risk violent reprisal. Although protests do occur (and gang-led violence in Mathare and other “slums” is prevalent), more common quotidian defiance takes place simply through continued presence. A continuing meshwork of bodies face off the vagaries of both gang and state-sanctioned violence, and sticks a middle finger up at the continuous denigrations by middle-class and government commentators of informal area residents as “slum dwellers” and “thugs,” designations that legitimize continued neglect and repeated lethal violence against some bodies under the guise of protecting all. It is striking how a colonial lexicon of contamination and infection deployed in the screening of evicted residents and detainees residents during the Emergency echoes these more contemporary denigrations and the effects they have.

In his contribution, Craig Halliday looks at a protest in 2017 by middle-class Nairobians against extrajudicial killings by the police elsewhere across the city. This shows how individual bod-

ies can also be collectively mobilized in protest against state violence, and against the othering effects it can have, and, in turn, how such collective mobilizations can provoke further violence. Here bodies are mobilized and utilized against other bodies on both sides, albeit in different ways and with different consequences, as the violence of security forces attempts to demonstrate the state's necropolitical (Mbembe 2003) capacity through inscribing itself in the very corporeality of bodies and lives, and protestors position their bodies in deliberate defiance to this.

* * *

Dispossession (Annie Pfungst)

Fig. 6. Annie Pfungst, *Mathare*, May 2018.

Fig. 7. Annie Pfungst, *Mathare*, May 2018.

Fig. 8. The old Mathare, mud houses and roofs of cardboard. June 30, 1971.

Fig. 9. Annie Pfungst, *Mathare*, May 2018.

Fig. 10. Africans rounded up in police raids have their papers checked at a screening camp. October 19, 1953.

Fig. 11. Annie Pfungst, *Mathare*, May 2018.

Fig. 12. Annie Pfungst, *Mathare*, May 2018.

Fig. 13. Women sit beside their belongings after obeying a chief's order to pull down their houses. August 29, 1979.

Fig. 14. Kikuyu wives queue for their permits, which enable them to be repatriated [...] reserves. The permits issued [...] from Pumwani Memorial Hall. Just taken over as a Police Centre. October 2, 1953.

Fig. 15. Mathare Valley. Some of the homeless residents of Mathare walk through the ashes of their homes looking for possessions. September 10, 1970.

Fig. 16. Annie Pfungst, *Mathare*, May 2018.

Fig. 17. Waiting at the tap to draw water and then sell it is a serious business, Mathare valley. July 7, 1971.

Fig. 18. Annie Pfungst, *Mathare*, May 2018.

Fig. 19. Annie Pfungst, *Mathare*, May 2018.

Fig. 20. Annie Pfungst, *Mathare*, May 2018.

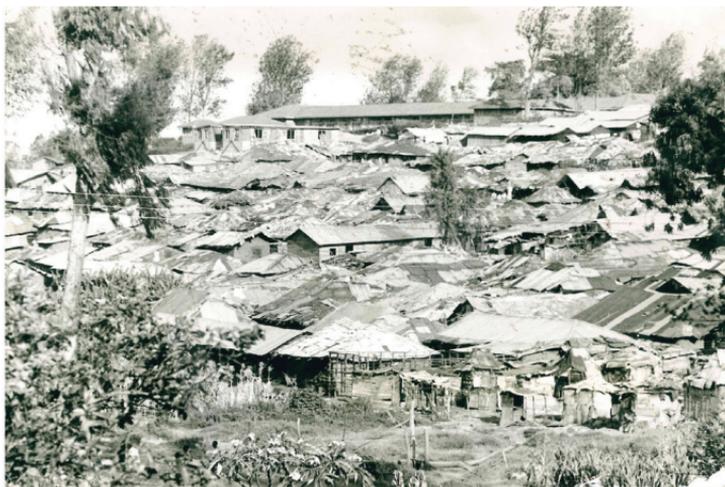
Fig. 21. Annie Pfungst, *Mathare*, May 2018.

Fig. 22. Annie Pfungst, *Mathare*, May 2018.

Fig. 23. Annie Pfungst, *Mathare*, May 2018.







The certainties of Kenyan life, land, and freedom were disrupted and destroyed through British colonial settlement. Nairobi became the location for thousands of those who lost their land, their homesteads, and their livelihoods. Life became insecure; there was no certainty other than the violence of dispossession and oppression. Colonial certainty about the rightness of colonial settlement, governance, and moral value framed the colonial determination to break Kenyan resistance. The colonial frame was incapable of recognizing the legitimacy of Kenyan complaints about the loss of land, removals, and dispossession and was only able to apply a racialized depiction of resistance fueled by violent intent, a threat to the life of the colonial project and of settlers.

The British colonial response to what it framed as the disorder and lawlessness of Kenyan resistance, and to the Land and Freedom Army (also known as Mau Mau) was enacted through the 1952 state of emergency proclaimed to secure public safety, the defense of the territory, the maintenance of public order, and the suppression of mutiny, rebellion, and riot. The files of the British Colonial Administration of the state of emergency of the 1950s held at the National Archives at Kew, in the UK,⁴⁸

48 The “migrated files” of the British Colonial Administration’s state of emergency in Kenya were released to the public as a consequence of the case of





depicts Kenyans as disloyal to the colonial order, their subjectivity, agency, and bodies subject to restrictions, arrest, interrogation, detention, and execution.

Thousands were detained under a series of evacuation orders whose aim was to clean Nairobi. These included Operation Jock Scott and Operation Anvil. Those detained were sent for screening, and from there for further interrogation, for detention, or, for a minority, to release. Those sent for interrogation/screening and detention were transported across Kenya to Manyani and Mackinnon Road in Voi and to Manda Island and Takwa Special Detention Camp off Lamu where they were subject to harm and injury — forced labor, beatings, overpowering force, and torture.⁴⁹

Language functioned as a racialized armature over which the colonial order hung its operations, authorized its practices. Encounters with the architectures and technologies of colonial dispossession and oppression were individual and communal, with individual and communal effects. Aside from designations of disloyalty and rebellion — adherents of Mau Mau or those

Ndiku Mutua and others against the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in the High Court of Justice in London, April 7–14, 2011. See <https://www.asser.nl/upload/documents/20130311T095828-mutua-v-ors-judgment%20judgment%2021-07-2011.pdf>.

49 Ibid.





resisting the colonial order were considered “by natural temper [to] tend to truculence, resentment of authority, and hostility to Europeans.”⁵⁰ There was also a vocabulary of disease and infection, not only of those deemed “hard-core” and to be a direct danger to the colonial order, but also those who might “infect”

⁵⁰ Inward Telegram to the Secretary of State for the Colonies from Acting Governor Kenya June 1, 1954, TNA [The National Archive (Kew)], DO 35/5352.

others not considered adherents but with whom they might come into contact, including in detention camps.

Throughout the period of the colonial state of emergency, those subject to the violent containment of colonial rule found themselves, individually and collectively

| | | | |
|------------|--------------|--------------------|-------------|
| Arrested | Counted | Detained | Documented |
| Encircled | Enclosed | Executed | Gendered |
| Imprisoned | Interrogated | Legally determined | Racialized |
| Rationed | Removed | Screened | Starved |
| Tagged | Tortured | Transferred | Transported |





Those arrested, sent for screening through Operation Anvil, and interrogated were designated as either white (harmless), released, and allowed to return to their normal employment; grey (slightly contaminated) and “to be given the opportunity to prove by cooperation and hard work that they can be released without danger to the rest of the community”; while those designated as Black (dangerous Mau Mau supporters) “would be detained for a long time and be subject to rehabilitation designed to make them good citizens.”⁵¹

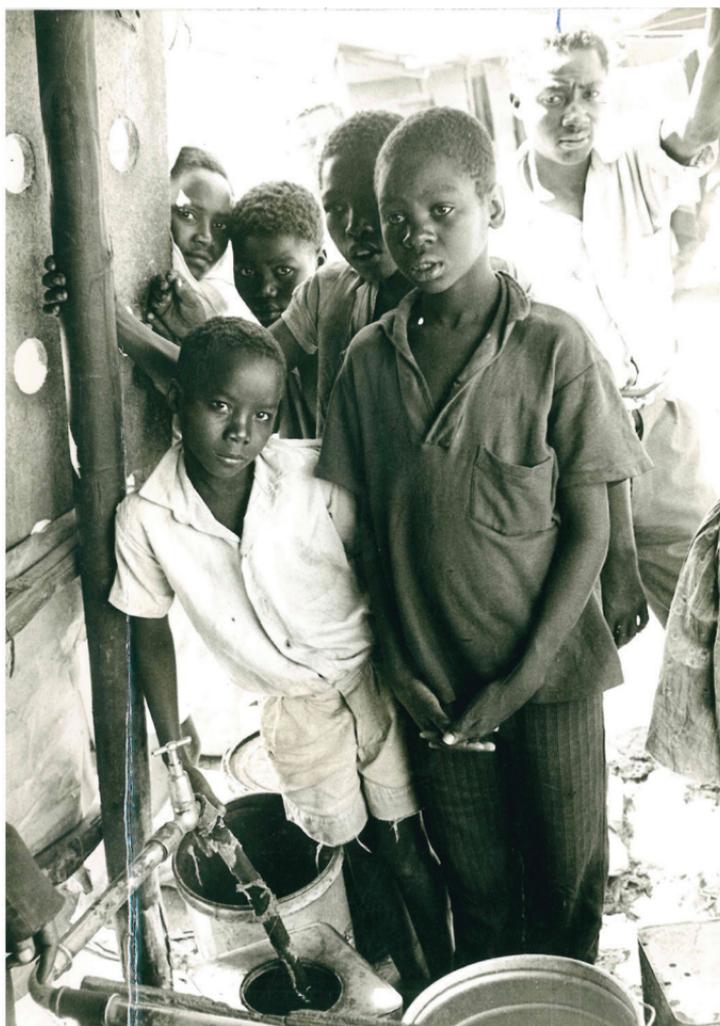
The movement of detainees, often under military conditions, across the country and the assemblage of zones of imprisonment (detention camps, works camps, and screening centers) together with mechanisms of control and containment (passes, permissions, and curfews) and material and spatial arrangements (walls, ditches, and enclosures) rendered Kenya a carceral geography; Nairobi neighborhoods, subject to surveillance, interrogation, arbitrary arrest, and detention, were assembled as multiple sites of punishment.

“Legal racism” (Wertheimer 2011, 469), through which the racialized hierarchy of life was given legal power through both

51 Ibid., and “Kenya Suspects Graded Rehabilitation Plan. From Our Correspondent,” *Times Nairobi*, May 9, 1954, in TNA DO 35/5352.



the legislation enabling a state of emergency and a myriad of legal and administrative practices regulating the lives of Kenyans under colonial control, framed the precarity of those detained. “Legal racism” would in time be coupled with what has been described as an “accountability deficit” — refusal on the part of officials to account for mistreatment, torture, deaths, and injury







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of detainees. Aofe Duffy argues that such an “accountability deficit” is the “legacy of detention without trial as it was practiced in colonial Kenya” (2015, 490).

The injury and harm rendered through colonial spatiality and governance, including but not limited to the interrogation, screening, and detention of Operation Anvil, continue in the materiality and the spatial configuration of the communities of Mathare, a materiality and spatiality of neglect and abandonment already configured through urban planning, policing, and demolition—Mathare was bulldozed in 1953, prefiguring the expulsions of the following year (Kimari 2017). Injury and harm, what we might frame as the carceral “afterlives” of empire, are evident in the continuity of criminalization, policing, control, and containment found across Mathare and east Nairobi (Pfingst and Kimari 2021).

* * *

The Bodies of Protest: Reflections on “Stop Killing Us: A Protest against Police Killing Protestors” (Craig Halliday; images by Craig Halliday and Al-Amin Mutunga)

Fig. 24. Al-Amin Mutunga, (no title), 2017.

Fig. 25. Craig Halliday, (no title), 2017.

Fig. 26. Craig Halliday, (no title), 2017.

Fig. 27. Al-Amin Mutunga, (no title), 2017.

Fig. 28. Craig Halliday, (no title), 2017.

Fig. 29. Al-Amin Mutunga, (no title), 2017.

Fig. 30. Craig Halliday, (no title), 2017.

Fig. 31. Al-Amin Mutunga, (no title), 2017.

Fig. 32. Al-Amin Mutunga, (no title), 2017.

Fig. 33. Craig Halliday, (no title), 2017.

Fig. 34. Al-Amin Mutunga, (no title), 2017.

Unlike the usual arduous weekday commute into the city, Thursday, October 19, 2017, was distinctly different. In fact, for the past week or so the city’s frenzied atmosphere of vehicles clogging the main arteries in and out of Nairobi’s Central Business District were, uncommonly, moving freely. The familiar hustle and bustle of bodies that create urban space had shrunk, even though the streets were not empty.

Stationed strategically at different sites, occupying public benches or loitering the pavements, were bodies of heavily armored bodies. Helmets, batons, rifles, tear gas canisters, riot shields, boots, and camouflaged clothing became material extensions of individual physical bodies, which made up the collective body of the General Service Unit (GSU)—a paramilitary wing of Kenya’s Police Service. Their presence was in response to mass demonstrations called for by the opposition, which, following the Supreme Court’s decision to annul the August 8, 2017, presidential elections, were demanding reforms ahead of future elections. The right to protest⁵² in three cities (Nairobi, Mombasa, and Kisumu) was temporarily banned by

52 Article 37 of the Constitution of Kenya provides for freedom of peaceful assembly and states that “every person has the right, peaceably and





the government on October 12. Lawlessness during past rallies was given as the reason, which, according to the interior minister, Fred Matiangi, included serious disruption of normal business, assault on innocent civilians, destruction, and looting of property. In case repeated protests erupted, the heavy presence of police in Nairobi's public spaces was for security. But whose security were the "security forces" protecting?

According to Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, in the month following the August 2017 elections, at least thirty-three people were killed in Nairobi, mostly as a result of police action (Amnesty International/Human Rights Watch 2017). Many more were left injured. The bodies of those who died included a woman eight-months pregnant, and four children, the youngest a nine-year-old girl. Deaths were caused by being struck by tear gas canisters fired at close range, brutal police beatings and shootings, asphyxiation from inhaling tear gas, and being trampled by fleeing crowds. This pattern of police brutality and excessive use of force against protesters also took place across other parts of Kenya. Nairobi was not an isolated case.

In response to this, the activist Boniface Mwangi and "Team Courage" organized a protest. Planned to start at 11 am in Uhuru Park, the protest would be against police killing protestors. The organizers used a network of civil society organizations and social media to mobilize support. A "Protest Code of Conduct" and "Safety Protocol," detailing possible eventualities and appropriate responses, had earlier been posted online. As I made my way to the assembly point, the high visibility of a large mass of police bodies did little to ease the uncertainties of attending the demonstration.

When I reached Uhuru Park, the air was heating up as the sun broke through the clouds. It was shortly after 11 am. A small group of people had already assembled at Freedom Corner, a section of the park that embodies the fight for justice. Today this

unarmed, to assemble, to demonstrate, to picket, and to present petitions to public authorities."





PAY
POLICE
WELL

STOP
PROTESTS



site is marked by a monument dedicated to the thousands killed, tortured, and jailed in the Mau Mau rebellion and struggle for independence. However, it was the subversive use of female bodies that has given this site its prominence. In the late 1980s, Wangari Maathai led hundreds of protestors, mainly women, against plans to erect a huge building for the ruling party in the park. Their efforts stopped this from happening and in so doing inspired a generation of other Kenyan civic activists. Maathai recognized the importance of accessible public space that was becoming increasingly encroached upon by urbanization and privatization; the park became a space where people had the freedom to gather, and where people gathered to be free. In 1992, a group of women did just that, occupying the Freedom Corner and demanding the release of their imprisoned sons and husbands for alleged political crimes. When the police started brutally evicting the women, they used the strongest form of political protest they had at their disposal. The women threw off their clothes and exposed their bare bodies to the police — cursing them with their nakedness (Brownhill and Turner 2002). These actions reached the global stage, prompting huge support for the women's cause.

As time passes, the gathering of bodies at Freedom Corner transforms into a collective body. Individuals are no longer solitary figures on the landscape. Instead, through this act of coming together (both physically in the here and now and through shared principles and ideas) they become one, but they are not the same. There are bodies for which coming to an organized protest is something new, but also old-hand activists, youthful and timeworn bodies, and bodies of different genders. Connections, reconnections, and bonds over a united purpose are made. While this takes place, the periphery of Freedom Corner is occupied by the pacing of armored bodies — the police. As this modest group wait for the organizers to arrive and the demonstration to start, the anxious atmosphere is broken by an explosion, shortly followed by others.

For a second there is hesitation among some in the group — an uncertainty as to what has happened. For others the sound and

actions are familiar. The ground starts hissing and spews a toxic cloud of chemicals, quickly blanketing those of us slow to get away. The body of bodies separates as individuals evade the chasing haze, which is pushed on by a gentle breeze; only the park's exposed landscape enables our escape from its smother. But that is not before suffocation from the tear gas thrown by the police forces us to gasp for air. Air that was not air. Air that *is not meant* for our bodies but *was meant* for our bodies. A few breaths and exposure to this weapon cause the body's defense mechanisms to go into overdrive. Those affected choke and retch as the chemicals attach to the mucus of our throats and lung walls. Eyes begin streaming. The pain and panic is disorientating, yet the assault continues. Not only the innocent bodies of those who came to protest are affected. Those relaxing, meeting friends, and earning their livelihood in the park are not exempt from this violent sensorial assault.

As those who came to meet at Freedom Corner were pushed out of the park, another group, led by Boniface Mwangi (among others), made their way to the park. Mwangi has come to embody the face of twenty-first-century creative acts of civil disobedience in Nairobi. He founded PAWA 254 in 2011, a space for artists and activists to find innovative ways of achieving social change. In early 2017, he left the organization to focus on vying for Nairobi's Starehe parliamentary seat. This was the first demonstration attended by Mwangi since the elections. Some activists describe Mwangi's approach to activism as self-centered and depict him as suffering from a case of "celebrity syndrome," which they claim has the effect of drawing attention to the individual rather than to the injustices the collective is fighting. Such comments raise questions as to the role of powerful individuals within protests and the effect they can have on the greater movement. Even so, the actions of Mwangi and PAWA 254, in collaboration with other civil society groups, have for a half decade instilled a fiery spirit back into activism that had waned following the end of authoritarian rule and a pro-reform government elected in 2002. It is precisely this fiery spirit and use of performance, symbolism, and ritual within demonstra-

STOP KILLING US!!!

STOP
KILLING
US
A PROTEST AGAINST
POLICE KILLING PROTESTORS
#TEAMCOURAGE

ARREST
LOOTERS.
DON'T
SHOOT.

STOP KILLING
PROTESTORS



tions that has grown a reputation. This protest was to be no different.

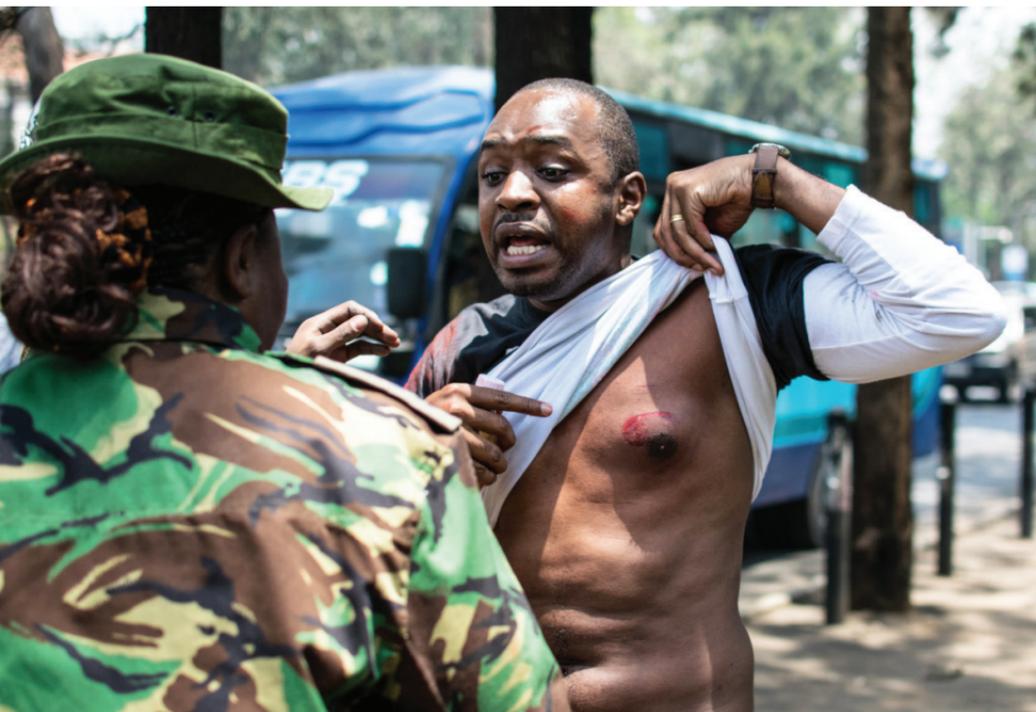
The body of demonstrators walks in unison adorned with branded black and white T-shirts; they carry placards, clutch red roses, and embrace wooden crosses bearing the names of those whose lives had been taken by the police. Despite their absence, the bodies of these dead are present through the embodiment of their memories on crosses. Above his head Mwangi carries a large model bullet with the words “Stop Killing Us” scribed onto the shell. Dress and adornment have long been used in protests within Nairobi to give expression to a group’s social and political values. Through this act of procession and memorialization, this body of demonstrators use their own bodies and representations of dead bodies to emphasize their corporeal fragility and vulnerability against the might and brutality of the weaponized and armored police and their apparent ability to act with impunity. The fragility and vulnerability of demonstrators’ bodies was about to become all too real.

A body of armed police bodies confronts the group of demonstrators. Mwangi shows the officer in charge their written notification, alerting the relevant authorities to this planned demonstration. However, this body of bodies takes orders from another body — that of Inspector-General Joseph Boinett, who instructs that the demonstrators be dispersed. As Mwangi hopelessly attempts to engage in dialogue with the officer, he is brutally interrupted. Mwangi, still with his hands in the air carrying the model bullet, is pushed by a police officer veiled in armor. Unbalanced by this, Mwangi stumbles one or two feet backward. The officer raises his riot gun and pulls the trigger, unleashing a tear gas cartridge that smashes into Mwangi’s chest. Slumping and then dropping to the ground, Mwangi’s body comes to rest in an apparently lifeless state on the side of the road. The police retreat, led by the officer in charge, seemingly only concerned with the effect tear gas will have on their bodies. Now a safe distance away, the officer in charge casts her gaze at this citizen felled by her colleague’s actions. Rather than being unconcerned and offering a nonchalant expression, this

officer's body language can't hide her emotions at this violation — with her eyes fixed on Mwangi's limp body, she smirks.

A visit to the hospital later that day revealed the injury sustained to Boniface Mwangi's body was fortunately nothing worse than a painful hematoma. Despite this act of police brutality and intimidation, Mwangi and others bravely defy abandoning their protest. Lifting his shirt and revealing his damaged body, Mwangi fervently confronts the police, as emotions flood. "I am Kenyan, I am Kenyan," he cries. Exposing his damaged body exposes the immediate consequence of callous actions by the police upon a citizen. Emotions soon turn to irritation. Confrontation ensues.

Three police swoop in attempting to arrest Mwangi, who once again drops to the floor, but unlike last time, he does it willingly. Mwangi employs a passive, nonviolent posture and uses his body as an embodiment of peaceful protest. He essentially demands, "If you want to arrest me — and in so doing display the state's criminalization and suppression of a citizen's right to peaceful protest — you will have to physically pick me up and move my body." For this to be effective it requires the physical reaction of the police, which it receives. But the police do not meet Mwangi's body with the violence we saw earlier. Instead and rather awkwardly, three officers, each using one of their hands, pick up Mwangi by his limbs, while their other hands clasp their weapons. The apprehension of Mwangi rather than other equally vocal protestors is a deliberate move. One might ask, if the face of twenty-first-century activism in Nairobi can be treated this way, what would happen to me? Holding Mwangi like a rag doll, the police exhibit their control and power over those who choose to speak out while visually proclaiming their ability to act against the constitutional rights of citizens. The performative use of the body and bodies by both Mwangi and the police creates an instant spectacle for the press, who are there to capture every moment. As a finale to this performance, though perhaps more likely because of a growing discomfort of this marvel, a tear gas canister explodes and disperses everybody.



The police's open acts of violence against the bodies of citizens, intimidation, and the arbitrary arrest of peaceful demonstrators are real risks for people who choose to exercise their constitutional right to demonstrate. Putting yourself in an insecure situation, where the levels of uncertainty as to what will happen are all too certain, quite literally results in demonstrators putting their bodies on the line. For many, the risks involved in attending demonstrations without incentives other than a desire to be heard are all too great. There were thirty demonstrators present at the *#StopKillingUs* protest. But to describe a low turnout of people attending organized demonstrations as a case of apathy brushes aside pragmatic reasons for nonparticipation. For example, it is often not the case that the everyday person will have an adequate contingency in place if they are injured and have to seek medical treatment, or miss work, or are arrested and cannot pay a bribe, or for a lawyer, and possibly as a result of this become dependent on others or cannot provide for those they have been supporting. Additionally, concerned citizens may well make their participation and voice heard through other means. The park and street become material supports for demonstrations, but spaces for engaging with "protesting bodies" expand beyond these realms.

Mwangi and Team Courage congregate once again — thanks to those bodies that carry mobile phones. They take their protest to another space in the city, boarding a bus and merging with other bodies in order to evade the police. Further confrontations with the police will occur, but for now the media houses have already started relaying what these bodies of police and protestors have been doing on the street. The protests enter other spaces, such as radio and news channels, but in the tech-savvy city of Nairobi, it is the online spaces where they meet bodies and enter that very contemporary version of the public sphere.

* * *

Making Selves: Precarity, Gender, and Performance

An important aspect of the examples above are the intersections of race, class, age, and ethnicity in Kenya. Colonial dispossessions were highly racialized, ethnicized, and had deep class-based consequences. Election violence in independent Kenya is well known for being deeply ethnicized/ethnicizing (Lynch 2011), even as this sometimes obscures deepening class inequalities that are key to how police killings of “thugs” are often legitimized. At the same time, the counterpoliticization of bodies in public protests (such as the 2017 protest discussed above) is also often a class-defined phenomena, and sometimes the tolerated preserve of Nairobi’s emergent middle classes, whose situation enables or emboldens a nonethnic position not so easily available to others living in low-income areas of the city.

The intersection of different kinds of bodily designations in experiences of violence and control are also usually gendered and gendering. Extrajudicial killings are profoundly gendered: it is the bodies of young poor Black men that are targeted above other bodies. The first two discussions in this section highlight further how violence and the control of bodies in Nairobi is profoundly gendered, but also, importantly, how it is sexualized. “My Dress, My Choice” by Doseline Kiguru addresses the enduring misogyny, patriarchy, and subjection of women in male-dominated urban spaces across the city, and in “On Male Sex Workers,” Naomi van Stapele focuses on contested sexualities and homophobia. Both speak to bodily performances. Not only collective performances of, or resistance to, gendered violence, but how bodily performances are involved in making and in challenging gender and sexual normativities. “My Dress, My Choice” points to the intersection of dressing, bodily adornments, and public spaces in contested performances of gender — and highlights again how class differentiates women who are and those who are not vulnerable to such violations — but van Stapele’s discussion highlights the intersection of bodily gesture, place, and the violation of corporeal boundaries that both performances of sexuality and sexual violence often

involve. Both speak to alienation and marginalization, to spatialized control over gendered and sexual bodies, to violence as bodily violation, and to conditions of precarity and vulnerability that some bodies experience more than (and sometimes as a direct result of) other bodies. The intersection here between bodily and sexual violence experienced by some bodies, and experiences of social/economic exclusion is important because it illustrates how different forms of vulnerability and precarity are deeply interrelated.

Such precarity links these accounts to Tessa Diphoorn's and Peter Lockwood's discussions that follow, of domestic security guards and of young footballers in Kiambu, respectively. "Disposable Bodies" highlights the precarious lives of underpaid domestic security guards employed to protect the bodies and belongings of people more privileged. Here "fitness," appearance, uniform, and the emasculated technology of the baton are important corporeal aspects of performances of security but offer little defense against armed intruders or against capricious accusations by their middle-class, wealthy, and often expatriate employers. For footballers of the Star Boyz team in Kiambu, bodily protection too is a preoccupation, albeit from injury more than violence, and sourced from the immense immateriality of the divine rather than uniforms, objects, or gesture. In Mathare, the continued presence of bodily life may be the most effective defiance to enduring state neglect and violence, but in the "hustling" peri-urban context of Nairobi's outskirts, life is "defined by its constant exertion," and the value of "having a body that works" to navigate Nairobi's highly exclusionary economy is hard to overstate. Yet for these young men, their bodies are not just about securing short-term wage labor on construction sites, or other temporary employment, but football training, bodily exertion, and display are also sources of pleasure, social ties, belonging, and self-realization. Like Nairobi's sex workers, or its security guards, these footballers' bodies are what they have to generate livelihoods and social lives and are therefore worthy of divine protection. Their bodies are also how they fashion global, "cosmopolitan" lives in defiance of the economic, social, and

political structures by which they are subjected and objectified, thereby remaking precarious landscapes through their bodily performances and presence.

* * *

My Dress, My Choice: Thinking about Access and Alienation
(Doseline Kiguru)

In July 2017, three young men accused of stripping and sexually molesting a woman in Nairobi were sentenced to death by a Kenyan court. This is the first of such convictions, against a background of rising cases of sexual harassment of women across the city, and elsewhere in the country. It must, however, be noted that the death penalty was for the crime of robbery with violence that was attached to the sexual crime. Furthermore, no executions have actually taken place in Kenya since 1987. This piece is a reflection on Nairobi read through the images of women's bodies.

Tracing the history of rural to urban migrations in Kenya, the first people to move to Nairobi were mostly young men in search of wage labor. There was work in the construction industry, in the civil service, and in businesses. Men trooped to Nairobi, but women remained behind tilling the land, taking care of livestock, and running the family from the village. As a result, Nairobi and other Kenyan cities became known as male spaces. Some of the women who first ventured into the city, especially for business, became associated only with sex work and were labeled "immoral." Because of the unequal access to work opportunities, many women were engaged in the brewing and selling of "prohibited" alcohol to city dwellers. These drinking joints became social spaces where people would meet after work (or because they didn't have work) and speak about different sociopolitical and economic issues affecting the country. Women, however, continued to be alienated from many city spaces, especially the CBD. This alienation continues today,

intersecting gender and economic dimensions in processes whereby access to the city is limited.

A few cases have led to prosecutions, or at least raised some attention from the law enforcers, but many other incidents of men policing women's bodies, and controlling their access to public spaces, remain present. Take, for example, the case of police officer Linda Okello photographed in 2014 while on duty by a journalist and accused of dressing scantily, her tight skirt contravening the National Police Service Act. This led to her demotion, after which she sued the inspector general of police, Joseph Boinet, claiming her demotion was intended to humiliate her over her mode of dress, a claim he denied, alleging it was rather a separate corruption charge levied against her. The photograph was circulated as a meme across social media in different social contexts, from those who used it to make moral pronouncements about "correct" female behavior and dress, to those who sought to celebrate the female body and reclaim its position within public spaces.

Another prominent case was that of Sabina Chege, MP, who in 2018 was accused of dressing inappropriately for parliament because her blouse was short-sleeved and "exposed her arms," which several of her male colleagues considered "immodest." This elicited a longer conversation, both within parliament and beyond, and across different media spaces, about the role that legal mechanisms in Kenya play in policing women's bodies. It served as a reminder, once again, that many such spaces were originally designed for male bodies, and even as society has changed, many such rules have not. It was, after all, only in 2013, during the tenth parliament, that "National Assembly Standing Orders" were revised to allow members into the chamber with their handbags. In making his ruling on the accusation of immodesty and inappropriate dress made against Chege, the speaker referred to "the Speakers Rules" on the dress code for members and other visitors. This prescribes the following dress code for men: a coat, collar, tie, long-sleeved shirt, long trousers, socks, shoes, or service uniform. But for the women the dress code is only described as decent, formal/business wear.

The ambiguity of this clause assisted the speaker's conclusion that Chege had not broken any house rules, but its vagueness could just as easily be used against other female MPs to regulate their dress, just as the National Police Service Act had been used against Linda Okello.

Women within formal spaces, such as the police or parliament, have their dress regulated through institutional rules, but outside, in the streets of Nairobi, such policing is more random and usually accompanied by physical and sexual violence. Before the death sentence was handed to the three young men for undressing and sexually molesting the Nairobi woman in 2017, stripping women in public for wearing "indecent clothes" was quite common. These violations were common in the streets where the acts took place, and then overflowed into social media where opinions were expressed regarding not only the violent acts themselves but also women's dress and moral obligations. It is from such that the campaign *#mydressmychoice* was formed. It mobilized women through social media to come together to protest in the streets of Nairobi and to call upon the government to take action to end violence against women.

But even as the *#mydressmychoice* demonstration was taking place, many across Nairobi pointed out that only women with financial means have the privilege of dressing as they choose, without facing sexual harassment on the streets. This is because those with financial means can afford to hire taxis or use private transport to move across town, as opposed to those women whose only form of mobility is navigating the town by foot or by public transport. What did emerge, however, was the power of social media to address such questions of gendered access and alienation. Ambiguously both a private and public platform, social media has been used as a tool to highlight and contest the violence often meted out on female bodies for "failing" to uphold social morality. By challenging the notion that society's misogynistic moral codes are only preserved in female bodies, and in their public presentation, these conversations have helped provoke a much needed debate about gendered restrictions on women's access to, and alienation from, the city, a debate that

moves beyond gender to also look at the sociopolitical and economic aspects of gendered forms of alienation that continue to affect daily life for women in Nairobi.

* * *

On Male Sex Workers (Naomi van Stapele)

Young male sex workers in Nairobi are highly criminalized and marginalized, and often experience (sexual) violence by police, clients, and other people. Most are homeless because they fear discrimination by their neighbors in areas where they could afford to rent a house, and do not make enough to stay in the numerous student hostels dispersed all over the city. The vignette below describes how some of these sex workers as individual and collective bodies engage in all kinds of security practices, ranging from “acting straight” in public spaces or staying away from a mainstream hospital after being gang raped, to sleeping together sideways in a single hostel room for a night. Amidst all these security measures, young male sex workers dress and act in certain ways to attract clients and secure an income from the safety of small groups in an inconspicuous beer hall in the middle of the city center.

Lady, a young gay male sex worker from Dandora, sat at the public toilet, cigarette in one hand and a small black plastic bag with khat in the other. His left cheek was stretched to its limits, filled with a mash of green leaves. A customer came out of the toilet and Lady got up while throwing the cigarette butt on the muddy ground. He took a dirty rag mop and a bucket full of greyish water into the men’s toilet and swapped the urine, mud splashes, and some putrid water into tidy large circles. He looked at his watch, another hour to go. He sat back down on the rickety wooden bench, next to two of his male friends and co-workers from Dandora. His short dreads looked shaggy, his shoulders squared and his legs wide apart. “Acting straight,” he called it. “At the public toilet I act straight, just a guy from the ghetto, working at the public toilet with some of the other guys

from the ghetto.” He shared that it is not safe to be “out,” not at home or at the public toilet. He laughed, “They would kill me, no, they would first rape me and then kill me.” At nine exactly, he stood up and just walked out, taking me swiftly by the hand.

A hundred meters down the road, he suddenly turned left and immediately around the corner, and out of sight of the public toilet he started swaying his hips and throwing his imaginary long hair loose before tying it into a fashionable bun in the nape of his neck. He drew his shoulders up high and arched his back, and with elegant strides he walked into a beer hall about 200 meters from the public toilet. His transformation from a “ghetto guy” to a “slay queen” in just 200 meters was astonishing to observe. He later explained that he only felt safe “to be myself where the beer hall is because there we are so many.” In the dark hall, more than fifty young, beautiful-looking men were huddled together in small groups. Their clothes did not stand out, but the way they wore them did. T-shirts were pulled back to reveal tender midriffs and jeans hung low to bring out their behinds. Some had equally stretched cheeks and black plastic pouches as Lady, others were sharing a bottle of *makali* (cheap, strong alcohol), and all were eyeing the older men sitting in the middle of the large room. A few young men were in the midst of applying makeup together, sharing a mirror. Across from them, several women sat together, wearing long weaves, heavy makeup, and short skirts, also looking at the older men who were enjoying roasted meat and beer, and who occasionally checked either side of the hall. Sometimes eye contact was made, and a young man or woman would walk to a table in the middle and strike a deal for the night.

One of the young men, Princess, cried out when he saw me and immediately drew me to the back of the hall where the toilets were located. The stink was stiffening. Bones from the small butchery next to the restroom lay in rotting heaps next to the garbage from the bar, all drowned in water from an overflowing toilet. A rat the size of a small cat scuttled by. Without announcement, Princess abruptly stripped down his jeans and showed me his behind. All I could see was caked blood on his

jeans and on his skin. I gasped, but he just turned around and put on his pants as if nothing much was up. “Yesterday, I was gang raped. It hurts!” His gorgeous face was dimly lit, but I did see he was trying to be braver than he actually felt. I hugged him and told him he should go to a hospital. He did not want to go to a normal hospital, he said, “because of stigma.” He feared that they would arrest him for having anal sex, something that has happened to several of his peers. After long deliberation, he agreed to go to the Sex Workers Outreach Program (SWOP) nearby. After treatment, he told me that his main worry was not so much his health but that he was not able to work now for at least a week and would have to find other ways to “eat.” “I can suck someone, or give him a hand job, but that is not the same money. I may have to steal from clients, which is dangerous.”

He and some of his fellow male sex workers decided that night to pool their money to share a room, sleeping sideways on a single bed. One explained: “What happened to Princess, it puts that fear in you, ah, we sleep under lorries or in the street, anything can happen. But today we don’t have that courage so we sleep together in a room, and maybe we can even have a shower.”

* * *

Disposable Bodies (Tessa Diphoorn)

Every day as I enter and exit my apartment complex, I see the day guard, Waylan, polishing his shoes with a worn-out brush, some old newspapers, and water. He can’t afford to buy the real leather polish, he tells me. His meagre salary of 9000 Kenyan shilling (KSH) per month doesn’t provide space for such luxuries, particularly as he has a family of three kids who live close to the Ugandan border. With whatever money he has left over, he is just able to pay for food and rent for a small shack in Kawangware. His salary is far below the minimum wage for the private security sector, and he knows this. When I tell him that another company might pay more, he brushes this off and says that,

eventually, “they are all the same.” I am unable to convince him otherwise. He is also certain that they won’t recruit him, because he has no certificates or training. His employer — Always Ready Security — should have provided him with a basic level of training, but Waylan didn’t receive this, and he feels that he has to gain work experience before he can move up to a bigger company that pays better.

This applies for most security guards in Nairobi, especially in the informal sector, who are very often “hired and taken from the street,” given a uniform and told to work a minimum of twelve hours a day for six days a week. And during those working days, they are expected to come to work “looking clean and fresh.” His uniform must be spotless and neatly ironed, without creases. Because he can’t afford an iron, he uses old books to straighten out his uniform. He only has two sets, so he washes them once a week, and sometimes not even. In contrast to the requirement that employers pay for uniforms, he paid for both sets of uniforms through monthly salary deductions, and his last payment was three months ago. He talks about his uniform with pride. Despite the lack of training and low wages, the uniform is a form of status that shows he is “providing” for his family. He agrees that he must “look clean and fresh” and that his body must be “fit.” Although Waylan doesn’t engage in regular exercise and spends most of his days sitting down, with intervals of walking toward the gate, he narrates how his body must be fit, for the “security work.” In case “thugs” might come to this apartment complex, he has to show that he can take them on. So he must spend time working on his uniform, polishing his shoes, and looking fit. When I ask him how he can protect himself, he shows me his worn-down baton. Unlike other parts of the world, security guards in Kenya are not armed (by law) and must rely on such defensive tools to stop crime. As he shows me his baton, he laughs, as if he knows that this will not protect him against armed intruders, and he then shrugs and says, “It isn’t a gun.”

Yet despite these shortcomings, he is expected to protect the inhabitants of the apartment complex I live in by determining

access beyond the gates and questioning whether potential visitors are welcome to enter or not. Another company owner once mentioned to me that “the guards are the first line of defense if something happens.” Yet they are also the first ones to be suspected if an incident occurs — they are responsible for the “inside job” and very often immediately fired and placed (by some companies) on the notorious “Blacklist,” a list filled with dangerous and untrustworthy bodies.

Waylan is now in that list. One day he wasn’t at the gate, not polishing his shoes any longer. It was unclear what exactly transpired, but I was told that he had a disagreement with one of the nannies and that her employers (residents of the complex) had demanded he be fired. And that’s what happened, gone, just like that.

* * *

Football in Kiambu (Peter Lockwood)

“We thank you, Lord, that there were no serious injuries today.” Mungai leads the team in prayer. The players are huddled together, arms around each other. Hats are removed, and a silence has fallen. “For there were no serious injuries, Father.” We stand in the empty playing field located far beyond Nairobi’s leafy northern suburbs, part of a growing metropolitan sprawl in southern Kiambu County. “Protect us now, Father, as we go home, Father.” In the peri-urban areas that border Nairobi, amidst routines of casual labor and outright boredom, football is a practice that manifests experiences of joy and success — a means for young men to realize and express a “talent” honed over the course of their young lives kicking balls around on their *shambas* with the neighborhood boys. “Amen.” The players, most of them between nineteen and twenty-six, utter the words and then begin the long journey home past enormous tea plantations and smallholder farms. The conversation returns to football — the Premier League fixtures of the weekend or the classic debate between Ronaldo and Messi (who is the GOAT?) — and

as night falls, *matatus* occasionally speed past, heading in the direction of Nairobi from Kiambu town.

Every Star Boyz player prays to God, especially after training and after matches. The misfortune of injuries in the course of a football match is warded against with the protection of God. As casual laborers in their work lives, Star Boyz players know the importance of having a body that works (Mauss 1973[1934]; Staples 2011). The requirement of protection reminds us of the reliance on the body in a “hustling” economy (Thieme 2013). For those who finished secondary school up to Form 4 or perhaps Class 8 of primary school, a life in the hustling economy is defined by its constant exertion. Nairobi and its metropolitan environs are defined by a political economy of wage hunting that requires able bodies. In the areas of Kiambu I know, some physically disabled men are often cared for by kin and continue working in their own gardens, but others might deny them their status as a *mündū* (human) capable of possessing rights over the land and family inheritance.

In the past, many of the Star Boyz would have worked on tea plantations, but more and more work is found on building sites, constructing fabulous middle-class houses in gated communities often built by real estate firms that — Kiambu people speculate — have absorbed capital through nefarious means, from SACCOS or perhaps from government coffers. Nairobi’s “working class” — those with white-collar jobs — now live adjacent to the farms of peasant households, emblematic of the aspirational ideologies that fetishize economic success and which permeate modern Kenya.

Not long after I moved to Kiambu County in early 2017, the Two Rivers Mall was completed. The towering fortress, something of a temple to a powerful imagination of what middle-class lifestyle entails, has become an attraction for many of the Star Boyz players — a place for those with cash to take dates at weekends, and for practically anyone to partake in the visual manifestation of modernity. Taking selfies in front of its shops and attractions is par for the course, reminiscent of Philip Kwame Apagya’s photography (cf. Ferguson 2002). On the one

hand, there is the desire to partake in a global society through displaying the body (what Roland Barthes called “the corps”) against the backdrop of a world of commodities and food chains — Pizza Inn and Kentucky Fried Chicken. On the other, the wonder of a building that trumps in its sheer aesthetics even the plush high-rise flats of nearby Ruaka.

Rather than the impression of a disciplined, laboring body as analyzed by Michel Foucault — a body more typical to the factory contexts of industrialized and industrializing nations — the aspirational Nairobi one perceives today appears defined by wage-hunting subjects who must volunteer their labor in pursuit of such horizons (Kalb 2015). In this landscape of precarity, it is little surprise that young men turn to God — a power beyond with the capacity to protect their bodies, their ultimate and necessary means to realize even a modicum of wealth, the condition for participation in the new, middle-income Kenya.

* * *

Making Dead

If the previous examples all illustrate, in diverse ways, how corporeal flows/blockages and bodily performances — individual and collective — are key to processes of making (or denying) secure bodies and certain livable lives in Nairobi, then the two contributions in this last section show how material, performative, and semantic processes of making dead too are caught up in the becoming of the city. Francesco Colona draws attention to the “special” and deeply uncertain “plasticity” of bodies constituted and “othered” as “thugs” through assemblages of objects, violence, stories, corpses, and technologies, including security fences and newspapers, guns and social media, and pathologists’ tables and crowded city morgues. This corporeal plasticity demands the work of categorization, stabilization, and “holding still,” exactly because the bodies of “thugs” and of “victims” are not self-evident. Often they “share the same markers” and “anybody” (but especially young Black men from Nairobi’s “slums”)

can “be a thug.” “Thugs” and “thuggish bodies” are therefore actively constituted through complex assemblages of stories, actions, and things, of which extrajudicial killings by police is but one, albeit often devastatingly absolute, component, and one that is brutally reductionist in its anonymizing effects. When a young Black man is killed as a “thug,” little room remains for anything else about him to matter anymore, and yet this constantly reinforces older and broader processes of class-inferred “criminalization,” so that “everyone in an entire category of people could — possibly — be a thug.”

In the last piece, Lamont picks up some of these themes by focusing not on the violent and often fatal othering of young men in Nairobi’s “slums” but, rather, on the funeral of a Nairobi man brought “home” to Meru for burial, a form of “good death” to which many migrant, working men of an older generation continue to aspire, to avoid the shame and anonymity of being buried in Nairobi’s cemeteries. Lamont’s fascination with the “smell” of death and the intermingling of corporeal and other materials during this burial bring our focus back to the corporeal and material flows and blockages with which we began this chapter. It also returns our attention to the recursive flows of bodies into and out of the city, particularly between rural and urban areas, thereby illustrating how cities, like bodies, too are leaky, and this leakiness is as crucial to ongoing processes of making the ever-emergent city as it is to the multiple, contingent processes of securing lives and bodies within it.

* * *

The Making of a Thuggish Body (Francesco Colona)

“Anybody can be a thug! [...] Even you!” That is what John, a longtime private security officer in Nairobi, once yelled at me to make an impression. I had asked him and his colleagues, while they were slipping into their uniforms, who were these thugs I kept hearing about. When I first arrived in Nairobi, I read, heard, and learned about “thugs.” Thugs could be everywhere,

behind any corner, ready to strike and make your victimhood status change in a heartbeat: from a “victim in the making” — as one of my interlocutors loved to put it — into just a victim. Day after day, I opened newspapers and read how two, three, or four “suspected thugs” had been “gunned down” (The Standard 2019) by the police or by an overly zealous citizen with a gun permit. Rarely, if ever, would these small news flashes break the pattern. If they did, they would tell the readers that among these thugs, who were overwhelmingly poor young Black men, there was also a woman (The Standard 2015k) or an Asian (never, to my knowledge, a white person), exceptions that confirmed the rule. On social media, such news would sometime spin out of control. At the end of March 2017, a smartphone video went viral through Kenyan social media showing a plainclothes police officer shooting, in the back, a surrendering and unarmed young man lying on the ground. Newspapers and television news discussing the video identified the young man as a “thug” and member of a renowned gang (cf. van Stapele 2020; Human Rights Watch 2017). This label was enough to propel widespread public support for the cold-blooded and nonchalant killing. Only a few questioned it in outrage. Once designated a “thug,” the young man, apparently, could not be considered a victim.

During my fieldwork I was invited to join a WhatsApp group that kept its members up to date with crimes and dangers in the city. A shootout had just occurred between police and “some” thugs in an area adjacent to Parklands. Group members narrated the battle live. A few pictures of a dead young man lying in a pool of blood were shared. Someone asked if the dead body was a thug or a victim. Uncertainty arose. A pause in the flow of messages and notifications. How can they, after all, be told apart? Meanwhile the body count increased. First four, then six thugs killed. There was no information about how many carried out the original attack. What about the dead body in the picture? That question slipped out of the running conversation. A vehicle and two guns were recovered, according to some sources. The police were praised for their “commendable execution of duty.”

Once someone becomes a suspected thug, one that has been gunned down, the dead body is not just a dead body (Colona 2019, chap. 5). It enters the city morgue with other dead thuggish bodies. The bullets are extracted. If the family is known, my interlocutors told me, they will be charged with the costs for the body to be released and given a proper burial. After all, he was a thug. And, who could say otherwise once the police have said that he “intended to commit a crime”? (*The Star* 2018b). This body of dead bodies “establish[es] the *parameters of otherness* [...] in situations of categorical uncertainty,” as Arjun Appadurai would put it (1998, 913; emphasis added). Each of those bodies becomes part of a collective. Their markers, almost without exception, are those of young, Black men and living in poor urban settlements. The suspected thuggishness of one individual body taints other living bodies that share the same characteristics. Yet this process is never certain. Quite the opposite. Identifying a living (or dead) thuggish body is full of uncertainty exactly because when those markers are mobilized (poor, young, male, living in one of Nairobi’s poor urban settlements), their use is necessarily slippery (M’charek et al., 2014). What makes their use even more slippery is that they describe an overwhelmingly large proportion of Nairobi residents, which renders them useless at best. Victims of thugs often share the same markers. The consequences are remarkable. The dead bodies of “suspected” thugs that fit the description of young African men from poor urban settlements reinforce a criminalization process where everyone in an entire category of people could — possibly — be a thug.

This process is not just the product of narratives or of the “talk of crime” (cf. Caldeira 2000). People, objects, and infrastructures cooperate to this end (Colona 2020). Policing and security strategies, markers and the dead bodies of “suspected thugs,” guns, and social media, newspapers, and the pathologist’s tables, alongside other objects and technologies, become woven into an assemblage to *make* a thuggish body. Residents in middle- and upper-class neighborhoods defend themselves from this threat with fences, iron bars, and security officers

armed with batons. The physicality of tall walls, especially when they are rimmed with coils of razor wire, goes hand in hand with the imagined physicality of a thuggish body. It is a body that needs to be kept away from compounds and private spaces, relegated to the outside. Many in Nairobi come to the realization that “thugs are getting smarter,” or that thugs now “also wear suits,” but these types of objects and technologies assume, instead, a threat that is embodied in a specific type of body. One that can be kept out by razor-sharp barbed wire, or that can be either dissuaded to enter or — eventually — beaten up by security guards and their batons.

On Nairobi’s residential and commercial premises, other threats come to the fore, which are associated with those posed by thugs. Among the most frequent fears of homeowners and shopowners is that of an inside job. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines an “inside” job as a “*crime* committed by or with the assistance of a person living or working on the premises where it occurred.”⁵³ But that does not quite cover it. In Nairobi, the inside job is also, or primarily, a criminal character, a co-perpetrator. It is a criminal act as well as a designation for those who provide assistance to thugs and let them in. Maids, cleaning staff, shop assistants, nannies, gardeners, and security guards are all suspected as the inside jobs after a robbery. More technologies come in to defend middle- and upper-class residents against these threats. Some alarms are particularly valued: they can be activated in certain parts of the house, and they let domestic workers continue with their tasks in other parts. CCTV and nanny cameras are also consistently sought-after. A CCTV camera, a technology generally deployed to surveil anonymous crowds, here becomes a surveillance tool geared toward people who are already known. They become watchable. Objectified and criminalized at once. Labor wanted and required for a domestic task, and at the same time unwanted because they

53 “Inside job,” *Oxford English Dictionary*, https://www.oed.com/dictionary/inside-job_n (emphasis added).

could potentially “open the door” to unwanted, thuggish, bodies.

The dead bodies of thugs have a special plasticity, in the context of Nairobi, that makes them stand out. As everything else, they are not made in isolation. People, mundane objects, and more or less sophisticated technologies engender these processes. The making of a thuggish body is entangled with dynamics that draw in domestic workers who require surveillance, and with the residents who need protection. The making of a thuggish body is, most importantly, entangled with the *unmaking* of Black young men living in Nairobi’s poor urban settlements as a body of persons and of victims themselves.

* * *

The Smell of Death (Mark Lamont)

“Come with us to bury Gideon,” Mutethia told me in July 1998, when I went to see him in his rural home on the outskirts of Meru Town. Gideon Muthee was a name I had heard, but the man, I had never met. One of the elevated and respected men of the Gichunge age-set, Gideon belonged to that utterly self-conscious *Uhuru* generation that came of age at the dawn of Kenya’s independence from Britain.

These men were the architects and builders of the good and bad of contemporary Meru. They shouldered a lot of credit for developing the area into a modern agricultural breadbasket, but also remained burdened by moral ills, viral load, and early mortality. Painted in wide brushstrokes, they were a generation seen to have embraced many of the hallmarks of modernity, but looked different from their own children because they remained in touch with the traditions of their parent’s generation. They were more Nairobi men than Meru men. And, like Gideon, they lived in the capital to meet their everyday needs, but came home for “culture,” for special ritual events, such as circumcisions, bride wealth ceremonies, marriages, and funerals.

Increasingly, during the years I frequently went to Meru (1991–2008), these “sons of the soil” were coming home in a final way, some of them to be interred into deep graves on their little, frequently overcrowded, plots of land. I had seen his portrait on a tattered, photocopied eulogy I was handed at his funeral, but I never met Gideon. Yet something deeply material, even at a molecular level, happened that would tie me to him, something below or beyond the immediately social. It was something impossible to determine that ties me to him, something sublime that escapes the grasp of the social, binds me to his memory: the smell of death.

Leading me by my hand, Mutethia rushed to Gideon’s funeral, anxious that we would miss sealing the grave with myriad handfuls of soil. Being a successful clerk within the senior management of the Kenya Post Corporation in Nairobi, Gideon had paid school fees for Mutethia when his father could not. Gideon was Mutethia’s father’s age-mate, a classificatory father and, therefore, someone whose blessing and curse mattered, even if it were beyond the fragile boundary of life and death. As Belinda Straight has offered, there is a distinct and pressing ontological relation between the living and the dead in Kenya, an “entangled agency” that stresses the need for the living to bury the dead (Straight 2006, 100). Pressing through a crowd that had gathered in Gideon’s brother’s compound, a cluster of plank and tin-roofed houses, we pushed into the center, where the deceased’s coffin lay straddled two sawhorses.

With the many dozens of men, women, and children to our backs, Mutethia and I were effectively closest to the coffin. Immediately, I was assailed by the smell of death. Minimizing my breath, and resisting covering my mouth and nose out of respect, this volatile smell clawed at me, raising a silent panic inside as the crowd behind me pushed forward. Gideon’s coffin, with its black lacquer paint barely dry, was almost within touch, the cadaver’s imagined presence visceral and close.

Some of the crowd complained to the organizers of the funeral that the body smelled bad, urging them to do something about it. One of the men, distraught if not also alcoholic, shouted an

abusive remark about morgue attendants in Nairobi. A woman asked the organizers to “spray air freshener” on the coffin. Seconds later, another man walked to the coffin and sprayed it with an aerosol fragrance. This combination of perfume with death became a stench, something horrific that has been a catalyst for my thinking about death in Kenya ever since.

The combination of the smell of death with chemicals masquerading as “early-morning-mist” or “lilac” is profoundly disturbing. Perhaps the horror of this mixture of organic and manufactured smells is purely chemical, inciting this strong aversion because of the way we are neurologically put together. But I think like an anthropologist and suspect that this aversion is the underside of a mask: that the spraying of artificial fragrance is not simply about suppressing the smell of decay, but rather about socializing and taming death through materials of recent import.

These are incongruent smells: one probably hard-wired into us, and another literally out of this world. They relate an incongruity that parallels how death and disposal is managed in this part of the world and one that, I think, has points of connection with an ambivalence about the polluting effects of death on the living in Meru. The mix of organic and fake marks the wider funeral industry in Kenya, and points to the political economy of death and dying in a country that has been on the move for the great part of a century. Nowadays, we could say, the materiality of funerals mirrors in some ways the changes in social relations that have attended to mass migration for employment, the dissolution and rebuilding of the agrarian economy, and the imagination of death and its mediation through ritual and law.

But what is in the smell of death that we should pay attention to it? Is it more than simply an ethnographic ploy to make tangible the sublime viscerata that defy words? In thinking about Gideon’s funeral, a number of connections might be offered. In the first place, my fieldnotes spanning almost a quarter century of research are conspicuously silent about smell, except for this singular episode. The verb “to smell” in Kimerû is cognate to the verb for “understanding,” *kwigua*, which has an extremely

wide application to many things cognitive. Smell is then linked to ways of knowing. Recently, analytic chemists have shown that human beings can distinguish the smell of a decomposing human over that of other animals owing to organic compounds unique to human corpses. Investigation into the emission of specific gases known as volatile organic compounds (VOCs), with identifiable chemistry marking them as human, shows that the smell of death could have practical applications in disaster zones or murder scenes, but we also might think that this science provokes us to think about the implications for human mortuary practices.

As every Nairobi morgue attendant knows, the cadaver isn't alive, but the decomposing flesh certainly is. Filled with bacteria and enzymes promoting microbial activities, the cadaver decomposes in readily identifiable stages and gives off an array of VOCs as it putrefies. Using embalming and refrigeration to arrest this development, the biggest challenge to postponing the rot is actually resource-based: Is there enough time or money to slow or speed up the process of disposal? Hospital and morgue fees, the attendant paperwork duly processed, and the transport of a corpse from urban morgue to rural grave become social barriers to keeping the VOCs at bay.

In interviews with very elderly Meru men who had once been migrant workers in the tea and sisal plantations of the colonial economy, one of the greatest problems that could confront them was the premature death of one of their co-workers. Colonial death certificates were the completion of their *kipande* (work-pass), transportation of the corpse extremely arduous, and the distance full of logistical and financial hurdles. Clearly, it was more complex and difficult to repatriate the dead back to Meru for burial during this colonial period (the Meru began to bury in the 1930s, previously disposing of the dead through corpse exposure in designated bush areas), but another problem confronted them. The corpse was the source of potentially moral danger, a polluted being rather than inert object, which was subject to a particularly virulent miasma: *gikuo* (death pollution, or a crack). These migrant workers were confronted with

a responsibility for their age-mate (it was common for labor recruiters and military recruiters to take men from among a specific circumcision cohort or age-set) and with the bureaucratic and logistical difficulties of transporting dead bodies. Wrapped up in calico sheets and transported as cargo was an option, forcing the corpses' living companions into corrupting proximity to death pollution, entailing ritual cleansing upon arrival in Meru. Yet these migrants also admitted to failing to get the resources together to rapidly transport the body home for interment, having no other choice than to summarily bury them in undisclosed woodlands away from human habitation under the pretense of repatriation.

What ties these examples together? Meru men have been migrant laborers and, indeed, migration in search of work is part of contemporary masculinity, but I think the way that Gideon's funeral combined the olfactory pollution of death with its taming through chemical sprays points to a continuing ambivalence about the "roving agencies" involved in understanding illness, death, and dying. The futile attempt to tame the smell of death through air sprays highlights the sometimes very fragile boundaries that separate the living from the dead (Straight 2007). It demonstrates how the materiality of funerary practices is about suspending and managing not only natural processes but also moral ones, processes that demonstrate to the living just how little control they actually have in stemming the agency of death. And these moments, into which the smell of death erupts, can be poignant indices of unseen agency. In a not-too-far-removed context from Meru, that of the Samburu highlands, Bilinda Straight once related her painful witness of a child's death, "And immediately the smell of death was upon us" (2007, 4). In asking what this smell of death is, as a kind of roving agency, we see what disposing of the dead really costs the living. This smell of the dead gets inside the living.

* * *

From Making Bodies to Making Lives and Futures

The uncertain entanglement of incomplete corporeal and material processes of making, containing, and transforming bodies and performing subjectivities, both individual and collective, with the material flows, blockages, and unfinished containments of the city, which the contributions to this chapter have all pointed toward, are clearly as much about making death as they are about making life. The two are in the end, perhaps, inseparable. The corporeal, material, and performative processes of making lives and deaths, which bind bodies to the contingent stuff of the city, are temporally consequential and constituting, facing forward and backward simultaneously. They are both in time and they make time, and they are about making futures as much as they are drawn from, and yet constantly involved in the remaking of, multiple, coexistent pasts.

The contributions collated and curated in chapter 3 pick up on these concerns by focusing attention onto the social, economic, moral, and political aspects of making lives and making futures, and on the deeply social processes of materializing aspirations and making futures in which all Nairobians (and perhaps people everywhere) are always involved, however diversely they may be enabled or constrained by, shaped of and shaping, larger recursive structures and contexts.

INTERLUDE

From the City Came the Dumpsite from Which the City Reemerged

Billy Kahora

Against the Dandora iridescent sky before the morning light, the signs began, “This is the end. DO NOT DUMP.” Beneath one of the signs was a torn piece of cloth with small arms that had once been a toddler’s T-shirt. Beside the piece of cloth were two dead car batteries half-buried. The hill was a giant lump, a shadow against the steadily growing bluer sky streaked by light from the east. Nairobi’s refuse had been brought here for decades. New hills were chosen and utilized, burned, and when that rose too high, the trucks moved to an emptier space, sure ground that had aggregated and become earth. The hill heaved still burning, steaming the air. At the foot of its rise, terra firma, Manu felt it underfoot and advanced. Behind him Dr. Harold Kingsolver and the three men of Kamjesh that Manu had brought as mere bodies, security against the potential violences of this place, followed. They all took in the gluey air through their mouths caught up in a coppery taste, the smell corrosive. Little balls of fire caught, flared, and simmered. They stepped back when they felt the softness underfoot and sidled, keeping away from the molten center and climbed. Smoke rose from patches of

the wasteland all around them chasing away the early morning fog. Manu pointed out the lights in the distance. Below was the giant ellipse of Dandora. Biafra, Beirut, Boma, Dunia, Kinyago, Canaan, Paradise. They made their way around, and they could see the wasteland on the other side of the hill, the largest garbage point. They went past a mewling shape of moving fur. Kittens. Four, no, five smaller bird-shapes pecked at something and lifted their beaks to swallow in the dark. Manu waved his arm as if stirring a giant pot in the night sky, and Dr. Kingsolver and the three men followed him to the vantage of the other end of the dumpsite. They heard the giant wings in the sky behind them, the *phrrrr* of wings became *crrrrcrrrrrs*, and when they reached the other side of the dumpsite the birds were taxiing and landing around the molten center of the darkling plain upon yesterday's refuse. They could see the flock's leaders feeding close to the burning hill where the refuse was freshest. The light from the east came up fast. The giant bird shadow shapes below the men took in the light like all else, becoming discernible wholes. They rained down from the sky. As the light grew, they increased in their tens, gobbling and scrambling in the darkling plain. "They only cackle when they are full," Professor Kingsolver spoke into his dictaphone. The city marabou is a mutant subspecies of the Nairobi modern. The bird has migrated from Nairobi National Park to the Dandora dumpsite: "The young leopard grew with the goat economy. When Kiamaiko goats were brought to graze in the thickets by the Nairobi River, the young leopard periodically snatched one of the animals." Dr. Kingsolver wore a bush jacket riding high on his back with many pockets weighed down by notebooks. At least he wasn't wearing shorts, but he had on hiking boots. The jeshi men became sleepy from the soundtrack of his American voice. It was still too early for the more dangerous dump's human habitants, who would kill for the camera slung around the American's neck. "I am looking at the city's new scavengers. The fauna has turned with time," the professor continued into the dictaphone. The light slowly turned crimson in the sky and opened out on the ground — now, an hour after

the flocks had started feeding and the birds were losing their hungry intent. They watched the younger ones become playful and vicious. "Behold the new and improved marabou stork. New and improved," Kingsolver whispered. Then he went to work with the camera. Then, the sun was suddenly upon the world and the leaders took to the air. They flew back toward the city. Sated and bloated. "The marabou is the environment's equivalent of the city's criminal," he continued in his dictaphone. "Sociopathic and unnatural." "Twende. Look," one of the men said and pointed. There were figures slowly making their way toward them from the other end of the dumpsite. The birds were still taking to the air. Kingsolver looked up into the sky with a fond look on his face: "The marabou has a symbiotic relation with the city. It feeds on its refuse. They must feed on a substantial waste from the city." The men now looked meaningfully at Manu, and he nodded. He looked at the professor and pointed at the sky, and the man reluctantly let him lead them away. "This garbage dump is gold," Manu said. "It is food, scrap metal, and plastic for a few thousand people." Kingsolver followed Manu trying to stick the dictaphone into his face as he was saying this. They drove against traffic into Outer Ring Road through K-South. In the car Manu had continued the history of the dumpsite: "Goats, dogs, street children. They all survive on the dumpsite. They feed on all the waste from the slaughterhouses. They have all become wild [...] and fat." One of the three men laughed at this: "Two three years back we wouldn't have been able to come here because of the dogs. Wild packs. The birds do not attack grown men if left alone." The taxi stalled in traffic caught up at fourway underneath some acacia trees, and Kingsolver pointed high into their branches. There were two disinterested old-looking marabous. The birds stretched their wings hopping onto different branches of the tree and then settled. Their wingspans cast a shadow over the boot of the old taxi. "These are waiting to die," Kingsolver said.

Making Lives

Curated by Peter Lockwood

Lazima huu mwaka niwashangaze. Lazima nipate! “This year I’m going to shock them all. For sure, I’ll make it!” The words of Kenyan singer Jaguar in his 2015 hit “Huu Mwaka” (“This Year”) evoke the figure of a rural migrant who travels to Nairobi in search of opportunity. The song’s refrain goes to the heart of this chapter’s concerns — the aspirations and life projects of Nairobi-ans pursuing their hopes and dreams within a postcolonial city. This is a city that soaks up migrants from its rural hinterlands and far beyond with the promise of economic success — the chance to amaze one’s relatives and friends with newly won wealth and status. The theme of “making lives” draws us to the way Nairobi-ans describe their dreams of “making it,” a term that implies relief from everyday struggles with money and a life *beyond* uncertainty, of membership in the ranks of the urban middle class, their lives characterized by seeming abundance and security.¹

1 Like the “grand schemes” described by Samuli Schielke and Liza Debevec (2012, 2), these good lives are often located beyond the bounds of everyday life and its economic uncertainties.

The urban frontier of Nairobi has long provided a horizon of opportunity for migrants arriving from further afield, their lives taking a multiplicity of paths. From integrating into the urbanizing fabric of the city (White 1990) to returning cash to the homestead (Droz 2011), Nairobi's twentieth-century history saw it operate as a new frontier of economic opportunity and self-making, a place where Islam could be embraced by Kikuyu migrants or where Luo laborers could find respectable urban lives in city housing while they worked for the railway (Lonsdale 2001). In the early twentieth century, Nairobi's urban character—its status as “Town”—aroused the suspicion of rural conservatives, who remained careful to differentiate themselves from townsfolk, insisting upon the upcountry homestead as the proper site of public self-making (Lonsdale 1992). Anxieties about the corrupting potential of town life have hardly disappeared (Rahier 2021), but in Nairobi today aspirations for “making it” take shape within a distinctively *urban* landscape, where forms of conspicuous consumption associated with middle-class membership are valorized (Spronk 2012; cf. Dawson 2023). Relative political stability after the 2007–2008 postelection violence has given way to more than a decade of rising expectations of prosperity, fueled by GDP growth and the promises of the Jubilee Alliance government that took power in 2013 to improve education and create jobs. Nairobi's landscape has changed over these years too. The emergence of the Thika Road and the Outer Ring Road have created sprawling metropolitan outskirts where forests of high-rise apartment blocks cater to young commuters. Emerging satellite towns such as Ruaka and Ongata Rongai provide homes for upwardly mobile Nairobi-ans and Kenyans who have arrived from elsewhere, attracted to the city's promise of employment. Nairobi may not match up to the futuristic image of a smart city envisioned in Kenya's Vision 2030 document (Smith 2017), but new shopping malls and plush Chinese-built apartment blocks mark a process of gentrification that has accompanied these new infrastructure projects (Goodfellow 2017). The aura of modern living—of

owning a car and living in a new apartment block or an “estate,” the material trappings of a “working-class”² lifestyle — emanates from these urban enclaves, orienting life projects toward them (Nielsen, Sumich, and Bertelsen 2021).

Nairobi’s cityscape continues to transform through major infrastructure projects and real estate booms, but making a life in the capital continues to require a multiplicity of strategies and pathways toward the dream of “making it.” In today’s Kenya, more than 80 percent of people find their work in the informal economy (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics 2022). Like in many cities across the Global South in countries experiencing “jobless growth” (Li 2013; cf. Iliffe 1987), economic precarity and piecemeal incomes are the norm. Emma Park and Kevin Donovan speak of a “zero-balance” economy prevalent among those living on the economic margins in contemporary Kenya — of a constant struggle to make ends meet (Donovan and Park 2019). Migration to the city requires not only the navigation of such economic uncertainty (Vigh 2006) but also the expectations of rural kin and intimate others (Schmidt 2024; cf. Schmidt et al. 2020). Through the discourses of “hustling” (Thieme, Ference, and van Stapele 2021) and an enormous and ever-changing vocabulary describing *ujanja* (street smarts) across Sheng and the many mother tongues spoken in Nairobi, Nairobians express both their triumphs over adversity and the very requirement of such wisdom and ingenuity by the city itself (Cooper 2018). “Wirũ wendaga mbĩa hiũ,” goes a Gĩkũyũ aphorism designed to prime rural to urban migrants, “The desert needs fast rats.” Only the quick-thinking get by in the unforgiving city.

Seizing upon these discourses and practices of resilience, contemporary scholarship on life in Africa’s cities has emphasized the constant work of “getting by” (Honwana 2012), “hustling” (Thieme 2018), and “moving around” (Di Nunzio 2019) under conditions of material and political insecurity. Wale Ade-

2 In Nairobi, salaried workers are regularly referred to as “working-class,” a term that evokes the economic stability of paid employment.

banwi has used the phrase “the political economy of everyday life” to describe such “striving, struggling or surviving” through which people “attempt to impose some order and stability and place value on human life,” how a “challenging political economy is encountered, domesticated, and made sensible” (Adebanwi 2019, 5). Across Nairobi’s informal settlements, such bittersweet life in the city has been storied in *genge* rap, its humorous and ironic observations on the challenges of life in the *mtaa* (neighborhood) (Nyabola 2017).

But a focus on resilience should not preclude an appreciation of the stresses under which Nairobians labor — both material privations and the normative pressure placed upon migrants to access the city’s promise of a good life (Schmidt 2024; Lockwood 2023c; cf. Wiegratz et al. 2020).³ Nor should we ignore the political life of “hustler” discourse. The “hustler” term was recently, and notably, embraced by William Ruto’s presidential campaign in 2022 to articulate the interests of “the masses” locked out of economic and political power by the country’s oligarchic “dynasties” (Lockwood 2023b). But it also has the capacity to condemn, to accuse the poor of “laziness,” for failing to work toward their own prosperity (Lockwood 2023a).

To speak of “making lives,” then, is to illuminate the everyday struggles of Nairobians within the city’s material and political limits as they try to access its promise of something better. It explores the fleeting achievements, moments of desperation, and the constant, almost unending, search for money, all the while avoiding the dangers of city life. Going beyond tropes of mere survival and resilience (Guma et al. 2023), it focuses upon economic and existential uncertainty with an appreciation of the life projects pursued by Nairobians — their search for financial security, better futures for themselves and their kin — while acknowledging that these life pathways often remain incomplete. Francis B. Nyamnjoh (2017) captures this sense of life as

3 A point elaborated across a series of blogs organized under the theme of “Pressure in the City” (Wiegratz et al. 2020; cf. *Developing Economics* 2020).

inherently incomplete with his notion of “conviviality,” directing us to the life projects through which “frontier Africans” seek completeness, a form of existential satisfaction. Nyamnjoh describes Africans as “frontier beings” who “adopt different forms and manifest themselves differently according to context and necessity” (Nyamnjoh 2017, 258). Nyamnjoh’s notion of the “frontier” also appears as one of perpetual striving — what Lauren Berlant (2011) called “cruel optimism” — where the goods of the city are in touching distance but always out of reach.

“Making lives” provides a series of art works, ethnographic fragments, and stories through which we explore these ideas of incompleteness — Nairobi’s status as a perpetual frontier of potential fortune or failure, of inclusion and exclusion within the constraints of the postcolonial city. Beyond the city’s (often unmet) promise of wealth, what emerges in this chapter is an appreciation of the city as a place of exclusion and encounter. Amidst a situation of generalized economic and existential uncertainty in the city, a crucial dimension of “making life” is the search for solidarity and security in each other, the social relationships from which one might elicit future support (Englund 2008). Such relationships are hardly free from conflict, requiring careful management and maintenance when economic pressure is as pressing as it is (Neumark 2017; cf. Schmidt 2024). But as a place of possibility, it is through relationships that Nairobi’s capacity to make lives is realized.

In light of such instabilities and possibilities, the first entries explore how Nairobians cope with economic uncertainty and maintain hopes for a better life. Peter Lockwood’s contribution reflects on the predicament of those who work in Nairobi’s economy, their philosophies of struggle and narratives of ingenuity through which they conceptualize their creative responses to economic uncertainty. But as Mario Schmidt’s contribution on savings cooperatives in Nairobi’s Pipeline neighborhood points out, social relationships rarely yield the wealth that Nairobians dream about, even if new forms of microfinance and cooperative banking fuel hopes of prosperity in solidarity. Onyis Mar-

tin's "A Table for Two" meditates further on the predicament of unreachable wealth, alluding to the "fakeness" of the middle class in Kenya, who — to borrow Sasha Newell's (2012) concept — "bluff" to their families and friends that they really have "made it" to middle-class status. Read alongside photographs from Wambui Kamiru Collymore's installation *Mashakura*, an even starker portrait emerges of Kenyans who have nothing to eat but headlines of political corruption and betrayal. These ethnographic fragments and artworks provide stark confrontations with the reality that narratives of urban resilience and aspiration regularly run into material constraints, producing both irony and cynicism, bluffing and short-cut attempts to access the city's promise of prosperity.

Concerning these attempts to dwell in prosperity, this chapter continues with the theme of making life through belonging in others, drawing attention to the racialized inequalities that make certain types of belonging possible, and certain types of life livable. Joshua Doble's contribution describes the Talisman "Gastrolounge" on Nairobi's Ngong Road, "a microcosm of the persistently racialized socio-spatial dynamics of the city." With its exotic decor that evokes an era of proto-colonial exploration on the African continent, Talisman regularly plays host to white Kenyans who seek a space where their racial privilege still has purchase. Doble presents an island of whiteness amid a postcolonial Nairobi but also a place characterized by deepening anxieties of belonging (cf. Anderson 2010). Doble presents Talisman as both a peculiar sort of colonial fantasy made manifest and a spatial prison for white Kenyans who belong to a very different Nairobi.

Such racial exclusion and exclusivity recall once more the significance of Nairobi's securitized landscape and its consequences for the lives of those living on the urban margins. For Nairobi's urban youth, the self-declared "ghetto hustlers," the making of life always takes place alongside the pervasive existential threat of encounters with law enforcement. Young, economically disenfranchised men find themselves under constant threat from policemen who carry out extrajudicial killings

on behalf of a state that sees no value in their lives. Conservative opinion often aligns against these men — casting them as *wakora* (criminals) who deserve to die for their engagement in acts of petty theft or brewing *chang'aa*. In this respect, Wangui Kimari's contribution introduces us to the antithesis of making lives — the politics of death characteristic of contemporary Africa that Achille Mbembe (2003) famously described as “necropolitics.” Kimari introduces the *mtaa* of Mathare, one of Nairobi's largest informal settlements, and through her eyes as a researcher she shows how the arbitrary killings of young men are felt and experienced in these places in which persons are actively neglected and ignored by an indifferent government that projects its power simply by policing perceived disorder (Atieno-Odhiambo 1987). Placed alongside Lamont's contribution (“The Smell of Death”) in chapter 2, we can see two very different ways of dying in contemporary Nairobi: a death that illuminates one's achievement, connections with the rural hinterlands, and status won in life, and another that underscores Kenya's contemporary necropolitics and the sheer vulnerability that characterizes life in Nairobi's marginal spaces.

Finally, this chapter returns once more to the frontier-like character of Nairobi, its status as a place of encounter and the exotic for its newcomers. Historian Atieno-Odhiambo (2002) once discussed the city's “contours of leisure” that emerged toward the end of the colonial period. This was a period where socially mobile clerical workers became “enthusiastic urban consumers,” wearing ties and long trousers, possibly even driving Vespa scooters and owning gramophones. He showed how lyrics of songs from this period displayed strong themes of a changing urban landscape and modes of longing and love that overlap with urban styles (women wearing perfume and lipstick, owning expensive handbags). Songs situate places such as River Road as zones of seduction and chaos:

Nilikwenda, riva rodi
Riva rodi, sikujua
Mwisho yake

I went to River Road
 River Road, I could not tell
 Where it ended

| | |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------|
| <i>Riva rodi, sikujua</i> | River Road, I could not tell |
| <i>Nyuma na mbele</i> | Its front and back |
| [...] | |
| <i>Nilisimama mu riva rodi</i> | I stood along River Road |
| <i>Nilisikia harufu nzuri</i> | I sensed some good scent |
| <i>Harufu ya marashi</i> | A scent of perfume |
| <i>Ya mrembo moja</i> | Of one beauty |
| <i>Alikua mrembo wa mapenzi</i> | She was the epitome of love. |

(Atieno-Odhiambo 2002, 259)

Atieno-Odhiambo evokes one of the most enduring themes of city life — the figure of the stranger. In this spirit, Doseline Kiguru’s story “Sikuku” evokes the figure of a newcomer to the city and the travails in life and in love.

* * *

A Frontier of Fortune — Valuing Ingenuity in Nairobi’s Informal Economy (Peter Lockwood)

Speeding toward town on the back of Joseph’s *boda* (motorcycle), I ask him whether his friends share the same hopes of building a house in the near future that he does. “Yeah, I want to build a house, I’m fed up with paying rent. It’s just going in someone’s pocket,” he had told me a couple of days previously.

Joseph: Actually, I am making more than most of my *boda-boda* friends. I have quite good connections, and lots of good clients. But for them [other *boda-boda* drivers], it’s all about business, just business. Me, even if you have no money, I will drop you somewhere. Because there will never be enough. In this world you will never make enough money, so you just have to work. I just work. Then it can happen.

Q: So if you don’t look for it, then the money will come?

Joseph: Yeah, [laughs] if you don't look for it, the money will come. That is why I just work.

On our *boda*-drives to the CBD, I had become accustomed to conversations like this, where Joseph would hold forth on topics ranging from US politics to Pentecostal Christianity. On this occasion, his words made a particular impression on me. I asked my question because my initial suspicion was that Joseph was simply referring to the capacity for his friendships with “clients” or “customers” (his words) to generate more business, that is, he retains “clients” by giving them lifts for free, those clients returning his gift at some stage in the future. Yet, looking back, I now believe that Joseph meant his statement as a mark of the unpredictability or indeterminacy that governs the nature of work itself, as it plays out in Nairobi. Joseph was telling me that he had reached something of a zen-like state of acceptance, that he could never make enough money in his life, and in accepting this he had not resigned himself, but continued to redouble his efforts to create networks of “clients” with the certainty in a turnaround in his fortunes. Fortune was out there, he suggested, he just needed to remain open to it.

Joseph claimed to be something of a self-made man. At twenty-six, he had come up the hard way, growing up in Karangware, one of Nairobi's toughest informal settlements. He had worked on construction sites since he was a teenager and had saved money carefully to buy his first motorcycle in his early twenties. His is a story of long, slow, and careful economization — of life-making in the midst of economic turbulence, of investing in social relationships to protect himself from hard times.

Embracing uncertainty and contingency is a familiar theme in the contemporary anthropology of Africa. In his ethnography of youth in Addis Ababa, Marco Di Nunzio (2019, 196–97, 201) writes of youth who “move around” in search of opportunity in the city, looking for work, or friends to lend them short-term cash. In this way, Di Nunzio sees his interlocutors as embracing uncertainty and indeterminacy while emphasizing

capacities to traverse and navigate such terrains (Vigh 2006). In a similar vein, Morten Pedersen (2012) has called such “apparently irrational optimism” in the face of market uncertainties “the work of hope.” Young men in Mongolia’s capital, Ulaanbaatar, face a similar predicament to Joseph’s — trying to create social networks of moneylending in order to sustain themselves financially. But these men do not try to anticipate or predict the future, Pedersen writes, but accept the inherent indeterminacy of the market economy through a radical certainty in an upswing in their fortunes, instead of becoming fatalistic or cynical (Pedersen 2012, 13). In this way, the informal laborers are constantly “falling into the present from a deferred future,” letting the potential for a turnaround colonize the present from a future moment (2012, 13).

Like these works, Joseph’s words speak to the self-spun narratives through which economic uncertainty is lived and recast as an opportunity — Nairobi itself becoming a frontier of opportunity in an imaginary that reframes economically disenfranchised informal-sector workers as entrepreneurs crafting their own futures through their sheer ingenuity. Joseph presented his social relationships and survival of economic uncertainty in the city as an achievement of his adaptation to market logics.

Consider how Joseph would also claim that he would “just work” without the prospect of immediate returns. His words illuminate his understanding of what the world consists of and the possibilities for being prosperous within it. In a similar way to Pedersen’s friends in Ulaanbaatar, “business” — as Joseph would describe the fluctuations in his prosperity — is characterized by an inherent unpredictability that is impossible to transcend.

“I think I still have Monday blues,” Joseph says when I greet him. I ask him how late he worked last night. “Usually I finish at 10 to 11 if there’s work, but if there isn’t I go home at 6.” “But I just have to pay myself — I am the one who is doing this — even if business is bad, I take it [money to live on] out

my savings, 20 dollars, 30 dollars [laughs] so I can eat, go for drinks with friends at the weekend.” “I must pay myself.”

(Fieldnotes, July 6, 2015)

In one sense, “business” for Joseph materially *is* the transactions that take place between him and other persons, but it also has a spectral quality in his definitions that evoke the transcendental category of “the market” or “neoliberal capitalism” as often used in social analysis (Pedersen 2011). As a reference to the general state of his prosperity, it indexes his exposure to market forces beyond his control, a set of fluctuations in fortune that he must accommodate and direct, rather than quantifiably know and overcome. In this respect, Joseph’s prosperity is defined by its ups and downs, and his capacity to modulate market effects on his “business.”

This distinct lack — of never being able to truly make enough money — is what distinguishes Joseph’s work as a form of relation-making, that is, “just work” without the object of money. Joseph’s declaration of “I just work” recognizes that he has a moral obligation to his clients even if they are unable to pay him, in an acknowledgment that his survival and prosperity is intertwined with the lives of others. In addition to hope’s capacities to flood the present with unrealized potential (Pedersen 2012, 12), work to Joseph is as much about the constant maintenance of a moral community able to assist each other: “The most important thing is the relationship with the customer, to get that relationship to keep the money flowing.” “That’s why I like to give a good service. If you give a good service then people will recommend you to others.”

Joseph’s work can then be seen as a practice of managing economic uncertainty through relation-making, where moral obligations of assistance and financial gift-giving guard against the fluctuations of “business,” whether slow or bad, or occasionally just *si mbaya* (not bad). Because of the capacity for business to become “slow,” blocking the flow of money as Joseph described it, Joseph would also shift his activities to his “side hustles” to kick-start business. He relies on selling electronics, particularly

mobile phones, which he advertises on the internet, and rents a van out to *wazungu* (Western) tourists. “It’s good,” he tells me. “If you get stuck on one thing, you can move to another.”

Discussing the relationship between labor and personhood in precolonial equatorial Africa, Jane Guyer has noted that forms of labor with particular social values, such as iron smelting, afforded forms of what Guyer calls “self-valuation,” whereby laborers could deploy the social value of their work in order to define themselves in particular ways against the backdrop of the social order (Guyer 1993, 254–56). Through exerting or performing their labor in ways that valorized the category of the individual person, laborers were able to pursue “singularity,” to render themselves “real” persons, rather than parahuman commodities as an emergent capitalism was at the same time quantifying persons through forms of slavery and wage labor (Guyer 1993, 243–45). What Guyer essentially suggests is that labor, particularly labor that has social value, informs understandings of personhood. In Nairobi, it is in relation to the “wilderness” of market forces and informal labor that a singular mode of personhood is formed.

Since Joseph’s work pits him against the unpredictability of the market, he is able to appear as a man who stands between its wild forces and the social order, and he directs its chaotic and uneven capacities for prosperity and misfortune toward particularly moral and social ends, such as his building of a house and the creation of client networks. Joseph’s valorization of his precarious yet potentially prosperous position was evident in the way he disparagingly referred to Nairobi’s young men who simply “go to university just to get a job.” By contrast, Joseph suggested his work required the creative capacity to harness the unpredictability of the market (cf. Zaloom 2006), since business opportunities were out there for inspired persons like himself: “If you didn’t meet that person to give you that idea, that spark, then you would never know what you could do. Here, if you are independent you can do a lot — you realise you can make more than if you were employed. You just need brains. People here

just want employment for that steady income” (Fieldnotes, July 2015).

On our journeys, Joseph and I talked about a whole raft of topics, usually circling back to his own knowledge and discernment about how to conduct his economic life. US politics was a key point of reference for his navigation of market uncertainties according to a mode of personhood defined by management, adjustment, and, above all, knowing how to build and maintain relations with clients. “Me, I don’t like spending money. Those rich people they don’t spend a lot. Actually, I am very interested in American politics[...] Like, Romney got rich by not spending a lot [laughter]” (Fieldnotes, August 2015).

Criticizing the corporation tax cuts implemented by the Bush administration, Joseph told me it was the reason “why in America it’s very hard to save.” “That’s what happened in 2008, 2007–2008, people had to sell their homes because that was their only asset [i.e., because wages were depressed]” (Fieldnotes, August 2015).

But by contrast, Joseph told me, “In Africa there are so many opportunities — so many opportunities — because it is not regulated. It’s not like other places where you need a licence, paperwork. Here, if you are independent you can do a lot — you realise you can make more than if you were employed [i.e., in a formal salaried position]. You just need brains” (Fieldnotes, August 2015).

Commonly referred to as *kazi ya andikwa* (literally, “the work of being written,” a term that evokes its formalized character), contracted employment is sought by Nairobians for its security (cf. Mains 2011; Masquelier 2013). Daniel had never had such a job. But rather than concede his position, Daniel emphasized that he did not desire such economic security — that there was more autonomy and opportunity in the uncertainty of the informal economy.

For Joseph, the regulated economies of Western Europe and the United States were too constraining, whereas the unregulated economy of Kenya could be a place of prosperity for a person with the “brains” to manage the uncertainties and ebbs and

flows of prosperity. “In Norway you can’t save,” Joseph would tell me, citing the cost of living. “That’s why so many guys go over there and come back here to invest.” But during a conversation when we were discussing the fortune of migrants from Africa, Joseph responded almost angrily to my suggestion that returning migrants would invest in houses:

ME: So do they come back and try to buy a house?

JOSEPH: No! You can’t compare me to a guy my age coming back from the USA. He doesn’t know how much a house will be. It will be like, him coming back and everything has changed. I am here so I know. Like, I could charge him five times as much and he would think that’s a good deal.

This was a claim to an embedded knowledge of Nairobi’s vagaries, of mastery of precarious economic life newcomers would lack. As often as Joseph would describe his reliance on others, he would equally define himself as someone able to manage the unpredictability and changes of the market in Kenya, yet never control it outright. At stake in identifying himself was also a distancing of his work from that of other *boda boda* drivers, who he identified as trying to game the market for nonsocial ends, for “just business.” For Joseph, the quasi-heroism of his position is in his exposure of himself to the market wilderness in order to direct it toward the pursuit of personal betterment, particularly in comparison to others he felt were not brave enough to rely on their “brains” to succeed. In a way, we could view this as an example of Joseph turning the potentially disempowering facets of informal labor on its head, turning his exposure to uncertainty into a position of risk that he was able to mitigate on the basis of personal talents of judgment and calibration. This might also explain the terminology of business that crops up throughout his descriptions of his work, whereby he defines himself more like an entrepreneur than a *boda boda* driver.

Anthropologists of authority describe the figure of the “big man” or “manager” who exposes himself to the sacred realm

beyond the social order, a force of inherent excess with the capacity to renew the social order (cf. Burridge 1975, 87–96, in Mosko 2015, 376). His “individualist capacities” emerge from his ability to stand against and harness otherworldly powers in the maintenance and renewal of social relations with other persons. In the contemporary moment — where desires for prosperity conflict with economic insecurity — Kenyans represent themselves in the same way, recasting precarious work as ingenuity on the economic margins.

* * *

A Table for Two (Onyis Martin)

Fig. 35. Onyis Martin, *A Table for Two*, 2018.

HOUSE TO LET
1/2 AND 3
BEDROOMS
0720 851 543

HOTEL MENU

| | |
|-------------|-----|
| Ghali | 20 |
| NDAZI | 10 |
| CHAPO | 20 |
| " BEANS | 30 |
| UGALI " | 50 |
| " SUKUMA | 50 |
| " MIX | 50 |
| RICE BEANS | 70 |
| " BEEF | 100 |
| UGALI " | 100 |
| GITHERI MIX | 60 |
| CHIPS | 50 |
| BAJIA | 80 |

* * *

Socializing “Investment” in Pipeline, Embakasi (Mario Schmidt)

“Mi—, Ho—, Si—, Ki—.” While we were walking through the muddy streets of Kware, Embakasi, Jack Obiero pronounced each syllable composing the name of his investment group slowly and with a small break between them. “It stands for Migori, Homa Bay, Siaya, and Kisumu,” he explained and continued as we walked past *mama mboga*, women selling fish and other hawkers: “We, the young Luo of Pipeline, had to come up with our own investment group. The Luo elders in Pipeline have theirs, so we need our own as well. By now we have around thirty members, all men apart from one, but we are expanding. One day we will buy our own Nissan and join the *matatu* business. I will talk to the secretary and chairman, but they have already seen you walking around. So, no problem. You just come to one of our next meetings.”

Kware, named after a huge stone quarry that, decades ago, brought people to this area as manual laborers, is part of what many Nairobianians call “Pipeline,” a sprawling tenement city with one of Nairobi’s highest population densities, situated between Outer Ring and North Airport Road. It used to be a so-called informal settlement whose inhabitants, among them Jack and his grandmother, were evacuated in 2009 to open up more space for the cement dreams of Nairobi’s wealthy elite who started to privatize the housing sector in the 1980s (cf. Huchzermeyer 2007).

“Looming nightmare,” “disaster zone,” and “concrete slum” were just a few names thrifty journalists had found to describe Pipeline, whose endless chains of high-rise buildings had the potential to intimidate and confuse first-time visitors. When I skimmed through newspaper articles in the *Daily Nation* from the last ten years, I realized how the journalistic coverage of the estate had helped to turn Pipeline into the nightmarish place it was in the imagination of Nairobi’s middle class: ardent sup-

porters of Premier League clubs who jumped to death from the seventh floor after losing a bet; a young child coming home to find her mother stabbed to death and lying in her own blood; buildings built without adhering to standards and regulations set by Nairobi's political class that collapse (Smith 2020), and dead embryos that swam around in the sewer where they were placed by Pipeline's infamously cheap prostitutes. Local rumors such as the claim that Pipeline's meat market consisted of the meat of gigantic rats and the flesh and bones of fat women who were kidnapped and boiled behind some closed doors only intensified the equation of Pipeline with hell on earth.

These characterizations, rumors, and reports captured the nightmarish perspective many middle- and upper-class Nairobians have on the area, but Pipeline's overcrowded streets and comparably anonymous tenement flats were also the places where manual laborers working in Nairobi's nearby industrial area, airport employees, students, unemployed men and women, and many Nairobians working in the informal and gig economy daydreamed of a better future. And, for some, "Pipu" was home. Jack whose family hails from Homa Bay County, where I have been conducting research since 2009, was one of only a few inhabitants of Pipeline I met who grew up and still lived in Kware, to which he returned with his grandmother as soon as the tenement constructed on the land where he had lived with his grandmother in a shack was finished.

Most of the members of MiHoSiKi, however, were born in one of the Luo-dominated counties in western Kenya (Migori, Homa Bay, Kisumu, Siaya) and came to Nairobi as migrants full of hope of a better life. What united them, apart from being Luo, though, was a feeling of being ignored by the government, invisible to the international aid sector, and left out from municipal initiatives. Being under increasing economic pressure by their families both in western Kenya and in Nairobi—most of the members had, like the majority of Pipeline's inhabitants, small children—they had felt the urge to create, and experiment with, new forms of sociality. Founding the investment group was a

result of the decision to take initiative and to try to carve out a viable future for them (cf. Schmidt 2024).

Climbing up five floors of an unfinished building to attend my first meeting of MiHoSiKi, I already heard the laughter and voices of a few members I had met while walking around in Pipeline. As every Sunday afternoon, MiHoSiKi's chairman had invited the members to meet on the balcony of the fifth floor. Some members stood, others sat on plastic chairs, the rail of the balcony, empty plastic buckets, or half-full sacks of cement. Before the meeting started, the chairman explained the rationale of the group. MiHoSiKi had been founded to raise financial assets in order to support the growth of the group and the success of its individual members. The chairman emphasized the need to learn new "skills" and to send the members to "trainings," a perfect echo resonating with the currently rampant discourse on self-employment and entrepreneurialism that was being propagated by local politicians and NGOs alike as one of the main tools to fight staggering youth unemployment (Dolan and Gordon 2019).

The secretary insisted that every member should introduce themselves to me by name and tell me of their birthplace, marital status, or offspring. MiHoSiKi thus appeared to be more than an investment group linking individual entrepreneurs with one another to reach economic prosperity. Through different scales — ethnicity, county of origin, marital status — MiHoSiKi established social links between regions, families, and members of the same age group. "I do not think we can manage to pay for the family insurance. It seems they have changed the rate and we won't be able to raise that amount. Maybe we can manage the rate for individuals," the chairman explained after the introductions were over. The group had decided to let one member inquire about insurances against funeral expenses. Luo funerals are elaborate and require transporting the corpse to its ancestral home where it is buried under the eyes of sometimes thousands of relatives who all want to be entertained and served food and drinks over several days. Death, in other words, was not only a personal, but quite often a financial disaster increasing eco-

conomic pressure. After members decided that they would look for further offers from different insurance companies, they discussed the hospital bill of one member and agreed to raise funds for him. A heated discussion started about where the financial help should come from and if an emergency fund should be created alongside the investment fund out of which emergencies such as funeral and healthcare costs were paid. I got the feeling that some members assumed that the constant pressure on the group's financial reserves stood in contradiction to its goal of financial success. Several members brushed such considerations aside and emphasized that the group should stand together in times of bad luck and need. They would be, after all, friends, and, as one member emphasized, "our unity is our strength." The group therefore decided that the member's health bill would be, if possible, covered fully by the members without obligation to repay.

Theories of the gift economy, of corruption, nepotism, and patronage often assume that economic success is influenced by the ways actors behave in and discursively frame their respective social networks. The meeting I described suggests that among abjected contemporary Nairobians, this relation might have been reversed. The success of social relations appeared to be influenced by the ways in which actors behaved in and discursively conceptualized their economic intentions and plans. What if members of MiHoSiKi built relationships of friendship under the banner of economic success and strategy instead of building economic success under the banner of kinship? From an economic perspective, the investment group, which had existed for more than three years when I was introduced to it, was a failure, but from a social perspective, the investment group was a success. Acknowledging this figure-ground reversal (similar reversals were at stake elsewhere in Pipeline's economy where "business" was no longer an individual's activity from which economic success emerged in the form of profit but an economic activity without profit from which an individual emerged as an actor with agency) allows scholars to interpret references to "skills," "self-employment," "insurance," and

“investment” not as naïve imitations of a new economic paradigm, but as a way of connecting, relating, and kinning strangers who were all stranded in the liminal space of Pipeline, an estate one friend of mine called “the sleeping giant where people are ever busy but achieve nothing.”

* * *

Mashakura (Wambui Kamiru Collymore)

Fig. 36. Wambui Kamiru Collymore, *Mashakura 1*, 2018.

Fig. 37. Wambui Kamiru Collymore, *Mashakura 2*, 2018.

Fig. 38. Wambui Kamiru Collymore, *Mashakura 3*, 2018.





* * *

Tensions of Whiteness: Security and Sociality in the Talisman
(Joshua Doble)

Just off the Ngong Road heading south out of Nairobi, as you pass the Karen roundabout, there is an inconspicuous sign on the right-hand side for the Talisman restaurant. The carpark and exterior may be unassuming, but it is one of Nairobi's most reputable restaurants and a favorite hangout for white Kenyans.⁴ It has become a key site of Nairobi socialization, not only for white Kenyans but also for a Black Kenyan elite, and for foreign tourists and "expatriates." It is a space in which rumors circulate, business is conducted, and networks are established. In many ways, Talisman superficially indexes the racial, ethnic, and professional diversity of the elite of contemporary Nairobi. However, a closer analysis reveals that lurking beneath the bottles of Tusker beer, the cigarettes, and the weekend brunches is a microcosm of the persistently racialized sociospatial dynamics of the city. Talisman also, more than any other space in Nairobi, plays a key role in the construction and performance of a particular type of postcolonial whiteness, more often associated with the ranches of Laikipia than the apparent cosmopolitanism of the capital (Fox 2018).

Aesthetically speaking, Talisman is part village pub and part international restaurant, styling itself as a "Gastrolounge"; it is not distinctly "Kenyan" yet neither does it echo the globalized capitalism of the city's shopping malls. The wood-paneled bar area, reminiscent of an English pub, boasts an incongruous sign that jokingly exclaims, "Cowboys, leave your guns at the bar." The use of the term "Cowboy" in the Talisman is parti-

4 I use the terms "white Kenyan" and "Black Kenyan" in this chapter, but I realize that this may aggravate some Kenyans who are accustomed to just being called "Kenyan." However, racial categories and racial perceptions are important to this analysis. For developing this insight I have followed Janet McIntosh (2016, 3).

ment and—one has to think—intentional. The Kenya Cowboy (the KC) has become an infamous watchword for a certain white Kenyan stereotype, a masculine, heavy-drinking, “rough-and-ready,” “bush” persona, and—in the eyes of many Black Kenyans and white expatriates—denotes a particular kind of casually brazen racism.⁵ It is within Talisman that one can see this “KC” persona at its most forthright. In much of Nairobi, white Kenyans are self-consciously aware of their race, and its attendant association with wealth and colonialism. Compared to this “embryonic double consciousness,” which the wider city provokes, Talisman represents a space that is more safely “white,” in which whites’ self-awareness and markers of colonial privilege are not so open to interrogation—either imagined or otherwise.⁶ The safari shorts, desert boots, Leatherman on the waist, Tusker in hand, and battered 4 x 4 in the car park may be a stereotype of white Kenyans from the 1970s and fawning news publications in Britain, but it holds striking resonance in Talisman (*The Telegraph* 2016). White Kenyans’ “bush” identity may be central to their sense of place within Kenya—as both evidence of their “knowledge” of the country and their “economic contribution” through farming or tourism—but it has more than a passing resemblance to the features of postcolonial whiteness further south on the continent. Scholars of white Botswanan and Zimbabwean identity have noted the centrality of nature and “wilderness” to a postcolonial sense of self, and white Kenyans are no different (Hughes 2010; Suzuki 2017; Gressier 2015). What is striking about Talisman is that it is a space within Nairobi that has been carved out to both accommodate these features of postcolonial whiteness and arguably to foster them.

The KC has become a complex postcolonial strategy of belonging for some white Kenyans, but its significance here lies

5 Interviews with the author in Nairobi with TC/RS in Nairobi, JM/SB in Nanyuki, BL in Timau, AB/JW in Nanyuki, HG in Rongai, ND in Nairobi, RL in Nairobi, and TF in Naro Moru.

6 I use the phrase “embryonic double consciousness” in direct reference to McIntosh’s use of the phrase (2018, 5–9) to describe the ways in which white Kenyans see themselves through the eyes of their Black compatriots.

in the presence, and reputation, of KCS at Talisman, leading to a sociospatial divide within the establishment. And though it may be a particular space for white Kenyans, its growing reputation as a high-quality restaurant means its clientele is racially, if not socioeconomically, diverse. On the reliably busy Friday and Saturday evenings, the “old-fashioned” bar remains a largely white Kenyan, boisterous, male-dominated environment, and the outside restaurant area hosts tourists, “expatriates,” Asians, and Black Kenyans for dinner. This division in Talisman is a pertinent example of a wider pattern of apparent “voluntary segregation” since Kenyan independence in 1963 — as a number of white Kenyans explained — which sees white and Black Kenyans stay within their own social spheres and spaces.⁷ This is often explained as a natural process of socialization — “birds of a feather flock together.”⁸ This tacit segregation offers a sense of community, belonging, and security for white Kenyans within the uncertainty of postcolonial Kenya, where their conspicuous — and intertwined — wealth and whiteness marks them out as both privileged “other” and the embodiment of colonialism’s legacies.

The wider proliferation of these racial dynamics — which have carved out Talisman as a distinctly imagined white space — was clearly demonstrated at the start of 2018 during a lively Twitter exchange started by the high-profile opposition leader’s son, Raila Junior Odinga (Nyambura 2018).

Raila Junior Odinga @Railajunior

@DonaldBKipkorir so that place of yours Talisman Karen has a racists playground some toys are only available for white children, worst choice for Brunch ever.

63 Retweets 98 Likes

7 Interview with TL in Nanyuki.

8 For “birds of a feather,” see TD interview in Laikipia and JTW in Nanyuki. For similar ideas, see GR in Mazabuka and VNC in Kilifi.

In response, a number of Black Nairobians shared their own experiences:

When I was looking for a wedding venue, first they wouldn't respond to emails. Then they said they couldn't shut down the restaurant for a day because of their "regular customers." Even though it was a Thursday wedding [...] I got the impression they weren't there for Black Kenyans.

True [...] over-hyped food not worth its salt! Full of preening white Kenyans who honestly speaking, as they still feel superior to the locals whose country they're in [...] should haul off back to where they came from!⁹

These anonymized responses were just two examples from a list of respondents to Odinga's tweet. They represent a residual pool of knowledge—and experience—of Talisman as a *muzungu* place, a reputation reinforced through the comfort, and corresponding discomfort, experienced by different customers.¹⁰ This reputation is inextricably linked to Talisman's positioning in Karen. Karen is a suburb of Nairobi, about 15 km south of the CBD, reputedly named after Karen Blixen, the author of *Out of Africa*, a novel disproportionately dominant in the Western imagery of Kenya. Since independence, Karen has become one of the "whitest" neighborhoods of Nairobi, in both demographic and imagined aesthetic terms. This was partially because of the postcolonial influx of white expatriates as Nairobi became the East African hub for NGOs and multinationals, and Karen's reputation as a leafy, salubrious suburb—particularly before the establishment of Gigiri and the United Nations headquarters. However, more importantly Karen became the site of choice for a gradual white Kenyan retreat from the urban "modernity" of

9 All tweets taken from <https://twitter.com/Railajunior/status/952454606419845120>.

10 *Muzungu* is commonly translated as "white/white man" in Kiswahili. For the utilization of this phrase by Black Kenyans and Zambians to name white privilege, see Doble 2019; 2023.

central Nairobi, as the explicitly racially segregated urban planning of the colonial period gave way to a postcolonial urban boom. Tim Cooper, a resident of Karen since his birth in the 1950s and a frequent patron of Talisman, recounted, “I don’t go into Nairobi unless I have to, at any time. I haven’t been into the center of Nairobi for 10 years. What would I go there for? For what? To get traumatized by the traffic. To get fucked about by a traffic cop? To get buggered about by a *matatu* (minivan)?”¹¹

This retreat into the suburbs by white Kenyans and wealthy foreigners has transformed Karen from a semirural environment at independence to one of the most expensive areas of Nairobi. In recent decades it has increasingly become a multi-racial environment as Black Kenyan elites seek to build or buy in this area and neighboring Langata. The increasing racial diversity of Karen — its “overcrowding,” as some white residents lamented — has led to Talisman being informally managed as a white space. Within the wider context of Karen becoming less white, the need for a space of white security and socialization has increased. Talisman fulfils this prerogative. It is a site of comfort in which postcolonial angst about white privilege and insecurity is tempered by friendly yet paternalistic relationships with deferent African staff.

Nevertheless, Talisman fulfils a somewhat ambiguous role for white Kenyans in Nairobi, which is emblematic of the contrasts and contradictions that characterize this city at large. It is a white space — albeit one increasingly contested by other elite groups — which provides a sense of security and certainty in the face of both the “danger” of Nairobi’s urban modernity and the wider existential concerns of legitimacy facing postcolonial whites in Africa. However, in its very existence it is also a space of isolation. It is a space designed for a specific group of Nairobi socialites, whose continued existence relies on their acceptance within the wider context of postcolonial Kenya, which paradoxically Talisman provides the space for them to isolate from. This duality undermines Talisman’s place as a space

11 Interview with RS in Nairobi.

of certainty and security for white Kenyans as it represents a site of continued tension between Black and white Kenyan socialization within Nairobi.

Uptown (Wangui Kimari)

It was a day after my birthday, and I was on my way to Mathare slightly hungover and trying to piece together the revelries that had taken place the night before, the sojourns in millennial middle-class spaces and the many conversations that were beer-provoked and beer-filled. I was probably late, and so I took a *boda boda* in Pangani from where the *matatu* had veered off and left me abruptly cursing and trying to figure out why it did not take the route it had promised. It was not that far, but also not close enough for me to walk to my destination, and so I approached one of the *boda boda* riders who had camped by the roadside embankment, close to where I had been unceremoniously abandoned by the number 14 *matatu*. For some reason, the rider I chose gave me the fiercest stare. I was used to friendly bravado from *boda boda* riders, but grim countenance was not what I was expecting.

Even after I paid him as I descended from his motorbike halfway between Pangani and Huruma, the rider still looked at me through eyes inordinately focused, almost squinting. I decided to focus on the business that had brought me to Mathare, and, to be sure, my current state would only allow me to focus on just one thing at a time, but I also made a mental note to discuss this strange behavior with the friends I would see later.

After the usual meetings and obligations, I decided to wander around aimlessly as I followed two young male interlocutors. One was tall and gangly, with a face that could express simultaneous heartbreak and comedy. The other was shorter and more intense, who could pierce any conversation with the prophetic declarations that were certainly too old for his short time here on earth. These ramblings were not research or “deep hanging out” (Geertz 1998), but the aimless wanderings of young people, and one from “Uptown,” trying to make kin in

what popular Nairobi discourse narrativizes as an impossible place. Anthropologists have remarked upon community outliers who welcome ethnographers from elsewhere, the heroes who take as their wards the visitors no one else in the village has time (or wants to make time) for. Those who welcome them are often also from their own community margins, even if they function as entry points for the intruding and habitually white researcher. My at-once friends and interlocutors were my marginal welcome to this place, and whose extended hands I would be forever grateful for. I was not white or male or the researcher normalizing ethnographic reflections on method, but my class privilege functioned to entrench slightly similar status — I came from Uptown and this was *mtaa*. And the fact that I was young and female and single brought about other dynamics that played into these amblings. This is how I ended up seated by the riverbed close to where the Mathare and Getathuru Rivers connect, listening to the breeze moving through eucalyptus leaves, registering the din of Mathare life, and having my first taste of *chang'aa*.

Before we got there, we navigated through a few youth *bazes* to say hello to friends, relatives, and sometimes foes. And everyone seemed jovial enough that day, against all of the realities of daily life in this part of Nairobi, which for me, not from *mtaa*, could always appear insurmountable. As we walked, I told my ganglier and humorous young friend about the fierce face that the *boda boda* driver gave me and the suspicion he directed toward me even after I had paid him his 50 shillings. My friend/interlocutor laughed and said, “It’s because of your short hair and leather jacket, he must have thought you were a *karau* [cop].”

At that moment I missed my dreadlocks that I had shaved a few months back. They had afforded some sort of ease in *mtaa* Nairobi, an instinctive welcome, even if they were politely critiqued in Uptown where I came from, and the place(s) that affectively, whether I liked it or not, had imprinted itself on my body. The last thing I wanted to be mistaken for, especially as we walked toward the area where *chang'aa* (criminalized moonshine) was made in Mathare, was a Kenyan police officer.

We greeted a few young men working by the riverbank—“Athuri muriega,” “Men, how are you?” They were covered with the soot that springs ceaselessly from the carbon processes that fuel *chang’aa* making. Beyond their bodies, this chalky dark substance had taken over the landscape, stuck stubbornly on tools, place, and people, mimicking a coal mine. We walked past their open-air brewery, where they could claim livelihoods, and made our way to the area where a youth group had planted seventeen or so eucalyptus trees (I counted) a few years back. Here, if you closed your eyes and listened to the breeze passing through the swaying leaves of these tall trees, you would imagine you were in a forest. But here we were, in this place that was home to three generations of my friends and their neighbors, but also a “slum” ecology that had been “spatially condemned” (McKittrick 2013) over decades by formal planning practices and the discursive regimes of more prosperous Nairobi.

Noticing my surprise at the aura created by the trees, one of my interlocutors said, as he smiled, this is our “Uhuru Park.”

As we sat down, on a lightly elevated mound, the crossroads of the river before us, I wondered whether my friends could tell that I felt as though all the *matatus* on Thika Road were in my head. As we chatted, and I wondered if they could read the previous night’s happenings from my face, to our left we heard the mini whoosh explosion from the *chang’aa* barrel placed slanting above a blazing fire, and that was being monitored by the young men we had passed on our way here. This, I was told by my friends, was the best of the batch, the *chang’aa* that follows this first explosion, that can launch its improvised mouth plug far into space, is the most revered. And, what’s more, they would get me some.

When my taller friend came back with a plastic cup derived from a mini stockpile by the soot-covered brewery, he offered me the cup to sip first. I was not sure I would. Not only because I had pledged just that morning to uphold a personal moratorium against alcohol, at least for the next few years. Not only because I was not sure from whence that cup had emerged, but princi-

pally because this was *chang'aa*, the *machozi ya simba* (tears of a lion) drink that rumor mills and news reports from Uptown said could cause blindness, madness, and all of the pathologies that one finds in *mtaa*. Mostly, I was worried about blindness.

And as the surprisingly pleasant almost pineapple taste of *chang'aa* registered in my mouth, my friend with the cup said pensively as we sat facing the river, "This [Mathare] is the valley of death, you know how hard it is to get a ticket to Uptown? It is like going abroad. Very few manage to make it out."

The taste of the brew still lingered in my mouth; fragments of the previous night dropped in unexpected in my mind's eye. I knew we were not far from my home, but all of these moments and the narratives that carried them, that carried me here, made clear how punitively hard it could be to cross over to Uptown.

Fieldnotes, May 2015:

Zechariah Mwangi's life is in danger. Last week on the 17th of May 2015 his brother got shot. A boy I used to know and teach. He was shot in public at eight in the morning. He had been away from Kiamaiko for five months. He was back for one day. Five months after he had been warned not to come back. The cops, that people call Stupid and Pastor, found him and said to him "today is your last day didn't we tell you not to come back here?" They shot him in the shoulder and in the cheek. He was killed, age 17.

Now instead of letting the family mourn like normal people do, a day before the funeral, the police came and raided the house where they were raising money to pay for the car for the funeral. The police came took the money, shot in the air, threatened mothers with children and arrested Zechariah Mwangi and his two brothers-in-law. They slept in jail for one day. In the morning, admittedly a bit late, I joined some people to go and get them all out. It was a big production. People caught in discourses and practices of life and death. The family members walking past the police man who shot

their brother but unable to do anything. The fat big stomach man that Z called “*shoga*” (gay) trying to *tisha* (scare) everyone. I wish I had told him to get lost. He picked on me; I, two feet shorter and five stone smaller. In the end it was not worth it to take on this fight. He had said “you people we are seeing what you are doing here in this station, and we are not happy.” I went out teary eyed for another dead boy and another useless human.

Two days after the funeral I receive a call that Zechariah has been arrested again. I was unable to pick as I was at work where I am trying to establish boundaries between my hectic Mathare life and my semi-professional corporatism. Zechariah who I filmed talking about how his life was under threat on the day we were going to bury his brother but we couldn't because the cops had arrested them and almost broke his cousin's leg, and so we ended up spending the day at a police station and at the NGO where we documented this killing. Zechariah who saw his dead brother moments after he was executed, who spent two days in jail, jailed by the same police who killed his brother and threatened to kill him. Zechariah who has not had time to mourn and went to work, where he is a meat seller and cutter in the largest meat slaughterhouse in Eastlands. He had just gone to work but was arrested. It is true that this country would rather kill its youth than give them jobs and let them live honestly. It is a state that does not care that it has killed one mother's child and now wants to kill the next one. One woman at the police station said “they are killing us like we are chickens, our blood just runs and runs and runs.” Z had said something like, if we really are chickens then they should say so, but we are not. Another dead body is brought in a police truck as we are waiting for Zechariah to be let out. This blood just runs and runs and runs.

Sikuku (Doseline Kiguru)

I am leaning on the stairway railing listening to this woman talking to her friend in a language that is so foreign to my ears that I don't even bother to figure out what they are talking about. The whole time she is chewing at some succulent thin-skinned red fruits. Her lower teeth sink into the fruit, while the upper gum, toothless, holds the fruit in place before her hand expertly removes the partly eaten fruit from her mouth and repeats the procedure again and again, fruit after fruit. The red juice from this strange seedless fruit is now dripping slowly out of the corners of her mouth, when she finally faces me and says, "Six thousand shillings a month." Then she reaches into a pocket in the front of her apron. The pocket is placed lower in the apron and, given her seated position on a low stool, it looks like she is removing the fruits from her groin. She continues to savor the red fruits as I stare at her in exhaustion.

I have spent hours looking for a room. I don't want to spend another day in the cheap dorm room that is always full of loud-mouthed loafers whose speed to snatch bread from your slightly open suitcase is almost rivaled by the bedbugs' eagerness to suck you dry as soon as you get into bed. "Life is hard in Nairobi" was a constant phrase in my father's house and was especially dished out more generously in the few days before my departure to the city to study. So I am prepared for the tough life, but I need to get my own room. A new friend from college suggested that it would be a good idea to get a room on River Road or in Ngara. That way I would not have to budget for transport into town. This friend, who has been in Nairobi a few months longer than I, also let me in on another survival tactic: we do not have to buy vegetables but we would instead keep following closely on the heels of the *kanjo*¹² vehicle as it grazes through downtown Nairobi harassing hawkers, and then we would hurriedly pick up the few tomatoes, potatoes, carrots, and broken spinach

12 "Council," the Nairobi City Council.

leaves usually left behind as the hawkers scamper away from the dreaded *kanjo*.

But the house hunting business is tough, and almost every room is taken or uninhabitable. I am almost giving up. A quick calculation of the value of the shilling in Nairobi tells me that 6,000 shillings is too much for a room in this tenement. But nightfall is slowly blanketing, and this is my last option. "I will pay for it," I say resignedly.

"The room. There is somebody else. She has not yet come back for the new semester," says the fruit-eating lady, who I later learn is one of the owners of the tenement building. Her friend has by now moved to stand near the door and is fumbling with a bunch of keys tied around her waist. I look at the woman chewing the red fruits, and she doesn't look at me straight in the eye. She once again dips her hand in her groin and fishes out another fruit. By now the corners of her mouth are red, but she is not making any effort to wipe the juice away. I do not respond. She continues, "You can only stay for a short while."

"When is she coming back?" I ask.

"I don't know. Maybe today, maybe tomorrow, maybe next month, maybe never," she answers before adding in a low tone, "she is also from *ushagoo*¹³ like you." I want to ask her whether she thinks the standards of her tenement can even compare to the buildings in my *ushagoo*, but I can't. I do not want to go back to the dorm room. She then gives a nod to her friend by the door, who opens it and leads me in. As soon as we step inside, we find ourselves confined to a little corridor. There is the distinct smell of old age, ancient and expired spices blending in with the years of sweat left by the many tenants who have passed through this apartment. It reminds me of grandma's house just before she died and before my uncle's widow moved in with her children, who always smell like garlic and dhania. That sharp smell of decay and life mixed together. On the left is a kitchen with its sink full of rotting dishes, but the stench from the sink cannot drown the overall living decay of the apartment. The

13 "Upcountry."

corridor is so narrow that my guide has to walk sideways to get to a door at the very end. As she walks through though, her hips and breasts keep grazing the walls and leave behind lines drawn from the soot, dust, curry, and oil that coat the greasy wall.

We are at the farthest door, and she pushes it open and then leaves. There is a double bed and a thin mattress carelessly thrown over it. There is a closet at one corner, a lone chair, and a low cabinet near the window. The window opens onto the street below. I open the closet, and it is full of clothes. This is clearly someone else's room. I take out a pair of *khanga* from my luggage bag, spread one on the bed, lie down, and cover myself with the other. I will think about looking for a room of my own after the much-needed rest.

A strange humming lulls me to sleep, and soon I am floating away, floating on a sea of red and too tired to do anything. I spread my arms and legs and allow the thick red sea to carry me wherever it wants. I am alone. Scared. Hungry. Thirsty. I try to open my mouth to drink, but I can't. My jaws are locked. The strange hum has now changed to a mournful dirge. The distinctly male voice keeps rising, etched with pain at its pitch. Soon the voice is calling. The name sounds very familiar, and yet I cannot really point out where or with whom I have heard that name before. Hands reach out under me and lift me up, and I'm hanging somewhere in midair. But what a wonderful feeling of bliss! I am too tired to do anything and too comfortable to try anyway.

I wake up later, and it is already dark. The smell of food is overwhelming, and hunger is eating at me like safari ants on the fleshy insides of a ripe avocado. I walk to the kitchen at the end of the corridor. It is dark, but the smell of food is too strong. It is almost nauseating. I run my hand over the wall just inside the kitchen to find the switch, but the bulb does not flicker on. The smell of food is too powerful and it keeps me glued there, sniffing everywhere. I am just about to start searching blindly for that food when a shadow passes near me and goes to what I assume is the sink. There is the clinking of plates and spoons as the water starts to run.

“You ... you ... you startled me!” I manage to say to the shadow. “I didn’t hear you coming in,” I add before a voice eventually comes out of the shadow, soft and honey-like. “I’m sorry,” he says, pulling his R’s a bit too far and too familiarly. Like someone I know or someone I once knew. “You just woke up and left!” I concentrate more on the beauty in the voice before it hits me. How would he know I just woke up and left? But before I can ask, he answers to my hunger pangs: “I made some food for you.” I can feel the smile in his voice. Or am I just imagining it? “In this place, everyone makes their own food and cleans up after themselves. But I made some for you!”

I follow him out of the kitchen, along the corridor, and before I can register my surprise, he is already turning the knob on my door, and we are inside my room. It is not as dark as the kitchen. The street light below throws some light into the room, and he is no longer entirely a shadow. He is just a little bit taller than I am, and a flower patterned jacket accentuates his shoulders, and a tummy that is on its first stages of becoming a full blown pot-belly is visible. He moves expertly around my room and bends down near the window before scooping something from a metal pot onto a plate, which he then brings to me. I am still standing in the middle of the room, and he gently leads me to sit on the bed.

“Do you need a spoon?” he asks.

“Yah!”

“Coming up!” and he rushes to bring it, and we both laugh, but the tension does not melt. As he places the spoon in my hand, his fingers brush against mine, and I realize that he is too cold. Poor young man, how cold will he be in August when Nairobi almost freezes over? I place the first spoonful into my mouth.

“Biriyani!” I almost scream, with my mouth full.

“Oh! So you know? Do you like it?”

“Are you kidding me? I love Swahili food!” I say in between spoonfuls.

He takes the only chair in the room and sits opposite me, watching as I enjoy his sumptuous meal. He watches as I fill my

spoon, and then my mouth, with yellowed fluffy long-grained Pishori followed by pieces of beef so well cooked and browned they look like chocolate bars. My hunger knows no embarrassment. I save the kachumbari for last, to savor the sour chilled taste of salted red onions with thinly sliced cherry tomatoes.

“You like Pishori? I prefer basmati rice but I can’t afford it. But if you like Pishori better, there is a friend of mine who drives a *matatu* between Meru and Nairobi every day. We could ask him to buy us a bag of Pishori at Mwea.”

I just want him to stop talking and let me eat in peace, but since he seems to be in a mood for words, I ask, almost ungratefully, “Why are you in my room?” He doesn’t answer. “They told me that it belongs to another girl who has not yet reported for this semester,” I continue prodding.

“Ah! She won’t come back,” he says it so confidently that I begin to fear. After a short pause, he continues, “She couldn’t stand me and yet this is also my room.” I try to interpret the emotions behind his tone. I can’t quite figure it out but am sure it is not anger. I have so many questions still lingering on my mind, but the power of sleep is pulling me more strongly than the hunger that had pushed me to the kitchen. “At least let me know your name,” I say as I lie back on the bed, struggling to keep my eyes on him. But he doesn’t answer. He just stares at me as his figure slowly fades away. Or is it my eyes that close slowly?

Next morning, and he is gone. Not even a trace of him, or the biryani we had for dinner. Could I have imagined it? I head to college to register as a new student. I must find a room of my own, I tell myself. But the whole day is wasted on queues. Queuing at the students’ welfare office, queuing at the registration desks, queuing at the HELB offices to demand the money they promised. After queuing at the supermarket to buy groceries, I eventually get home when the street lights come on. And he is already there. In my room.

“We need to talk,” I say, feigning anger.

“I know,” it is almost a whisper, “but you better eat first.”

Tonight he has made *ugali dengu*, and I cannot say no. Each one of us gets a bowl of *dengu*. We sit on the floor, our backs

against the bed, a large plate of *ugali* between us, the street light shining in on us from the street below through the open window. We eat slowly, in silence, savoring every little morsel. Before long, our bowls resting on our thighs, we are Googling “How to make a healthy dinner” on my phone. Most of the recipes look uninteresting, with ingredients unfamiliar and strange. We laugh together at “halloumi salad with pomegranate and dill.” We are laughing because we know we can’t get the ingredients we would need for this in downtown Nairobi, and that even if we did, we would never be able to afford them. Instead, we settle on a grilled fish recipe because we know we can cheaply get fish in Gikomba if we go late in the day when the sellers are almost giving up and are willing to sell for half the price.

“Are you real?” I ask, out of the blue, making the question look light.

“What do you think?”

He waits for my answer, but it doesn’t come. He pushes the now empty plates under the bed, gets up from the floor and removes a pair of bed sheets and a blanket from the closet. He continues to make a bed on the floor, humming that strange sad tune. I also get up from the floor and get into bed. The strange hum lulls me to sleep, and I swear I could hear it the whole night. He is not there in the morning when I wake up, but I know that he will be there when I come back home in the evening. I spend the day walking around town and familiarizing myself with the new place, all the time hoping to catch a glimpse of him around a corner. In the evening, the first thing I ask him is his name because I have gained enough courage in the last few days. He doesn’t hesitate. “Sikuku.” I do not offer to tell him my name. I assume he already knows. We make dinner together and manage to be done before the other housemates come home. Then we sit down in our usual place on the floor, our backs leaning against the bed.

“I am sorry for lodging in your room like this. I did not know that there was another tenant in this room,” I start. “And I don’t think they know either,” I say with my chin pointing upstairs where the owners of the tenement building live. He doesn’t say

anything. So I add, “And am grateful for the food. I really love your cooking.”

“It feels nice to cook for somebody. The other girl who used to live here would never eat my food. She was scared — I think. I don’t know.” He looks sad, and I want to be able to reach out and help. But he reaches out for me first, and I fall into his arms. He is still too cold and feels too light for a man of his size. But it feels great to be in his arms. He pulls me away from his chest and holds me at arm’s length, looks into my eyes and says, “My dear, in this city, this is the only place that can accommodate me.”

I do not want to ask the next logical question, “Why?” because I am too scared to know the answer. I get up and crawl into bed, covering my whole body to try and stop my shivering. I don’t want to look at him anymore. But even with my eyes closed tight under the covers, I can still visualize him. I can still smell him. I can’t get him out of my senses or my mind. “Ok,” I say as an afterthought. “You can share the bed with me. It is big enough anyway.” I feel him move from the floor where he was still seated, stride over me like a shadow, and settle on the farthest side of the bed, away from me. Maybe he will be warm under the covers, I tell myself. But in the shadows I cannot tell where exactly he is on the bed. There is no sinking of the mattress as his weight shifts to the bed, and I cannot feel his breathing either.

I am slowly sliding into deep sleep. Arms reach out for me, and we are moving through air. No. We are gliding through the air like two shadows in a dance. I can no longer tell whether I am asleep or awake. Sikuku is taking me home to attend a feast in Eastleigh. I think it is a wedding ceremony. There are people in bright orange, blue, red, pink, purple, and white clothes eating *halwa*, *kaimati*, *biryani*, *pilau*, *chapati*, *samosa*. More food and drinks keep coming in, and we are all eating and dancing and laughing, and there are tears in our eyes. Wait. Are those tears of joy or sadness? I think we are at a funeral and everyone is dancing and stuffing themselves to keep the pain away. I turn to Sikuku to ask him about this place he has brought me to, and he

is not there. I shout his name until my voice is hoarse and there is a drumming in my ear. Another shout, this time not from me.

I'm back in our room, and Sikuku is still sleeping. The other housemates are knocking loudly on the cardboard wall that separates us, and they are shouting at me to shut up.

"We have heard enough of Sikuku in this house!"

"She is as crazy as the other one!"

And soon the housemates are all shouting and knocking at my door, "Sikuku is dead! Sikuku is dead!"

I turn to Sikuku who is now awake, and he pulls me closer to him. Into that embrace that is always cold but comforting. He shouts back at the housemates in a language I do not understand, and his voice rings throughout the house. Then everybody is screaming in fright, and they are all running around, the sounds of falling and scattering pots, spoons, and cooking sticks everywhere. Soon, the house is quiet again. Only the tap tap tap of the water droplets falling into the dirty sink. "Don't mind them. I will keep you safe," he assures me, and I don't want to get out of his cold embrace. "Are you afraid of me now that you know?" he asks so softly I almost think that I imagined it. "I think I have always known," I say, as softly. We are pressing our bodies close to each other. I seek out his mouth in the darkness. My mouth on his feels like a long-awaited and well-deserved dessert. The one that your mother used to give you after you had carefully eaten your spinach, your carrots, your broccoli. It takes me to the pleasant taste of hot chocolate fudge served with vanilla ice cream. The more we kiss, the colder I get, and I am scared but I cannot stop.

* * *

Making Lives as the Struggle for Belonging on an Uncertain Frontier

The myriad challenges of making a life in Nairobi brings us once again to the promise of an unknown and uncertain frontier, the sort of frontier described by Nyamnjoh in his characterization

of an ongoing yet unending search for “completeness” as an existential condition. It is by no means particular to Nairobi, but the city nonetheless provides a heightened instance of a frontier’s perpetual promise. Discourses of ingenuity (Lockwood) and economic solidarities (Schmidt) provide hope for better futures, keeping disappointment at bay, but the mythology of success finds itself criticized in the work of Onyis Martin and Wambui Collymore. Martin’s work points toward the illusory nature of success, and the awkward requirement to keep up the appearance of middle-class status against the backdrop of economic insecurity. Collymore’s evokes the distraction of politics (*siasa*), the headlines of corruption scandals that cannot be eaten. In their hands, the promise of prosperity made by Nairobi begins to look like a joke made at the expense of those who have not yet realized its hollow nature.

The theme of an uncertain frontier rears its head again in the boundary-making practice of white Kenyans, their attempts to demarcate white space amidst the changing nature of the city, finding themselves routinely mocked on Twitter for doing so. The politics of belonging also finds potent reflection in Kimari’s notes on police brutality, where the boundary between “Uptown” and the *mtaa* is crossed through the relations Kimari is drawn into and, to some degree, *caught* by. Political commitments become deeply personal when stark injustices come into view. That lives are made and unmade in the shadow of Nairobi’s racial histories recalls the observations of chapter 1, and the uneven distribution of risk and uncertainty across the city—a colonial inheritance that points us forward, toward the role of the city’s institutions, and a more concerted exploration of a securitized city to which we are about to turn.

But like Atieno-Odhiambo’s River Road, Nairobi’s mysteries also have the capacity to *kubamba* (catch) the unsuspecting, taking life plans in new, unexpected directions. Amidst the everyday struggles of urban living, Doseline Kiguru’s “Sikuku” turns anonymous real estate into the unlikely site of a ghost story, where more-than-human transfers of memory turn alienated spaces into ones of dense history, viscerally experienced. Her

story captures the essence of this book's overarching theme — of life unfinished, a city never complete.

INTERLUDE

The City Is a Goat Eaten by Leopards

Billy Kahora

Jethro's father, Joshua Ngari Wa Ngai, had been among the first gardeners that were brought from Githiga. He came to the gardens before Mukuru Twin City, Kiambiu, Buru Buru Carton City, and everything else, before the first huts by the first gardeners from Githiga back when the valley crept behind Uhuru Estate, Bahati, and followed the river to Eastleigh and Moi Airbase (MAB). Beyond what Sister Faith could see from her room in the house in Phase 1. Ngari Wa Ngai told his son Jethro that when he first came to the great empty wilderness of the valley that would become our Mukuru Twin City, there was a young leopard that roamed the land. Back then herdsmen from Borana and Samburu brought goats to graze in the valley just before thiguku Christmas. They came from the savanna on which Moi Forces Academy (MFA) would be built. The Borana and Samburu had told Mzee Wa Ngai that the leopard had come from the north before Dandora emerged in the grassy marshlands that held bird life and small game. In the 1980s, these empty grasslands, wetlands, and thickets were eaten up by the developments of Kariobangi and Dandora, but a one-kilometer strip on each side of Nairobi River was left. It was in that two-kilometer bush corridor with the river in between that the leopard

made his home. When the live goat economy of Nairobi in the 1980s boomed, Kiamaiko market was the go-to goat place for all Nairobi celebrations. The young leopard grew with the goat economy. When Kiamaiko goats were brought to graze in the thickets by the Nairobi River, the young leopard periodically snatched one of the animals. The herdsmen blamed the losses on the thieving butchers of nearby Mathare. The few glimpses of the leopard went unreported to the local chief. The herdsmen were always careful to skirt clear of the local chief and the police who would demand more than the leopard if the herdsmen went before them to report the animal. The herdsmen knew that the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) would be brought in and that would be a problem because the wildlife police believed that all pastoralists were poachers. And so over the years because of these easy goat pickings the leopard lost some of his natural stealth. In that early Nairobi, leopards were spotted in different parts of the city. Brother Jethro remembered tales of a leopard when he was still a boy when they hunted with friends in Karura near what Babilon would come to call Westlands. The first settlers from Githiga heard the leopard's voice grow every night as his girth expanded. The lonely buzz-buzz of his youth became an adult chainsaw purr as the years went by and Kiambiu grew. Between MAB and MFA, a large clump of eucalyptus trees older than Kenya remained even as Kiambiu and Buru Carton City came up. There the young leopard made his main lair. The eucalyptus trees — there were about fifty of them — belonged to the MAB commander, who was going to harvest them for a neat and tidy sum so they were fully protected. Jethro's father and those who knew the ways of the leopard saw through his tracks how he traveled from near MAB down Nairobi River, in the thick undergrowth up to and beyond the Kariobangi North bridge, past Outer Ring where the marshes stretched past Gomongo all the way to KCC Blue House to hunt dik-diks and rabbits. As Kiambiu grew and the brush was cleared, sightings of the animal increased. Never out-and-out encounters, just a quick glimpse of the fluid menace of his movement in the thick shrub-

bery that bordered the shambas. Or a shimmer, a whiff of his animal smell. When the leopard came of mating age, the sounds he made like a buzz saw reached deep into the ancient dreams of a new Kiambiu, the first fifty huts that had been built to the west near the gardens. The leopard woke the early settlers in an abrupt and sour sweat, and they wondered why they had left Githiga. Kiambiu and Buru Buru Carton City might have come of age without full knowledge of the leopard because the other side of the river had always been part of air force land and in its emptiness had become the leopard's main stalking ground. But when the air force started building MFA, the leopard was forced to retreat to the Kiambiu side of Nairobi River before it combined with Buru Buru City Carton to become Mukuru Twin City.

Regulating Relationships

Curated by Tessa Diphoorn

With matters pertaining to (in)security and uncertainty, we cannot avoid the role that institutions play in governing and ordering our daily lives. In Nairobi, we can identify an extensive range of institutions that conjure, initiate, command, or exert a form of authority and shape the security landscape of Nairobi. In fact, insecurity and uncertainty often seem to be most rife when institutions prevail as weak, decayed, or failing (see Mueller 2011).

Perhaps the institutions that first come to mind are the various security forces, police units, and other state institutions that dominate the security scene. These institutions are important, and several of the contributions in this chapter illustrate that. Yet, we employ a broader definition of institutions as “humanly devised constraints that structure political, economic, and social interactions” (North 1991, 97). Institutions are recognized collective entities that are mandated, either by law or by larger collective support, to govern, monitor, control, and order economic, social, and political life. Institutions act as intersections, as bodies that *mediate* and *negotiate* between different actors and individuals and provide, substitute, or delineate authority. Through their role in governing and ordering, institutions bring

together and structure dimensions of social life, and set rules, frameworks, and systems in play through which practices and performances are enacted, permitted, and constrained. Here we explore how institutions determine one's access to a variety of political, economic, and social resources, and thereby shape, frame, and steer people's experiences of security in Nairobi. With security as the analytical operator of this book, we use the frame of institutions to explore how Nairobians establish, manage, and negotiate various relationships.

Relationships and Institutions

The first and most encompassing type of institution that comes to mind is "the state." From the bulk of work on statehood in Africa, which has primarily focused on the particularities of postcolonial states, terms such as the "patrimonial state" (Branch and Cheeseman 2006), the "postcolony" (Mbembe 2001), "warlord states" (Reno 1998), "politics of the belly" (Bayart 1993), "disorder" (Chabal and Daloz 1999), and the "criminalisation of the state" (Bayart et al. 1999) have been frequently cited. Yet what is the state? As highlighted by Mitchell, "it remains difficult to explain exactly what is meant by the concept of the state" (1991, 77), and this has encouraged several anthropologists to think about how we can approach and understand the state (see Gupta 2012; Haggmann and Péclard 2010; Hoag 2014; Trouillot 2001; Navaro-Yashin 2002). One way is to look at the state as a large and complex system that comprises various institutions and practices. This includes the numerous entities that make up our idea of the state, such as the various departments and ministries, but also the individuals — the bureaucrats and officials — who execute state functions and act as state representatives (Bierschenk 2010; Bierschenk and de Sardan 2014).

Various scholars, such as Daniel Branch and Nicholas Cheeseman (2006, 13), make a distinction between two specific state institutions, namely, the bureaucracy and the executive, and argue that "institutions are particularly useful for our pur-

poses, because they lend themselves well to attempts to theorise the development of the state over time.” More anthropological approaches also highlight the need to include certain representations and understandings of the state, such as particular symbols, artifacts, and “state spectacles” (Hansen and Stepputat 2001) that we associate with the state, such as documents, stamps, and tokens, that reinforce the legitimacy and authority of the state. Combined, these two features — institutions and representations — are connected, codependent, and mutually reinforcing. This entails that we should not regard the state as a unified and totalizing power structure, but rather recognize that our experiences of the “state” are often through our encounters and interactions with officials and officers who engage in certain practices that somehow maintain this institutionalized notion of the state.

Another approach, which this chapter also draws from, is that proposed by Timothy Mitchell (1991, 2006) and his idea of the “state effect.” Broadly speaking, Mitchell (1991, 94) suggests that “the state needs to be analysed as such a structural effect. That is to say, it should be examined not as an actual structure, but as the powerfully, metaphysical effect of practices that make such structures appear to exist.” With this approach, Mitchell stresses that the state is not an entity that is separate from society — rather, the state is a (social) construction that requires constant performances through formal and informal institutions that are widely regarded as being part of the “the state.” The implication is not that the state cannot always be separated, but that it is a part of society and created by it (rather than existing as some floating entity separate from it). This claim has also been developed and further echoed by much of the work on African states, showing the imbrication of state and society and the role that certain elites have had in the co-creation of states (Branch and Cheeseman 2006; Mamdani 1996).

The role of the state is critical, but we also want to emphasize the crucial role that nonstate institutions play in shaping perceptions, experiences, and understandings of security in

Nairobi. This includes informal security providers such as private security companies and gangs (see Agade 2018; Anderson 2002; Chulek 2019; Colona and Diphoorn 2017; Mutahi 2011; Ruteere and Pommerolle 2003), NGOs (international, national, and local), and self-help groups that facilitate access to basic services. Such institutions, and their associated practices, play a large role in shaping security realities in Nairobi and in enabling citizens to access resources. Interestingly, these actors often mimic state institutions and appropriate “languages of state-ness” (Hansen and Stepputat 2001, 5) to legitimize their authority and construct an aura of formality.

In our analysis of institutions, we include both formal and informal institutions. Although we recognize that in many cases the distinction between the two is blurry or difficult to identify, we draw from Bagayoko et al. (2016, 5) and refer to formal institutions as those “whose boundaries, authority structures, and ways of working are for the most part codified through publicly recognised rules, regulations, and standards (constitutions, laws, property rights, charters, organisational blueprints, and so on),” and informal institutions are those that “are largely structured around implicit practices, social understandings, networks of interaction, and socially sanctioned norms of behaviour (conventions, customs, traditions, etc).” However, the informal and formal are very often entangled. Yet essentially, as outlined by Cheeseman et al. (2019, 16), “it is important to note that both formal organisations (such as legislatures and parties) and informal practices (such as established norms and customs) may count as institutions if they feature broadly understood rules that individuals cannot break without exposing themselves to some form of sanction.”

The formal and the informal cannot always be distinguished, and in many instances, we are dealing with complex hybrid entities that are state-sanctioned in certain contexts and deemed illegal in others. This complexity has been captured in several concepts, such as twilight institutions (Lund 2006), hybridity (Albrecht and Moe 2015; Bagayako et al. 2016; Meagher 2012), and the informalization of the state (Bagayako et al. 2016). Such

demarcations of formal versus informal are further complicated by transnational aid agencies that seek to support good governance practices, democracy, and the transparency of government institutions. We thus underline the importance of *recognition* in this process: institutions are recognized collective entities that operate as mediated and regularized forms of socialities. An institution is thus *recognized*, either formally by the state or informally by a group of citizens, as an actor or practice that can reify, construct, question, negotiate, mediate, and demystify authority.

To capture and convey the multiplicity of institutions that shape the experiences and perceptions of (in)security in Nairobi, we focus on *relationships* that individuals have across and within institutions. Rather than employing a common state/society divide to understand how institutions govern daily lives, our focus on relationships allows us to cut across and within institutions and show how individuals, both within and outside institutions, experience their governance. In this way, we can outline different relationships between institutions and show the diversity of ways in which authority and power are conjured, contested, and constrained and further understand that the “state” does not exist as a separate entity outside of such relationships and performances, but is created through and by them.

By exploring these various relationships, we aim to highlight five key dimensions. The first is that institutions entail a dialectic between individuals and institutions: institutions are made up of individuals and provide a structure that shapes their daily practices, yet individuals, through their everyday performances, simultaneously define institutions. This is evident in the first contribution by Peter Lockwood, where he provides excerpts from his interlocutors’ diaries to show the ways in which young men are habitually harassed and intimidated by the police. We can see how perceptions and engagements with institutions occur at the individual level, through encounters citizens have with certain state representatives. Through such interactions,

citizens shape the working of the state. Furthermore, citizens also make up the state. Tessa Diphoorn's portrayal of Michael as the state bureaucrat who is engaged in state oversight highlights the role that individuals play in institutions, and Gabrielle Lynch's portrayal of Mike Sonko in complex party politics shows how individual behavior is shaped by, and simultaneously helps to inform, popular perceptions and expectations of particular positions and institutions.

The second is the simultaneity of informal and formal alignments and connections between institutions. This clearly emerges in Naomi van Stapele's portrayal of the rather clandestine deals between local police officers and members of the Ruff Skwad. These interactions are based on informal arrangements through individual efforts that can change over time. Individuals thus need institutions for ordering and regulation, yet inherently shape the way in which this ordering is conducted. The same applies to Meghan Ference's contribution on the *matatu* SACCOS, where she portrays how the governance and management of the complex and enormous *matatu* network in Nairobi is determined by a range of informal practices and mechanisms, and by formally established SACCOS that also set certain regulations.

In line with this, the third dimension is that institutions are created both top down and bottom up in response to particular episodes. This clearly emerges from Jean-Baptiste Lanne's piece on "watchmen tactics" in Buruburu. Lanne shows the competitive nature of the private security industry and how this occurs at the level of the companies, but also among individuals, that is, private security officers, who compete among tactical resources within particular sites. The daily operations of private security companies are thus steered by (formalized) company policies, but also by individual initiatives and practices. Furthermore, the two contributions that focus on the role of NGOs also highlight how institutions are created and sustained in various ways. Beppe Karlsson's analysis of "NGO Nairobi" and his account of the discussion held at the Democracy and Human Rights Festival in 2018 about "sitting allowances," vis-à-vis Naomi van Sta-

pele's description of sex workers' perspectives on stipends provided by NGOs, show how the matter of allowances evokes and is shaped by contrasting interpretations and nuances. Combined, the two contributions highlight how institutions, such as NGOs, and their practices are viewed in contrasting ways.

In relation to this, the fourth dimension is temporality: institutions are inherently temporal and often cyclical in nature. Institutions are not static entities, but continuously change and adapt according to different contexts. We can identify the temporal dimension across all the institutions discussed in this chapter, yet it is particularly evident in Craig Halliday's contribution on the rise and fall of Kuona Trust. Halliday describes the emergence of Kuona Trust and its importance in Nairobi's art scene and shows how certain factors, such as local politics and individuals, can be so decisive in how institutions operate.

Fifth, institutions both exclude and include, and enable and disable. Their existence is simultaneously destructive and constructive, and also beneficial and detrimental, all depending on one's position in relation to that institution. It is particularly here where one's relationship with an institution is defined. This simultaneous process of including and excluding emerges in all the ethnographic vignettes provided by various scholars who have conducted research on some type of institution in Nairobi. By drawing from qualitative (and often ethnographic) research conducted on the police, political parties, private security companies, trade unions, gangs, and NGOs, we aim to sketch the ways in which authority and power is exercised in relation to matters of security and uncertainty in Nairobi.

* * *

Encountering the State (Peter Lockwood)

For many Nairobians, the key institution that defines their everyday lives is the state, and most notoriously, the state police. As the state body responsible for law and order, police officers have a dominant place in the public domain and occupy a visible niche

within state law enforcement. In contemporary Kenya, this is particularly the case for young men who are habitually stopped and harassed by the police for a variety of, often unknown and unlawful, reasons. Young men live their lives between the rock of unemployment and the hard place of criminalization. This is the era of “surplus people” (Li 2014), a capitalism that produces growth without jobs. As a result, Kenyan youths find themselves consigned to lives in the street, “hustling” here and there for piecemeal cash. These young men have often left school before Form 4, failing to complete secondary school. With few formal qualifications and no technical training, these men often find themselves working on construction sites for 500 KES per day or as *makangas* (*matatu* touts) in the local transport industry. Otherwise, they find themselves “idling” in the street. Whether working or idling, the public presence of young men renders them vulnerable to police extortion. Being a *kujaza* (person who “fills” *matatus*), for instance, is a public role, one that involves exposure to the vagaries of life in the street. Across Nairobi, police, like gangs, continue to exploit the industry for bribes of petty cash.

Consider, for instance, Shining Cloak, a youth from a town I anonymize as Chungwa, on Nairobi’s outskirts. Shining Cloak was twenty-seven years old, not quite as young as some of his peers on the street, but he worked as a *makanga*, “filling” vehicles. This was tiring work, and he stood on the street for hours at a time in the mornings, directing commuters to vehicles. It was work that regularly brought him into contact with local police. Through a diary that I distributed to Cloak and his friends during my research, in his own words he describes one of these typical encounters with the police:

Moral [morale] was holding [*ikashika*]. I went to fill [*matatus*] without worries. I didn’t even fear the police [*makarao*]. At 4 o’clock the police came and they saw me. They arrested me [*wakanishika*] because of tauting [touting], handcuffing me [*wakanipiga chain*] and putting me in their vehicle. Went [When] we started to go they asked me how much money

I had. I told them I had 300. They said “No, give us 1000.” I told them I didn’t have and I had 500, that’s it. They told me to give it to them, uncuffed me, and told me to go.

For Shining Cloak, it meant returning home that evening without money for his partner and child. It was no chance encounter. Young men in Nairobi find themselves criminalized not only by police officers taking advantage of their authority, but also by others in their immediate vicinity—judgmental conservatives and middle-class families who see them as little more than *wakora* (thieves) and report them to local police as such. Small urban neighborhoods shape these landscapes of paranoia and mistrust that in turn criminalize young men such as Shining Cloak.

Under the presidency of Daniel Arap Moi, the *nyumba kumi* initiative was created to create clusters of responsabilized citizens in urban areas, through neighborhood watches that would monitor criminality around their homes. This initiative was reinstated shortly after the Westgate Mall attack in 2013, and for many Nairobians, it is experienced as a form of local surveillance exercised by the state (Brankamp 2020; Kioko 2017). The scheme has entrenched practices of informing on others, feeding off the judgment of younger generations of men who spend their time “in the street” looking for work. Young men such as Shining Cloak refer to them as “snitches,” *mabab* (wealthy middle-class folk) who look down on them, care little for their material insecurity, and vilify their poverty. Cash, a twenty-four-year-old man from Chungwa, said, “They judge a book by its cover.” His friend, twenty-two-year-old Gaku, put it this way: “We don’t have guns, we don’t have *pangas* [machetes], you understand? We just live a normal life. When you call me a thief, first investigate and come with the investigation! [Q: But they don’t investigate, they shoot first?] They shoot first.”

These words speak to a particular relationship that has emerged between the state and its postcolonial subjects in contemporary Kenya (cf. Mamdani 1996), one that is highly mediated by conservative opinion and local forms of rivalry and mistrust. The state has created the wider conditions for such

landscapes of paranoia and criminalization, but middle-class anxieties about wayward youth feature prominently. Criminalized youth are hardly unaware of the opinions others hold about them, and they navigate life “in the street” in relation to the knowledge they generate of its contingencies — celebrating their “survival” and “struggle” as they attempt to make modest lives in the face of economic and existential uncertainty.

And for many young men, survival is not an option. As has been portrayed by various other contributions to this book, extrajudicial killings by police officers are a prevalent problem in many parts of the city and terrorize young men on a daily basis (Jones et al. 2018; MSJC 2017; van Stapele 2016, 2020). Despite the numerous efforts at police reform (Diphooorn et al. 2019; Osse 2016), police violence remains a rampant problem that primarily targets the most vulnerable. Police misconduct, in a much broader sense, remains to shadow everyday policing. As depicted by *Shining Cloak*, police bribery is rampant, and all Nairobians can share an experience of police bribery. According to the East Africa Bribery Index of 2017, the National Police Service (NPS) of Kenya is the most bribery-prone institution in the region, with a 68 percent likelihood that one will encounter bribery with the police.

* * *

The researchers who have contributed to this book will echo this finding; we have all shared our own experiences of police bribery with one another throughout the years. Yet here, as is the case with all our interactions with state representatives, one’s socioeconomic status plays a fundamental role. Foreign white researchers, for example, inherently occupy a position of privilege, and their encounters with the police cannot be equated with those of *Shining Cloak*, for example. Similarly, a resident of Muthaiga or Lavington will also surely have a different experience with the police, thereby reminding us once again how class shapes our experience of, and engagement with, institutions.

In many cases, police bribery takes place at police stations, but more often, these occur in the public space, most notably during police roadblocks. As Robert Blunt (2016, 381) portrays in his analysis of corruption and the prevalence of police roadblocks, “the police took on a heightened public significance as the state representatives that citizens encountered the most in daily life.” Furthermore, though various forms of corruption are invisible, police bribery, especially on the road, is “a relatively open-air affair” (Blunt 2016, 389), something that Nairobians can attest to.

This is especially so for those drivers and operators that dominate Nairobi traffic, namely, the *matatu* sector, which we will now turn our attention to.

* * *

Boss Eastleigh Commuter Service (Dennis Muraguri)

Fig. 39. Dennis Muraguri, *Boss Eastleigh Commuter Service*, 2018.



Matatu SACCOs: Regulation and Rehabilitation (Meghan E. Ference)

In 2010, Steve Langat, driver of the “Frost” *matatu*, one of the 10,000 minibus taxis operating in Nairobi, was fatally injured in an accident caused by a drunk driver. The other drivers on his route (#48) gathered money for his medical bills and burial costs. Each minibus donated a small amount of money every day for nearly two weeks, about 20–50 Ksh (.25 to .50 USD). The money was tracked in a logbook kept by Rasta George, the dreadlocked treasurer of Route #48’s chapter of the Matatu Drivers and Conductors Welfare Association (MADCOWA). Just as the driver or conductor would climb out of the *matatu* at the bus-staging area, Rasta George would politely ask for a small portion of their earnings, which averaged around 500 Ksh a day (\$4 to \$5 USD) in 2010. From what the log said, nearly all the vehicles gave something every day, even if it was five or ten shillings, and ultimately the MADCOWA route #48 chapter raised more than 70,000 Ksh (\$1,000 USD) for Steve’s family. Steve happened to be the chairman of this MADCOWA chapter, but *matatu* workers would have given money for any member killed on their route.

Although this collection was meant for a worthy cause, some see George’s persistent requests for money as a type of extortion or theft from those who own the vehicles. The drivers and conductors do not generally own the vehicles they are operating but deliver a target amount to the owner at the end of the day. In 2010, normal daily targets for a small *matatu* were around 3,500–5,000 Ksh (\$35 to \$50 USD) and 5,000–8,500 (\$50 to \$80 USD) for the larger thirty-six-seat *matatus*. That means the crew split what was left over after subtracting fuel costs, what corrupt police officers took for bribes, what gangs demanded for pay outs, and what groups such as MADCOWA requested for dues. Drivers and conductors often end up shorting the owner between themselves or splitting their loss. The cash-based, target system is generally blamed for the bad behavior of *matatu* crews, such as overloading the vehicle with passengers, speed-

ing, overtaking other cars in the road in a dangerous way, or hiking fares during rush hour and rain (McCormick et al. 2015).

Although *matatus* provide the bulk of transportation in Kenya, and have for decades, *matatu* workers are still highly stigmatized by the general public largely because of the practices just described. But they are often also blamed for things they are not responsible for, which also put them at risk, such as the awful state of roads, corrupt police, traffic jams, and Kenyan passengers' bad behavior inside vehicles (Mutongi 2006). Generally, the workers are perceived by the public to be menacing, rude, and dangerous (Wa Mungai and Samper 2006), and this puts them at greater risk in the already precarious world of Nairobi's urban workers. In fact, Steve was hit by a drunk driver early on a Sunday morning through no fault of his own, but accidents like his still perpetuate the idea that *matatus* are not safe. The *matatu* sector grew out of cracks in a colonial transportation monopoly by providing rides to African populations who were chronically underserved in the late 1950s. These early *matatus* were known as pirate taxis (Heinze 2016). Today there are more than 40,000 *matatus* operating in Kenya with the ability to reach 99 percent of the households in the entire nation (Salon and Gulyani 2019). Because the sector grew in the shadow of a monopoly, it has been hard for government institutions to regulate it over the years. This has led to several formal regulatory approaches (Mutongi 2017), many of which have failed.

Matatu workers and owners have developed a multitude of informal institutions, practices, and mechanisms, some brilliant and some problematic, to protect themselves in their risky business. These mechanisms range from developing particular slang words (Samper 2002) and coded hand gestures to forming route associations, such as MADCOWA (FERENCE 2016), or engaging with violent vigilante gangs and cartels who regulate the number of vehicles working on particular routes around the city (Anderson 2002; Rasmussen 2012). *Matatu* owners and workers developed many of these tactics and strategies largely out of the reach of government regulatory institutions before Kenya's independence, when they were providing illegal transportation

to workers commuting from African settlements (Aduwo 1990). In precarious environments, the pooling of resources is part of a business approach that has inbuilt mechanisms of reciprocity and solidarity (Kinyanjui 2019). Even with the bad reputation and fierce competitiveness in the *matatu* sector, mechanisms of solidarity were apparent in the worker-led association of MADCOWA.

Helping drivers and conductors when they were in trouble, legal or otherwise, through the collection and management of dues was one of the most important functions of MADCOWA, which was formed as a worker response to the Matatu Owners Association (MOA) and Matatu Welfare Association (MWA), two groups that had long positioned themselves between the *matatu* sector and the government, representing the owners and also all the sector's workers. Often, instead of representing the workers, the MOA and MWA seemed to mostly protect the interests of *matatu* owners. It came as no surprise, then, that *matatu* crew members who felt they were not well represented by the MOA and MWA formed MADCOWA to address the issues that were important to them. In 2008 and 2009, the idea spread throughout Nairobi, and workers across several routes joined. MADCOWA members had monthly meetings, elected an executive board, collected dues, and conducted informative sessions on a variety of issues that affected their community (corruption, risk of arrest, hijacking threats, police harassment).

Just a few months after Steve's accident, in 2010, Kenya transport authorities started to require that all *matatu* vehicles register with a savings and credit co-operative, or SACCO, a type of management and investment group. These management co-ops had been in the *matatu* sector, on particular routes for many years. SACCOS worked by taking a cut of the *matatu* earnings from the owner and managing the vehicle and the crews. They were also usually paid an initial fee. By 2011, no individual *matatus* were being registered, registration was only possible through route specific SACCOS. The logic was that institutions like SACCOS could succeed where others had failed in regulating and streamlining the transportation sector in Nairobi.

SACCO membership was simply the most recent in a long line of regulatory schemes imposed on the *matatu* sector throughout the years. In the face of this regulation, and the shift from independently owned and managed vehicles to SACCO management and larger investment ownership, MADCOWA dwindled. Instead of workers joining together and forming their own welfare association, SACCOS filled that role. Workers no longer paid their dues to MADCOWA for help in sticky situations caused by their jobs — arrest, hijacking, injury, and death — because they belonged to a SACCO that ran their route and provided those services as part of their employment. Some SACCOS even resembled MADCOWA in many ways. They were filled with *ex-matatu* workers who knew the challenges of the job, and they were focused on providing more safety and security for *matatu* operators through helping them save money, secure loans, and stabilize their incomes.

In 2016, I visited the River of God (ROG) SACCO in Nairobi's Buruburu neighborhood. The four main owners of this SACCO had met at church, and had all worked in the *matatu* sector for many years as drivers and conductors. The executive board of this SACCO was interested in dealing with worker concerns, such as wages, precarious work-lives, the threats of danger and injury, and their inability to get loans. The ROG SACCO formed in 2014, as a response to what they saw as problematic SACCOS that did nothing for the *matatu* owners or crewmembers and, as their CFO told me, they wanted to be different and “do something with a purpose, not just make money.”

The management of ROG SACCO had a focus on discipline, Christian values, cleanliness, and assistance for the crews. As ROG SACCO executive member Peter explains, “most of the crews were drunkards, they used to chew *miraa*.¹ You can't do that while you are working for ROG. So, it is like reforming them.” Brian chimes in, “Now, many of the crews, they save with us.” The executives I interviewed also presented the SACCO as a cru-

1 Miraa is a plant with leaves that, when chewed, provide a mild stimulant effect.

cial social network to advocate for the economic and occupational lives of its members. One of the most important ways that the SACCO manages the lives of their young and often stigmatized workforce is by setting up savings accounts for them and providing them with small loans. At the same time, the workers are still stigmatized by the public and highly surveilled by a set of supervisors. The managers of ROG monitor the music drivers play, their driving, and their behavior on the roads by fielding phone calls and spending large parts of their days jumping on and off ROG vehicles at various points of the road for surprise inspections. If a crew is playing music that is not Christian or gospel music, the driver and conductor will be punished with a fine or suspended from work. After too many infractions, they can be fired.

At the time of this writing (2021), SACCOS are still required for *matatu* registration and, although it is often seen as a positive evolution in the regulatory landscape of transportation in Kenya, there are also issues of power, inequality, and structures of surveillance present in these institutions. Just as the SACCO is responsible for protecting workers from the volatility of job precarity, they are also used by owners to surveil and control their workforce. Meanwhile they can serve as a larger target for government oversight and intervention, which may or may not be helpful to passengers, workers, owners, or SACCOS.

* * *

Washing Cars, Swapping Uniforms: Watchmen Tactics in Buruburu Estate (Jean-Baptiste Lanne)

In Buruburu, a middle-class estate located in Eastlands, the residential landscape is divided into several semiprivate residences, known locally as “courts” and can be described as cul-de-sacs. As the basic unit of neighboring sociability, a court usually consists of fifteen to twenty maisonettes, surrounded by walls featuring broken glass on top, which are watched over by private security guards. In Kenya, and especially in Nairobi, the private secu-

city industry experienced a substantial growth beginning in the late 1980s. Three main reasons are regularly listed to explain this phenomenon. First, an increase in perceptions and feelings of insecurity in the capital city, together with a lack of trust toward the regular police force, is regularly pointed out by national and international surveys (Abrahamsen and Williams 2005; Anderson 2002; Mkutu and Sabala 2007; Security Research and Information Centre 2014). These feelings of insecurity are mainly focused on crime, and particularly robbery, but have exacerbated with the rise of terrorist threats, particularly since the Westgate Mall attack in 2013. Second, the financial success of the industry — estimated at around KES 32 billion² per year by the Kenya Security Industry Association (KSIA) (Wairagu et al. 2004) has resulted in a rapid development of supply, as many entrepreneurs see it as an opportunity to invest in a growing and still poorly regulated sector. A third reason concerns status and class: in the contemporary urban culture of Nairobi, access to private security services is a symbol of wealth and social success, especially among the middle class.

Two main types of private security companies (PSC) may be distinguished (see also Colona and Diphhoorn 2017): big companies, officially registered under the Companies Act of Kenya and working at a national or international scale; and local companies, mostly unregistered. Big companies have an average of 4,000–5,000 security guards on the ground, except three major companies (G4S, KK Security, Securex), with around 12,000 to 15,000 employees each. They are equipped with modern technology (car-tracking systems, smart CCTV, guards monitoring units), vehicles, canine units, and have a clear chain of command. According to KSIA, twenty-three big companies share 60 percent of the market in Nairobi and succeed in winning the most lucrative contracts (government buildings, NGOs, hospitals, universities, malls, and upper-class residential compounds). Despite weak state regulation of the industry (see Diphhoorn 2016), private security companies progressively must

2 Approximately USD \$317 million, according to the July 2018 exchange rate.

show their commitment to reaching international standards, especially in terms of guard training, working conditions, and minimum wages. Alongside this first sector, almost 2,000 local companies constitute 40 percent of the remaining share. Most of these small companies have fewer than 500 security officers on the ground. The smallest of them count ten or twenty officers only, and do not have their own offices. Their standards and working conditions are largely aligned to the informal sector: no training, no equipment and uniform (except a stick), and no social security contribution. Their agents — called “watchmen” here in line with a common distinction made from security guards in the more formal sector — are generally recruited without proper contracts and must deal, more than other salaried workers, with the uncertainty of their revenues: some of these small companies delay the payment, some disappear before having paid their employees.

In this estate where most of the households cannot afford services from an officially registered private security company, many choose to recruit watchmen from small companies. For these precarious workers, dealing with the uncertainty of their condition, engaging in opportunistic multiactivity is often an everyday tactic of earning additional income. In their everyday lives, most of the guards — from both big and small companies — face difficult working conditions. First, their low salaries do not allow them to settle elsewhere than in slum areas, generally located far from their workplace. As a result, they must experience long and tiring commutes. The lengthy working hours — 6 am to 6 pm or 6 pm to 6 am — are mainly characterized by waiting, boredom, solitude, and disciplined routine (opening and closing the gate, saluting residents, and visitors, patrolling the compound). Many guards, especially those working at night, experience stress and anxiety regarding the possibility of an attack, such as a burglary. During the day, other challenges must be faced: a close surveillance from the chain of command, or direct control and even sometimes harassment by clients themselves. Despite all these difficulties, guards can find spaces of freedom, as the two vignettes below will show.

In April 2016, I meet Clifford M., a twenty-five-year-old security guard, who has been employed for two years by Super Fidelity Company and works as a day shift employee in Lomilio Court. Two years before, the Lomilio Residents' Committee complained about the quality of the service provided by the previous small company, blaming its watchmen for running other businesses (cutting grass, selling newspapers, repairing shoes, and washing cars) that lowered their vigilance. Consequently, they decided to work with a new company, Super Fidelity, which claims to be more professional, especially concerning the surveillance of its security guards. Appointed by Super Fidelity Company, Clifford M. is required to wear a standardized uniform and is monitored daily by his supervisor. Clifford's uniform is an obstacle in carrying out his everyday extra business, namely, washing the residents' cars. One of the ways he found to overcome this difficulty is to outsource the job: after reaching an agreement with some residents, Clifford asks George A., a watchman from a neighboring court, to wash cars on his behalf. Since George A. does not wear a uniform in his own court, he can work in Lomilio in a discreet manner. Clifford lets him in, the Super Fidelity supervisor does not even notice his presence, and at the end of the day, Clifford and George share the revenues of the job (50–100 KES per car on average).

Clifford's business doesn't end there. When he is off duty, he offers his services to residents of neighboring courts. In that case, the main difficulty for him is to enter and be accepted in a court he's not officially working in. So that he doesn't look suspicious, Clifford borrows a uniform from a colleague — a standard blue shirt or a gardener's coat — as his own appears too "official." By doing so, he blends in and looks like any local *jua kali*³ watchman. This kind of tactical arrangement may lead to competitive, even conflictual relationships with other watchmen from the court: in their eyes, an outsider has no right to steal their

3 In Kenya, *jua kali* is an expression that refers to the informal (and sometimes illegal) sphere of the economy, to which small security companies may belong.

customers. According to Clifford, the situation's outcome will vary depending on whether or not he has a personal relationship with an "insider." If he does, he has to accept to share his revenue with him or he will be reported to the Resident's Committee.

In Buruburu, this little cat-and-mouse game played by Clifford and other security employees reveals the hidden side of the competition between private security companies. Although private security companies — both big and small — compete with each other in terms of price, quality of service, equipment and uniforms, technology and monitoring standards, their employees on the ground develop a competition of another kind — an everyday competition — over clients and extra resources that are crucial for the improvement of their livelihood. This competition on the ground is a tactical one, as it always occurs in the physical space of the court, where the residents' fickle requirements prevail, and inside the normative space of the companies. These two competitions — the one between companies and the one between workers — are closely intertwined: the everyday competition on the ground turns into tactical resources on the differentiated levels of standards and controls generated by the competition between companies. From the workers' perspective, these parameters sketch a context of uncertainty where partners and rivals may reverse their role quickly, leading to a life on the razor's edge between competition and reciprocity.

* * *

These two key relationships are thus manifest among and within institutions, such as private security companies, and this occurs on various levels — at the level of the industry, but also among the individuals working for such organizations.

The key role that certain individuals can play in establishing and maintaining institutions, or leading to their downfall, is also one of the key issues addressed in the following section on Kuona Trust, a key institution for the Nairobi art scene.

* * *

The Rise and Fall of Kuona Trust (Craig Halliday)

In discussions of Nairobi's contemporary art world, the role and significance of institutions are granted. There are many kinds of institutions that support the arts in Kenya, and these include, but are not limited to, the Ministry of Culture and Sport, formal educational spaces, foreign cultural institutes, art centers, and galleries. One institution may bear greater influence than another, but their role as "gatekeepers" helps to shape the production of art and mediate its distribution and reception, giving art a place in a society, or at least a place for certain audiences.

The metropolis of Nairobi is a national and regional hub for contemporary visual art, in part because of financial support from international donors, who have played an increasing role in Kenya's art scene since the move toward democracy in the 1990s.⁴ Donor funding has proved significant in the Kenya context because of a lack of government patronage and an overbearing influence on contemporary art practices by Nairobi's dominant commercial galleries. An example of the nexus between art institutions and donor funding is the establishment of Kuona Trust in 1995 and its subsequent development.

Kuona Trust was established by British national Rob Burnet, who previously worked at Nairobi's principal commercial art gallery, Gallery Watatu. Opened in 1969, Gallery Watatu was taken over in 1985 by German-born Ruth Schaffner.⁵ Kenya's art market (nationally and internationally) was profoundly shaped by Schaffner's promotion of particular styles and artists. Schaffner showed preference to so-called self-taught artists over those with formal training. Additionally, her nurturing of "naïve" art

4 These donors included, the British Council, the Dutch embassy, Hivos, Duon Foundation, GTZ, Heinrich Boll Foundation, and the Ford Foundation.

5 Gallery Watatu was started by artists Robin Anderson, David Hart, and Jonny Waite, all of whom were non-Black Kenyans or expatriates who made Kenya their home and successfully marketed their artwork at the gallery.

was criticized for encouraging the adoption of a self-conscious “primitivism,” which inevitably inhibited the emergence of other styles or genres (Nyachae 1995, 182). Consequently, Schaffner created a new “authenticity” and marketability of contemporary visual art that simultaneously delegitimized other aspects and advances in the field. However, Schaffner was also instrumental in developing artists through her patronage, which enabled many to pursue art as a serious career. In addition, Schaffner established the Watatu Foundation, which provided financial support, art materials, workshops, and guidance both to artists starting out and to others more established (Court 1996, 18).

At Gallery Watatu, Burnet oversaw Watatu Foundation’s art workshops. At the National Museum of Kenya (NMK) similar, albeit ad hoc, workshops were run by Wendy Karmali (a member of the Kenya Museum Society, which initiated the museum’s Gallery of Contemporary East African Art in 1986). Together Burnet and Karmali persuaded NMK’s director to let them take over a vacant building on a permanent basis. Still an employee of Gallery Watatu, Burnet proposed to Schaffner that Watatu Foundation relocate its workshops to NMK, but Schaffner declined. This prompted Burnet to resign, and he swiftly registered Kuona Trust and secured the vacant building. Thus, Kuona Trust was born.

Kuona Trust initially relied on small grants from local businesses, and Burnet funded his salary principally through the money he made from regularly playing in a popular band. Kuona Trust became a space in which tens of artists grew as a community outside Nairobi’s commercial art venues. This was necessary because, as Burnet (2002, 38) says, “in Nairobi in the early 1990s the only spaces easily accessible to artists were the galleries, whose unavoidable commercial imperatives discouraged artists from interacting together and inevitably drove the work towards a style appealing to tourists who made up most of the clientele.” Alternatively, Kuona Trust focused on the process of creating (rather than selling) and the facilitation of local and international artist workshops (Savage 2014). Larger and more

significant grants, from the British Council, Hivos, and the Ford Foundation, quickly expanded possibilities.

Workshops and residencies associated with Kuona Trust—and the internationalism of these—created a social space of learning and interaction, and fostered relations with actors outside artists’ immediate context (Gerschultz 2013). Taking art to the public in spaces such as Jeevanjee Gardens, in downtown Nairobi, contributed to Burnet’s aim to “build audiences for Kenyan contemporary culture” (2002, 41). In the words of visual artist Michael Soi, “Kuona Trust no doubt provided us with an education in the arts that no university in the region could even fantasise about offering” (Soi 2013, 10).

What emerged at Kuona Trust was a community of artists whose proximity to NMK and the fact that a significant number of artists were located there made it a popular site for visitors to purchase artworks directly from the artists. Thus, alternative avenues for artists to make a livelihood—or at least take advantage of the art center as a platform where one could sell work away from the uncertainties of doing so at Nairobi’s commercial galleries—arose. In other words, prospects for artists to experience some form of financial security came about. What is also meaningful about Kuona Trust at this time was that it encouraged artists to embrace uncertainty and test out and play with new possibilities.

The political and social climate in Kenya was fundamentally changing at the turn of the millennium, and so too was Kenya’s art world. In 2000, Burnet left Kuona Trust, and in came Judy Ogana. Several new art venues opened across the city, and Kuona Trust moved to one of these—the GoDown Arts Centre. However, being housed within the premises of another institution meant that Kuona Trust’s identity became lost. In 2008, Kuona Trust moved to its own site in the Kilimani area of Nairobi, where it boasted of having more than thirty artists with studio spaces, an on-site art gallery, a library, and a program consisting of international residencies, workshops, and public art projects, making it arguably East Africa’s predominant visual art center.

Technological advances and increased globalization in the twenty-first century afforded artists in Kenya with great possibilities for the cross-fertilization of ideas and artistic practices (Marcel 2013; Vierke and Siegert 2013). Art commentators described this period as a “renaissance” in Kenya’s visual art scene (Ogana 2003, 11; Swigert 2011), while artists called it a “cultural awakening” (Jager 2011, 418). This art “renaissance” largely bypassed government patronage, which remained patchy and often shambolic (Wakanyote 2006, 24–25; Maina, 2006, 37–38; Zaugg and Nishimura 2015).

The advent of new art institutions signified a widening of cultural and democratic spaces. The visual artist Peterson Kamwathi, who for a while was based at Kuona Trust, describes these changes: “There is a lot more happening to the arts, a lot more brave expressions. Not striving to serve the tourist market, more engagement with socio-cultural issues. This generation of artists is more visible and assertive than the older one[...] There are a lot more opportunities to address these issues” (Kamwathi 2011, 102). This period in Kenya’s art history saw alternative art forms, notably conceptualism, make an impact. A new generation of artists confronted contradictions in modern Kenyan life and engaged in fearless forms of experimentation transcending technical and thematic conventions (Ogonga 2011, 235). However, because the dominant situation of art production in Nairobi has principally been for commercial galleries and their foreign buyers, support for conceptualism and its production and distribution comes from limited sources, chiefly the Goethe-Institut Nairobi and art grants from various funding bodies. Of note, however, is a move made by Kuona Trust to support “conceptual exhibitions” that include art forms as varied as performance, video art, and installation. This move can be traced back to the 2009 group exhibition *Stereotypes*.

Curated by the artist John Kamicha, *Stereotypes* came about because artists were displaced during Kenya’s 2007–2008 post-election violence and the toxic stereotypes that took a particular ethnic tinge during this time. The exhibition, which included work by John Kamicha, Thom Ogonga, Anthony Okello, Michael

Soi, and Sam Hopkins, was used to critically question issues to do with ethnicity, stereotypes, and how these have been, and continue to be, used by those in power to entrench politics of “tribalism.” Kuona Trust’s director at the time, Danda Jarolimek (2004–2012), provided a production budget for the exhibition, which was somewhat unheard of at the time. A consequence to this, says Jarolimek, is that the work was experimental, sometimes gimmicky, and often not well refined, but the idea was for artists to be able to develop strong concepts for an exhibition and to produce work that reflected this.⁶

Following Jarolimek’s departure in 2012, these “conceptual exhibitions” remained a consistent fixture. Exhibition themes ranged from elections, gender and politics, and the invention of tradition, to substance abuse, the NGO business, and mental health (Halliday 2019, 119–28). Attention to these themes was partly imposed by external donors. For instance, in 2015 the Swedish development organization Forum Syd partnered with Kuona Trust and other cultural institutions in the multiyear program *Wajibu Wetu* (Kiswahili for “It’s Our Responsibility”). Forum Syd was concerned with a shrinking of space for work on human rights and democracy following Jubilee’s appointment to office in 2013, and saw cultural institutions as “untapped pockets” of civil society to increase and diversify social change. In this context, Kuona Trust became an additional space where critical thinking and freedom of expression could be advocated for and stimulated through art.

According to Kuona Trust’s director at the time, Sylvia Gichia (2012–2017), these “conceptual exhibitions” created “a safe space” through their ability to “elicit serious conversations that are not easy to have, despite this whole idea of freedom of speech.”⁷ The concept of “safe space” is an often contested and ambiguous term generally applied in educational settings or within the LGBT community. Referring to queer safe space, the human geographer Gilly Hartal (2018, 1056) imagines it as

6 Interview with Danda Jarolimek at Circle Art Gallery, May 26, 2017.

7 Interview with Sylvia Gichia at Kuona Trust, August 6, 2015.

“a protected place, facilitating a sense of security and recreating discourses of inclusion and diversity. It is a metaphor for the ability to be honest, take risks, and share opinions.” Such elements, I suggest, are particularly apparent in the context of Kuona Trust. The exhibitions were well attended, attracting audience numbers of approximately 100 to 200 per show, most of whom were Kenyans. Furthermore, as part of the curatorial practice in these exhibitions, artist talks were a regular feature. These talks provided an additional platform for public dialogue around themes of an artist’s exhibition, rather than purely being about markets or artistic merit and process.

Acknowledgment of the role of donor funding was made in Kuona Trust’s 2013 Annual Report, which states that “without this [donor] support, most of the more cutting edge, experimental exhibitions, regional and international workshops, residencies, and public art projects would not have been possible.” In effect, Kuona Trust’s operations were fully dependent on donor funding. This setup inevitably follows patterns of support and withdrawal, leaving art spaces precariously positioned and unsustainable if funding is withdrawn. An example of this was seen with the Nairobi Museum-cum-gallery, the Rahimtulla Museum of Modern Art (RaMoMA), which closed in 2010, established in 2001 and expanded with support from the Ford Foundation. A contributing factor to its closure was the withdrawal of donor financial support. In 2016, Kuona Trust faced similar conditions.

By mid-2016 rumors were circulating that Kuona Trust was in crisis. Several artists had moved on. Others who had eagerly started working on significant projects were left waiting when promised funding never came through. Speculation about possible management misappropriation of funds became the subject of much local gossip. In September 2016, Kuona Trust’s Board of Trustees shut down the offices so that one of its donors, the Swedish Forum Syd, could conduct a thorough audit. Forum Syd’s audit was not made public, but the *East African* (a regional newspaper) reported that the Swedish NGO was demanding the return of more than \$50,000 that was unaccounted for (Whalley

2016). This is not the first time that controversy has surrounded Kuona Trust, but this time the results have been the most drastic. Following this scandal, other donors also withdrew their support, and Kuona Trust's operations were suspended, effectively bringing an end to its operations. The complete lack of public transparency as to what happened has meant those responsible for its collapse have not been held to account. However, the story does not end there.

This crisis galvanized artists and previous beneficiaries of Kuona Trust to come together to keep the space functioning. Working collectively, artists created a committee and raised funds through open days and art exhibitions to meet the minimum requirements to pay for the bills and rent. In December 2017, the Kuona Artists Collective was launched. The newly founded collective aims to continue the legacy of Kuona Trust. This is perhaps most notable through the nurturing of younger artists who are in the formative stages of their careers and who find the security provided there—through informal mentorship, sense of community, and where freedom of expression and creativity manifest—conducive to their artistic development. Additionally, the new collective continues to build local audiences for the appreciation of the arts in Kenya, which is evident in the monthly “First Sato” events, which draw crowds from across the city.

However, the Kuona Artists Collective currently lacks the resources to implement regular training workshops, artist grants, art residencies, and retain a gallery space. Thus, though it borrows its name and remains at the same site, it is clearly something very different from Kuona Trust. For now, however, Kuona Artists Collective is learning how it can continue to provide vital support for the visual arts outside the formalized institution that was once Kuona Trust. The form this new collective takes potentially falls into the trap of shaping itself on past models, but it does have the benefit of hindsight and opportunity to create something alternative and self-reliant.

* * *

The most crucial dimension is the risk of donor dependency: as will be made clear in the following section, donor support is fickle and institutions reliant on it need to create their own mechanisms and structures to operate on their own.

* * *

NGO Nairobi (Beppe Karlsson)

Nairobi is a critical node of the development industry in the Global South. It is the regional headquarters of the UN and many international organizations, bilateral donors, think tanks, and NGOs that work across the region. It is also home to many local NGOs and community-based organizations. According to some estimates, the NGO sector employs as many as 300,000 people in Kenya, of which the majority are based in Nairobi.

The proliferation of NGOs is a global phenomenon connected to the neoliberal agenda rolled out in the late 1980s, whereby the state was cast as a problem for development, and civil society actors were presented as closer to local communities and as more effective in the implementation of antipoverty schemes and other development programs (Ferguson 2015; Powell and Seddon 1997). Since the 1980s, Western donors have channeled large parts of their international aid budgets through NGOs (Mosse 2005). This led to a mushrooming of NGOs, some with a mainly local, grassroots profile, and others with an international reach and organizational structure that spanned Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The latter often have their headquarters in the West and work through regional, national, and local offices. With a well-developed expat infrastructure of schools, hospitals, and recreation attractions, and a favorable climate, Nairobi is an attractive base for these international NGOs, especially when compared to other parts of the region. Among the educated Kenyan middle classes, employment for these larger NGOs also became an attractive career path with relatively generous pay and opportunities to travel and build networks and expertise.

In 2011, there were 7,500 NGOs registered in Kenya, providing full employment to more than 300,000 people (Brass 2016, 76).

But the situation is changing, the romance of the NGOs is waning, and a new, more diversified geography of development aid is emerging with focus on support in building stronger state institutions, including social welfare schemes, such as cash payment programs (Fergusson 2015), direct support to the business sector, and involvement of new development actors, especially China, with a different *modus operandi*, focusing especially on larger infrastructural projects. In Kenya, the political space for NGOs has changed under the respective governments of Moi, Kibaki, and Uhuru Kenyatta. As Jennifer Brass argues, during Moi's administration it was a matter of conflict and direct confrontation, something that radically changed under Kibaki's presidency when NGOs could operate relatively freely, cooperating with government departments and receiving generous support from Western donors (Brass 2016, 60–94). With Kenyatta coming to power this changed, reverting to a colder or more constrained relationship between the government and the NGO sector (76). Brass only covers the early years of Kenyatta's presidency, and it seems safe to say that the relationship has become increasingly hostile after that. The Kenyan government has, for example, imposed various restrictions on hiring foreign personnel and in bringing in funds from abroad. Many NGOs have closed during the past decade, and many expat aid workers left, or were not able to enter, the country after being denied work permits. President Uhuru Kenyatta has several times expressed his disgust for NGOs and the civil society more broadly, accusing them of being antinational and of serving the interest of foreign powers, hence the notion of "evil society." The fact that several human rights organizations supported the International Criminal Court (ICC) case against the president and vice president is a particularly sore point for the Jubilee regime (see Lugano 2000).

To unpack these dynamics and their implications, let us turn to a high-profile event, the Democracy and Human Rights Festival, that took place at the National Theatre in Nairobi, January 31 and February 1, 2018. The festival was organized by Forum Syd

(now Forum Civ) and Diakonia, two Swedish NGOs, and their respective Kenyan partner organizations, with financial support from the Swedish embassy. In her opening speech, the Swedish ambassador to Kenya, Anna Jardfelt, pointed to the increasingly hostile environment that civil society organizations were operating under and the shrinking civic space. This sentiment was echoed in the speeches given by several other delegates. Ironically, and which was also the topic of heated discussions during breaks, the media faced various difficulties in reporting from the event. In the panel “Shrinking Civic Space,” the discussion came to focus on the repressive role of the NGO Board. As several delegates argued, the main function of the Board, which lies under the Ministry of Interior, seemed to be to harass and intimidate NGOs. The representative of the NGO Board, Sekoh Nyandiro, argued that they were carrying out their work according to an act of parliament. Their role, he stated, was to oversee the NGO sector and advise the government. The discussion revealed a lack of trust between organizations and the NGO Board. Only once did Nyandiro acknowledge problems with their work: after someone in the audience questioned why the NGO Board had declared the Sonko Rescue Team (associated with the then Nairobi senator) the best performing NGO in Kenya two weeks after the organization had been registered. In response, Nyandiro smiled and said, “You have a point there, let me leave it at that.” People laughed — obviously other forces had been at work behind this decision.

Generally, however, the conversation was more combative. For example, at one point, the moderator raised the issue of dwindling resources and the movement “from aid to trade.” Nyandiro used this comment to accuse NGOs of failing to grasp new opportunities:

Last week Melinda Gates was here, and earlier the richest woman in the world was here. There is something these people see that we are missing; the private sector wants to come here. Shrinking funds from Western donors, yes! But Samsung has a huge fund. Singapore has people that want to

support us — they have a lot of money and look for partners. They are businessmen and look for possibilities. The NGO sector is slumbering, not trying to capture these new possibilities.

To this, one of the panelists, Ruth Mumbi, from the pro-poor social movement *Bunge la Mwananchi*,⁸ responded, “Foreign companies, I stay away from them. Like with the Chinese, they come here to exploit people. Why should the NGO Board tell us to work with them?”

Most directed their frustration and critique against the Kenyan government and the NGO Board, and the debate also came to focus on inequalities and divisions within the NGO sector and civil society more generally. According to one activist from Mathare: “I am a feminist running a social movement. ‘Shrinking space,’ whose space is shrinking? Mainstream civil society doesn’t respect us who do unpaid, voluntary work. You need to recognize our work, the work of foot soldiers. To win this war, we need to help each other. Don’t keep asking us if we have a degree. Do you need a degree to work in human rights?” Through such comments, some of the larger NGOs with the institutional capacity to secure donor funding were criticized for being elitist and for failing to understand the difficult conditions that local grassroots organizations and activists faced. Such debates are further complicated by the competition between NGOs. In Nairobi, there is hardly any social sphere without NGO involvement, be it to run a school, a health clinic, a radio station, or to carry out tree planting, garbage collection, build sewage drainage, or provide drinking water. In Kibera, supposedly the largest slum in Africa, many foreign-funded NGOs struggle against each other to improve the lives for the people that live there (cf. de Lima 2020).

Thus, in addition to the problem of bracketing such widely different organizations as the Melinda and Bill Gates Founda-

8 For more information on *Bunge la Mwananchi*, see Gachici 2014; Kimari and Rasmussen 2010; and Lockwood 2019.

tion (with billions of dollars and a global reach) and small grassroots organizations (that work in a single neighborhood with nominal resources) as NGOs, the sector is riven by divisions and is undermined by dependency. Many NGOs in Kenya, especially locally based ones, are dependent on donor funding for their operations. This not only highlights a situation of precarity, but also of temporality: financial support from donors is volatile and unpredictable, and this has an effect on how and which organizations can thrive during certain moments.

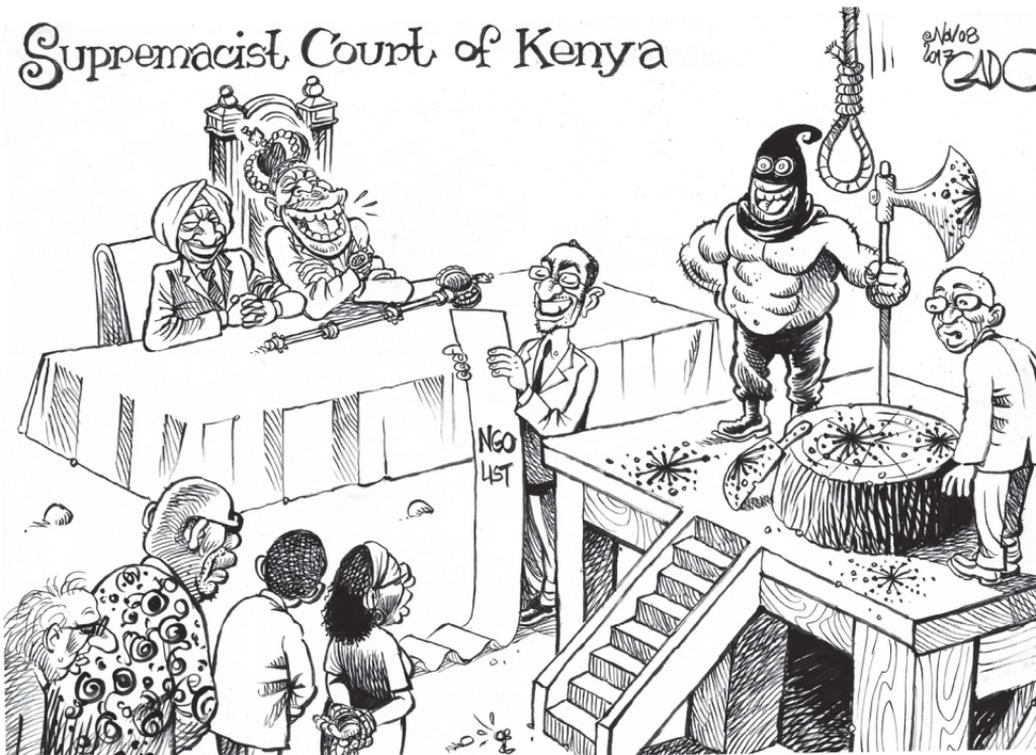
Yet this situation of dependency on donor funding is also reflected in another issue that kept arising, namely, the situation of “sitting allowances,” or the payment of money to participants of NGO trainings and meetings. For some, this was a mistaken practice: Trainings were for the good of the community and so why should people be paid to take part? However, others defended the practice and questioned why those lowest in the food chain should give their time without pay. If NGO workers get a salary, why shouldn’t those living in the slums at least receive a few shillings to take part in their activities?

* * *

The issue of “sitting allowances” is widely contested in this domain, and in the following section, we get further insight into how sex workers in Nairobi view this phenomenon.

Fig. 40. Gado, Supremacist Court of Kenya, 2017

Supremacist Court of Kenya



* * *

The Clientization of NGOs (Naomi van Stapele)

Per diems and stipends from NGOs form a significant part of the income of sex workers in Nairobi (see Beckmann 2010; Česnulytė 2019; White 2009). Many male and female sex workers not only participate in events but also often act as peer educators and mobilizers for health interventions run by NGOs and government bodies. Commonly, sex workers are paid to conduct such activities, but are less involved in decision-making and resource allocation. As a result, sex workers often talked about NGOs in terms like those they used to describe their relationships with clients.

On a hot and dry day in January 2015, I walked back to the city center of Nairobi with three young, gay male sex workers. The men were also peer educators at a community-based organization that advocated for their rights to be included in the design and implementation of health programs that targeted sex workers. We had just attended a capacity-building workshop organized by an international NGO at a luxurious hotel. Our bellies were full of the lavish lunch we had just devoured, so we strolled leisurely in the shade of the big trees that lined the street on both sides. One of the young men suddenly started to laugh and said that at least he did not have to look for clients now. “It is Friday and I have money to go out. I am so horny, hahaha so I am going to look for my boyfriend and have a good time.” He snapped his fingers and wiggled his head to show his contentment. His friend did not share his glee and replied to him with anger in his voice: “They [the NGO] should have given us more than a lunch (KES 500). I checked the menu and the lunch we ate was at least 3k per person. Put that together with what [the NGO] must pay for the room, for coffee, tea, huh? They should have given us at least a 1000 [shillings].” The others nodded in agreement. I asked them what they thought about the workshop, and the only response I got from them was a vague “okay,” uttered without any hint of enthusiasm. I urged them on: “Did

you learn something new? Was it helpful?” One of them replied lazily while shrugging his shoulder: “You know, these organizations [NGOs], they just come and ask information from us, so they can write big proposals and get lots of funds, they use our stories. We just go for the money.”

During my two-year research with fifteen gay male sex workers and peer educators in Nairobi, I learned that most of them earned an average of 1,000 KES a week from attending NGO seminars, roughly 30 percent of their total weekly income. One of them, called Riri, explained to me: “Of course we know everything about taking care of our health! Hahaha, but we go to these seminars because they have so much money. They need to write down how many of us attend so they can show they are doing their work [to donors], and we get some money and food.” Riri continued: “Without us, the community [of gay male sex workers], they [the NGOs] cannot earn so much money.” He also shared that NGOs hardly helped them out: “Many of us still have health problems, safety issues, but not because we don’t know how to take care of our health or practice safe sex. That is only what these NGOs focus on. Because that is what donors want. They don’t know our real situation; they do not really listen to us. We have problems because we are poor, homeless and we are gang raped when we sleep in the streets.” He concluded that even if the NGO seminars did not help them address their problems, it did provide them with a source of income that enabled them to sometimes avoid clients who refused condoms. However, he said, “for real help we go to [the Community-Based Organization (CBO)]. [The CBO] helps us when we are arrested, or gang raped, huh! Or when we need emergency health services, even for food!”

Every time I evaluated the interactions between NGOs and gay male sex workers, I observed similar accounts. Almost none of them ever felt that NGOs were relevant to them besides the frequent stipends they could access. More so, the way gay male sex workers and peer educators talked about NGOs resembled the way in which they understood their relationships with clients — that is, as a commercial transaction that involved their

bodies. In their view, NGOs had lots of money to which they felt entitled, but the NGOs only wanted their bodies to be present during meetings to meet a certain “body quota.” In return, they received money, but—and again as with clients—they were often disgruntled about the amount paid. Just as they taught each other how to talk to clients, they also taught each other how to talk to NGOs: to give “stories” that would fit the NGO agenda, which enabled them to increase the money they would get. Some even referred to attending NGO seminars as “going to work,” the exact words that many used to describe when they went out to do sex work.

* * *

This section on stipends, or sitting allowances, shows the myriad of relationships that exist between individuals and institutions. We see how certain institutional frameworks can translate into specific, and often unforeseen, everyday practices. Yet we also see relationships of dependency, that is, how sex workers rely on such stipends as an income, and perhaps even some sense of mutuality, that is, both “benefiting” from each other in various ways. Furthermore, we also see how individuals, such as sex workers, are creative in extracting resources from where they can. Very often institutions have relationships with each other through the practices of certain individuals who in entrepreneurial, serendipitous, or extractive ways establish certain relationships with others from other institutions. This is also the case in the next section, which highlights the “dirty” relationships that can exist between institutions and further flesh out the often informal and clandestine nature of such interactions.

* * *

“Dirty togetherness”: The Gangs and Police (Naomi van Stapele)

The relationship between police and young men in Nairobi’s informal settlements is often described by the latter in idioms of war. Police are considered the enemy in a continuous struggle over security and resources. Police are known to execute young men who are considered criminals (see Jones et al. 2018; van Stapele 2016, 2020; MSJC 2017). At the local level, “crime” is often interpreted as theft, while other illegal activities — such as distilling alcohol or selling heroin — are not perceived as crimes by many community members, but as work, and are regarded as illegal endeavors by the police. During my fieldwork in 2010 and 2011 with alcohol distillers and heroin sellers, I observed how different police units came into Mathare daily to take bribes from these young men. Their bosses made regular agreements on the size of the bribe to allow these illegal industries to thrive without too much police interference. However, the police always pushed the young men to cough up more than they had bargained for, thus eating into their profits. The following vignette describes how heroin sellers from Ruff Skwad in Mathare responded to “hungry police.”

Blue was the uncontested leader of Ruff Skwad. He was also the main initiator of several additional collective business ventures to diversify the group’s income. As it turned out, he was the only one from Ruff Skwad to benefit from these collective ventures in the long run; he managed to carefully apply the skills he had acquired during the rise and fall of these businesses to build his private projects, which became increasingly lucrative over the years. At the time of my fieldwork, he was the proud and single owner of the Ruff Skwad Beach Pub, a chicken project, and an illegal electricity business. On top of that he was an important broker between the heroin bosses and sellers.

In late March 2011, I was sitting with a few Ruff Skwad members at their local pub in Kosovo, Mathare, when Blue entered brusquely and summoned a few of the young men to go with him. He told me to look out the window (a carved open square

in the plywood wall) and watch the rocky steps on the other side of the Mathare River leading to the main road. He laughed mysteriously and ran out. The group followed him, and minutes later I saw them climbing swiftly up the cliffs to “Nigeria” while picking up large rocks from the ground. Nigeria was the name of a field near the main road behind the petrol station where Ruff Skwad members sold heroin and other types of drugs.

Malik stood beside me and explained that the Administrative Police (AP) had become “greedy and now they come every day to ask for *hongoo*” (“bribe” in Kiswahili). Their bosses regularly met with police officers from different police stations and camps near Mathare to agree on the bribes the different police teams were to receive from the dealers on the ground. Malik continued: “All police they get bribes. AP they come once a week, Pangani [a police station nearby from the Kenya Police] twice because they have more power, hahaha, they need to eat more. So we can work at the field without police harassment.” Two AP officers had breached their agreement with the drug bosses, as they had visited the field almost every day over the past few weeks to demand money. As a result, the increased demand for bribes had reduced the daily earnings of the drug dealers because they had to compensate for the overall losses. Their bosses held them responsible for safeguarding the agreement on the ground. I quickly realized that Blue and the other Ruff Skwad members were out to punish the AP officers for their “greed” by throwing rocks at them.

Suddenly, Malik and I heard screams followed by gunshots. I stared at Malik in shock. He shrugged, but he kept quiet and stared anxiously out the window. Then we saw a few members running down the hill to the river, kicking up dust in their trail. Blue and two others entered the dimly lit pub out of breath and with a twinkle in their eyes, and they talked all at once to describe what had happened. Amidst laughter, they explained how they had thrown stones at two policemen, who had immediately responded by shooting at them. Blue told me that the young men had quickly found refuge in the labyrinth of alleyways behind Nigeria after he had hit one of the police officers on

the head. Blue chuckled: “Blood came out.” All of them felt satisfied with the outcome and were certain that this would teach the two AP officers to keep to their side of the agreement.

After a few minutes of catching their breath, one of the other Ruff Skwad members received a phone call from a team member at the field. Panic erupted inside the bar: news had reached the group that the two AP officers had arrested Jodo, one of their members. A commotion ensued until an hour later, when Jodo walked in triumphantly showing his handcuffed wrists to the cheering crowd inside the pub. Apparently, he had jumped from the cliff and escaped using the same route as the others, with the police getting hopelessly lost in the alleyways. A sigh of relief echoed through the bar. Yet, I was still worried and asked how they would remove the handcuffs. Blue laughed at my naivety and took his keychain from his pocket before casually using a key to click open the restraints. I later discovered that many carried a master key to open handcuffs, because they never knew when these would come in handy. Blue had got his key from his boss, who in turn had received it from her main police contact at Pangani police station.

Blue’s relationship with his boss, and furthermore that relationship with a particular police contact, show how networks (both informal and formal) span across institutions and create various forms of “dirty togetherness,” a concept developed by Polish sociologist Adam Podgórecki (1987). Although drawing from a very different context, the idea is not foreign to the Kenyan context, where there is a history of institutions working together, including gangs that are connected to politicians and/or the police (see Mueller 2011). In some parts of the country (and the city), “gangs effectively have become government in terms of perversely having taken over much of its physical space and functions” (Mueller 2011, 107), while in other areas, gangs are subordinate to the local authorities. Relationships between people and across institutions blur binaries and boundaries (such as legal versus illegal) and shape the way that institutions operate across urban spaces. Furthermore, in many cases, certain individuals play a prominent role in shaping how a particu-

lar institution or entity is defined. Think of the numerous leaders, businesses, and politicians that have defined the way certain decisions are made in the governing of the city.

* * *

In the following piece, we will see how one politician, Mike Sonko, marked Nairobi politics.

* * *

Nairobi Politics: The Hustler versus the Suit (Gabrielle Lynch)

Kenya's 2010 constitution devolved significant powers to forty-seven new county governments, complete with elected governors and assemblies, and created an upper house of the legislature with elected senators from each county. In the general elections that followed on March 4, 2013, Evans Kidero and Gideon Mbuvi Kioko (or Mike Sonko, as he is better known) were elected the first governor and senator of Nairobi County, respectively.

Kidero's victory was unsurprising. As a successful businessman he had the funds and connections to support a gubernatorial campaign and could sell a narrative of capability. Kidero also ran on the main opposition party ticket, the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM), and, although the benefits of incumbency clearly extended beyond the presidency to other ruling party candidates, opposition parties have historically done well in Nairobi because of the relative ease of campaigning in a densely populated area with high literacy rates and a diverse media environment, and popular frustration with blatant government failings (Jones 2020). In contrast, Sonko was part of the establishment's Jubilee Alliance, was widely alleged to have made his money from illegal drugs, and was otherwise known for his predilection for colorful hats and bling jewelry, his patronage of Nairobi's popular nightspots, his extramarital affairs, and for a

rough business and political style that had landed him in prison in the 1990s and often landed him in court.

As Kidero's and Sonko's first terms in office passed, it became clear that the senator, like many of his peers across the country, had set his sights on the gubernatorial race for the next election in 2017. The reason was simple: governors enjoyed significant resources, including official budgets, powers of appointment and contracting, and associated opportunities to accumulate, but senators lacked even a development fund of their own and clearly had less power and influence (Cheeseman, Lynch, and Willis 2016).

More interesting, however, was a growing sense that Sonko would be successful in his efforts to oust Kidero. This was not because of any significant change in Sonko's lifestyle or strategies. Quite the opposite: it was common to see the senator on a night out, he refused to follow official dispute channels, and insisted on engaging in development activities that lay outside of his senatorial mandate. Instead, Sonko seemed to be gaining ground in large part because of these activities and his associated reputation as a "hustler."

In contrast, Kidero was increasingly seen as incompetent. This was evident during a state visit by Barack Obama, the US president, in July 2015, and, four months later, by Pope Francis. Such high-profile visits by popular individuals often provide a boost to local leaders. However, on this occasion, it brought Kidero's waning support into sharp relief, as Nairobians joined in mocking the governor for a last minute city beautification project at the cost of KES 48 million, which included efforts to grow grass from seed in a couple of days, through the hashtag *#kiderosgrass*, and a plethora of videos and memes — for example, of Obama wearing green-tinted sunglasses for the entirety of his trip, and of "keep off the grass" signs above muddy verges. The jokes were laden with frustration: for many, *#kiderosgrass* exemplified the county government's inability to deliver on residents' priorities amidst widespread reports of endemic corruption.

Two years later, Sonko won the gubernatorial election on a ruling Jubilee Party ticket with 53 percent of the popular vote; Kidero's share shrunk to 42 percent. This was even though his party's standard bearer, Raila Odinga, secured 51 percent of the Nairobi presidential vote. Sonko's victory was rendered even more impressive by the fact that he was clearly disliked, and even a little feared, by many establishment elites, who, in the Jubilee Party primaries, had backed a polished businessman and former presidential candidate, Peter Kenneth, against this flashy upstart.

Sonko's ability to win the Jubilee primaries and gubernatorial race provides several insights into the politics of security and uncertainty. First, it stands as a reminder of the weakness of political parties: citizens divided their vote, and Sonko was able to secure the Jubilee ticket without the backing of party leaders. This is significant given that one aim of the 2010 constitution and associated legislation was to encourage the emergence of strong institutionalized parties that would provide a disciplinary structure for political action and thus help to change the nature of Kenyan politics from personality-based to policy-oriented. The aim: to end a pattern of "big man" politics and to usher in a new period of popular involvement in determining party policy, which would help to make politics more predictable, civil, and institutionalized.

Second, it reminds us of how, in contrast to regular assertions, elections are neither a mere ethnic census nor determined simply by vote-buying or patronage. Politicians must work hard to persuade voters to support them and to reject their opponents, with voters continuing to judge politicians on the basis of their perceived merit as an effective patron who can promote and defend their interests, and as a good civic leader who can promote public goods, such as development and security, more broadly (Cheeseman, Lynch, and Willis, 2020). In this context, Sonko's rise and cross-ethnic appeal stemmed from his reputation as a "hustler" who could get things done for individuals *and* the city.

First, his ghetto style, struggles with authority, and regular appearances in informal settlements and bars ensured that he appeared closer to his constituents than the besuited Kidero, the majority of whom also felt that they needed to hustle to get by. This in turn suggested that he understood people's day-to-day problems, that he would be more accessible to people when they needed to seek assistance and support, that he might remember and better support his fellow hustlers, that he might be able to play the system to his, and to his supporters', advantage, and that he might have the strength and bravery to talk truth to power (cf. Wanyande 2002). At the same time, a pre-election makeover into a serious, besuited politician and, more importantly, his regime-organized alliance with a successful businessman — Polycarp Igathe — ensured that many Nairobians (including middle- and upper-class citizens) were willing to give Senator Sonko and his deputy a chance against Kidero. The idea: Sonko might be a thug, but he would likely be kept in check by establishment elites once in office and might prove more capable of solving some of the city's intractable problems — from poor social services and sanitation in informal settlements to infamous traffic jams and high crime rates. Or, to put it another way, in a city characterized by uncertainty and insecurity, hustling — which might include a degree of rule-breaking and even violence — was an understandable approach that could potentially pay dividends.

As part of this image, it was critical that Sonko recognized the importance of being, and being seen as, an effective “big man” who helped individuals, various interest groups, and the city. Thus, while Kidero failed to clearly label projects funded by the Nairobi County government during his time in office, Sonko lost no opportunity to drum up publicity for his well-branded activities — from the TV crews who captured him standing up for people's rights in the informal settlements to the launch of the “Sonko Rescue Team” in 2015. The latter was composed of various branded vehicles — fire trucks, ambulances, hearses, wedding limousines — and youth who, in branded T-shirts, drove the vehicles and participated in various community pro-

jects, such as road maintenance and gravedigging. The message: if Sonko could get this much done as a senator with no development budget, think of all the things that he could do as a governor. Or as Sonko summarized: *#letsfixNairobi*.

This detail is important since, if people do not simply vote along ethnic lines or for the person who gives them the most, then periods of tension and violence along ethnic lines cannot simply be explained away as “ethnic violence.” Instead, it hints at the ways in which groups come into tension out of a sense of injustice, fear, or opportunity, and how violence can sometimes be justified by individuals and groups as a necessary means to protect and promote their interests or those of their city or nation. This means that violence is far from inevitable, but is always a pressing concern in a context of personalized politics, weak institutions, narratives of historical injustice, and a strong sense of skepticism regarding the character of the elite (both elected and unelected) and the credibility of key institutions (Cheeseman, Lynch, and Willis 2020).

After Sonko’s rise, came his fall. Once elected, he soon experienced a series of public relations disasters that saw him publicly backtrack from key policy decisions. This included a ban on public service vehicles from entering the CBD in 2018, which was quickly lifted after the city ground to a halt and pictures of almost unprecedented traffic jams went viral on social media. His calls for citizens to show patience for the delivery of his manifesto as he dealt with “entrenched cartels” similarly fed social media retorts that, as a man widely believed to have accumulated immense wealth through shady deals and drugs, he was part of the problem rather than the solution. At the same time, the dynamic duo quickly fell out, and Igate announced his resignation within six months of their election, citing a failure to win Sonko’s trust. Yet, things turned from bad to worse for Sonko in December 2020 when he was impeached and removed for abuse of office. The former governor went on to face criminal charges of corruption, assault, and recruiting and arming a militia, before returning to politics in 2022 as a gubernatorial candidate for Mombasa County. At the time of writing,

Sonko was seeking to overturn a decision by the electoral commission's Dispute Resolution Committee to bar him from running for office again.

Sonko's rise and fall says much about the politics of mobilization and representation in the city and beyond. In short, Nairobi's cosmopolitan nature provides unparalleled opportunity to mobilize across ethnic lines, but this is not because of a different logic of political representation. On the contrary, the idea that leaders should assist their constituents and protect and promote their interests, and the interests of the nation more broadly, continues to prevail across the country. The assumption that politicians tend to favor their "own," together with communal narratives of injustice, often renders it difficult to trust that an "other" will really be a good representative and fuel fears that particular "others" might undermine the same (Lynch 2011). The difference in an area as cosmopolitan as Nairobi is that leaders must secure their credentials as effective leaders across ethnic lines. Sonko's fall in turn reminds us of the regular turnover of elected politicians in Kenya and the need to deliver to retain support.

At the same time, Sonko's trajectory points to the limitations of institutional design to bring about a change in political culture. The 2010 constitution has clearly created powerful new offices that have complicated Kenyan politics (Cheeseman et al. 2019). However, the creation of these new posts has failed to overturn the logic of political representation and has instead born witness to the localization or devolution of long-standing political dynamics. This includes mobilization as patrons who can assist and defend constituent and national interests, the need to accumulate to sustain one's position as a "big man," and an ongoing politics of ever-shifting political alliances and weak formal parties.

* * *

Understanding such alliances is crucial to comprehending how institutions work, the role that individuals play in making or breaking them, and the politics behind uncertainty and inse-

curity. It also forces us to realize the powerful and key role that some individuals can potentially play. In addition to analyzing the role of individuals, it is also crucial to understand how they experience their positions and how they feel about it, as this might enable us to uncover a more personal and emotional perspective to statecraft, as is done in the following section.

* * *

“Checking my colleagues”: Oversight Work of State Authorities
(Tessa Diphorn)

“It’s not always rewarding work,” Michael tells me. “Although this work is about ensuring better public service delivery, that the state provides for the *wananchi* (ordinary people), for many, they feel you are controlling their work. And sometimes, yes, my work is about checking my colleagues.” Michael has been a public servant for more than two decades. He has witnessed the rise and fall of different governments and observed the evolution of Kenyan state performance. He takes pride in his work, as someone who is serving his country, and distances himself from the negatively associated term “bureaucrat,” which often implies a lazy state official who simply follows orders and is incapable of thinking outside of the box.

Discussing his current work at the Commission for Administrative Justice (CAJ), also known as the Office of the Ombudsman, Michael repeatedly refers to the Kenyan constitution of 2010. The new constitution played a defining role in Kenya’s governance at its various levels (from the country to the county to the municipality). Spearheaded by devolution and decentralization at its core, the constitution was heralded as a beacon of hope and transformation (see Ghai 2008; Kindiki and Ambani 2005; Kanyinga 2016). Throughout my fieldwork on police reform, the constitution was a habitual reference point, denoted as the source of potential reform initiatives.

For state officials such as Michael, the constitution was a pivotal construct. During my talks with Michael, he seemed to know

the entire document by heart, continuously referring to certain articles to clarify the nature and purpose of his work. It is, after all, “the constitution that guides our work,” and he specifically refers to Article 59(4), which permitted the restructuring of the Kenya National Human Rights and Equality Commission into three separate commissions, and this included the Commission on Administrative Justice (CAJ) Act in 2011. Generally speaking, the mandate of the CAJ is to enforce administrative justice by addressing all matters of maladministration of public officers. In practice, this largely centers around fielding complaints against public officers and investigating them. In a nutshell: citizens who want to file a complaint against a public officer can do so with CAJ and through seven different channels — physically visit one of the five offices, phone the office, text a particular number, write a letter, write an email, fill in an online form, or visit a Huduma center. These centers have been established as part of the Huduma Kenya Programme, a flagship of the Kenya Vision 2030 that was initiated by President Kenyatta. Broadly speaking, such centers have the aim of improving the access and delivery of government services. In 2016 alone, CAJ received a total of 118,543 complaints, of which 100,720 were resolved — a resolution rate of 85 percent (CAJ 2016). These range from complaints against police officers to public university employees. Furthermore, the CAJ is merely one oversight body among many established by the new constitution.

On paper, the CAJ seems to be an effective oversight body, and when entering their offices in West End Towers, off Waiyaki Way, one is easily impressed by their spacious and clean offices, which are in stark contrast to the run-down and dilapidated public offices that are commonly found in downtown Nairobi. Yet, at the same time, the vast majority remain unaware of the ombudsman’s existence and powers. For many Nairobians, the state continues to be an authoritative and distant entity that is inaccessible and unchangeable. To file a complaint is seen as a time-consuming and pointless nuisance, rather than as a step toward change and improvement.

This perception makes it difficult for individuals such as Michael to do their work: “We tell the people that we are here for them, but they don’t, or they don’t believe. And for them, we are also state, the same. So we have citizens who don’t really trust us, and we have state officials that also don’t really trust us, see as those who are here to correct them. It is not an easy job.” Michael’s sentiments have been echoed by many other state officials, who have shared their frustrations with their line of work and have described it as a Catch-22. This is especially the case for those who are part of the “reform train,” a term used by a human rights lawyer, and who have the mandate to implement change. Such individuals, of which Michael is one, experience their task of “checking on their colleagues” as a heavy burden. This dimension, namely, the personal emotions and sentiments of those in power, needs to be included to understand how institutions either create or diminish experiences of certainty and contingency.

* * *

Transformations and Becomings

Institutions are, after all, human-made constructions that are defined by the experiences and sentiments of individuals, such as Shining Cloak, Steve Langat, Clifford, Blue, Mike Sonko, Michael, and all the other people that are not explicitly mentioned yet function as key characters in the contributions to this chapter. These individuals co-constitute what institutions are and do, and through establishing and managing various relationships with and across institutions, they can negotiate through a complex and ever-changing landscape of security and uncertainty. These relationships, that range from competition to dependency to collaboration, operate along and throughout various binaries (state versus nonstate, formal versus informal, legal versus illegal, etc.) and give shape to ways in which uncertainty and (in)security are experienced and understood.

By focusing on the “humanizing of security,” this book understands security in more unconventional and multifaceted ways, yet this does not mean that we should overlook or disregard the more conventional ways that institutions, in the broadest sense, shape and produce uncertainty and insecurity in a variety of ways. Institutions contribute to our sense of ordering, and this occurs in asymmetrical ways: by providing security for someone, insecurity for another is often the inevitable result. And this is especially so in a context such as Nairobi, where transformations are always ongoing; from visions of 2030 to larger processes of constitutional reform, institutions are constantly in a state of flux and inherently create unforeseen urban futures.

Recursive Becomings

*Tessa Diphorn, Joost Fontein, Peter Lockwood,
and Constance Smith*

In 2020–21, as we were beginning to finalize our collations of the different contributions to this book, the Covid-19 pandemic reached Nairobi. As we write this now two years later, the pandemic and its afterlives are still unfolding. Like the themes of this book, the multiple, unequal, and sometimes deeply contradictory effects of the pandemic on Nairobi's landscapes, bodies, lives, and institutions remain uncertain and incomplete. And yet, as with so many aspects of Nairobi life and history discussed here — particularly as they relate to questions of security, uncertainty, and contingency — the effects of the pandemic have already begun to reflect, in diverse ways, the profound yet often quotidian sense of recursivity that marks the city; of enduring and replicating social and material forms within different coexistent temporalities of regulated change; of the entrenchment of particular kinds of social, economic, and political relations, aspirations, tensions, disparities, and complicities, at the edge of older frontiers of expansion, opportunity, and transformation.

When a village elder in Mathare told Gitonga and Fontein (2021) in October 2020 that “getting sick around here is a normal thing [...] but now if anybody dies it becomes corona,” his

comment not only indexed persistent spatialized inequalities in the city, and the multiple challenges that people living in its “slums” continue to face (as well as the opportunities these give rise to, for some people, sometimes). It also gave voice to the recurring ambivalences of making livable lives (and deaths) in Nairobi. That is, between, on the one hand, everyday critiques of enduring structures and excesses of power, privilege, inequality, and corruption; through, for example, circulating gossip about “politician super-spreaders,” “Covid billionaires,” and the looting of official resources set aside to offer relief from the deprivations of the pandemic and its “lockdowns” (see Smith and Wiegatz 2020). And, on the other hand, the uncertain duplicity of localized and individual attempts to exploit, normalize, or exceptionalize the everyday precarities of city life under a new “global Covid” banner, for the purposes of small economic gains, to generate new social relations, mark new achievements in social status, or to make real long-held aspirations of recognition and belonging to a wider berth of “global citizenship” (Gitonga and Fontein 2021).

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Mural in Mathare (Otemo James, Mathare-based graffiti/
mural artist)

Fig. 41. Otemo James, *Mural in Mathare*, 2020.



* * *

Covid-19 may have brought something new into the mix, as it has done everywhere, underlining the city's unfinished becomings. Yet the pandemic's complex effects have inevitably been not only Nairobi-specific — and intertwined with many global elsewhere — they have also exemplified some of the long recursivities of this city on the edge. At the same time, of course, Nairobi's unfinished becoming in the early 2020s has in no way been limited or constrained by Covid-19 in 2020–21. There is, and always has been, much more going on.

On June 21, 2021, when we were writing the first draft of this epilogue, part of a bridge in central Nairobi collapsed, burying several people. The bridge was over Waiyaki Way and was under construction as part of the “Nairobi Expressway” infrastructure project to create a major elevated highway slicing through the center of the city. Fortunately, there were only minor injuries, and no one was killed, but other such collapses, as explored in chapter 1, have caused fatalities. Such incidents drastically reveal how road-building and other projects of so-called development can, in themselves, be generative of uncertainty and insecurity, both for lives and for infrastructures and landscapes of the city. Since the core chapters of this book were completed, the fabric of Nairobi has continued to transform, through processes of collapse, demolition, and construction. The Nairobi Ring Road and Expressway projects have finally been completed, expanding urban terrains into formerly rural areas, and promising to accelerate movement across and around the city, at least for those willing or able to pay for it. New high-rise housing projects, such as Ngara, have risen from the rubble of old neighborhoods and reassembled urban infrastructures in new constellations. Urban insecurity is felt, therefore, not only in the frictions of gentrification, migration, displacement, or political violence, but also in the very stuff of the city. It is a marker of how a city's becoming is contingent and provisional, subject to intense and sometimes fraught processes that can knit together or unravel, asymmetrically and unequally, over time.

It is also a reminder of the impossibility of completion and of things always remaining “unfinished” (Biehl and Locke 2017). We chose the title *Nairobi Becoming* to evoke the shifting, churning character of the city, and the provisional process of its making. It implies a future-focused orientation, emphasizing contingency and open-ended possibility rather than retrospection and resolution. In *Writing the City into Being*, on post-apartheid Johannesburg, Lindsay Bremner (2010) beautifully conjures up some of the correspondences between city-making and book-writing, showing how an evasive city can reveal itself, and thus be partially formed, through the process of writing it. She draws here on Maurice Blanchot’s idea of “literariness”: that to write is to form, to bring to the surface something that is not yet there. Yet through her juxtapositions of essay and photography, she also conveys how Johannesburg is always excessive to attempts to know it, to order it, even to live within it. The city’s texture and character are felt in the interstices of the book, out of the corner of the eye, as much as in any direct analysis. We hope to have achieved a similar generative ambivalence with this book. Nairobi, of course, makes itself felt far beyond the page, and there are many other ways in which it is becoming that do not rely on words. Nevertheless, our multiauthored curation is one intervention, in the tension between multiplicity and coherence, toward understanding what makes Nairobi tick, and to reflect critically on this process. There is always more work to be done. As Billy Kahora succinctly expresses in the title to his “interludes,” this is work/city-in-progress.

Kenya’s politics continues to offer Nairobians plenty of reason for cynicism. In the waning days of Uhuru Kenyatta’s second term in power, his deputy president, William Ruto, who presents himself as the “chief hustler” of Kenya’s so-called hustler nation, emerged as a rival candidate to Raila Odinga, once Kenyatta’s long-standing opponent but now his preferred successor. In the context of Kenyatta’s kleptocratic Jubilee Party’s alleged “eating” of national wealth, Ruto’s allies styled themselves as representatives of increasingly disgruntled informal

economy workers. Such political rhetoric contained deeper truths: discontent with Kenya's economic situation weakened the girders upon which the ethno-nationalist "dynasties" of the Kenyatta and Odinga families built their power bases. In 2022, Nairobi's concerns about fuel and food shortages, and rising costs of living, fed into election politicking but also resonated with wider global crises. Regular, five-yearly elections provide Nairobi's with a cyclical pattern of rising hopes for the "city yet to come" (Simone 2004). Yet the contradictions bequeathed by stark inequalities and uncertainties continue to shape politics overtly, and fears among Nairobi's residents of interethnic political mobilization and potentialities for violence endure, sparking anxieties that Kenya's 2022 elections would see a return of the 2007–2008 postelection unrest. In the end, these fears did not materialize, and William Ruto won the elections without unrest or violence of the scale witnessed in 2007–2008, but this did not alleviate continuing concerns about Nairobi's inequalities and rising costs of living.

The uncertainties of Nairobi's futures are Kenya's too, but they are also mediated by the mastery Nairobi's have perfected—over the last century—of warding off uncertainty through the social relationships they create, and the social forms of security and solidarity that migrants make in urban surroundings. Amidst the political turbulence of contemporary Kenya, at smaller scales—of kinship, friendship, church, mosque, and neighborhood—social contracts continue to hold, providing Kenyans with hope that they can live good lives amidst broader political-economic instability. If stories of dangerous strangers, the betrayal of family members, the fraud of Evangelical pastors, and the corruption of the political elite tell of alienation and enmity in the city, chapter 3 shows us that Nairobi's continue, against the odds, to invest in social relationships, trusting against the odds that the solidarity of the other is not temporary, or that it will hold long enough to yield some good.

Such acts of hope-making and giving, whether grounded in social relationships or in the diverse engagements that Nairobi's undertake, both reluctantly and readily, with institutions (as

explored in chapter 4), signal how risks are managed in a myriad of ways. This reaffirms the approach to security taken in this book. It is not our aim to underestimate or downplay the corporeal, physical, and other more obvious dimensions of security that revolve around violence, terrorism, and crime. As examples in this book have shown, security often revolves around questions of safety, such as the very real threat of extrajudicial killings by police officers faced by young men in Nairobi's "slums," but also by the high walls topped with barbed wire and broken glass constructed across many other parts of the city. The fear of potential terrorist attacks and the responses to them are equally very real experiences that profoundly affect how urban life is encountered and embodied.

Yet our objective in this book has been to explore how such security concerns are entangled with more quotidian issues in often divisive, exclusivist, and sometimes productive, unexpected, or contradictory ways. By focusing equal attention on "uncertainty" and "contingency," we have tapped into the complexity of what human security could mean in diverse and rapidly transforming contexts across Nairobi. Largely inspired by Mbembe's (2017) notion of humanizing urban security, we have tried to flesh out how security is also about recognition, inclusion, and co-creating a shared world. We have done so by focusing on different types of security, ranging from food security to bodily integrity to social stability; by paying attention to the productive material and corporeal forms of stuff and textures; and by highlighting the simultaneous creativity and recursivity of security. We realize that this conjures up an inherent risk: by broadening security to include such contrasting processes, security can also start to function as an instrumental mechanism through which authority is exerted, as an encompassing discourse that justifies and condones the encroachment of power into the intimacies of everyday life. This tension surrounding the humanizing of security is likely to be deeply exacerbated by questions of biosecurity that have reemerged with the Covid virus. Biosecurity is certainly not new (Collier et al. 2004) — think of the terror unleashed with cholera, the HIV

virus, Ebola, Zika, and much more, as discussed in chapter 2. Yet new urgencies have been produced through the pandemic, which are likely to shape questions of security and contingency going forward, showing again the importance of approaching the city through its potential becomings.

If the city is, in part, as Bremner (2010) claims, written (and, of course, creatively painted, drawn, sculpted, photographed, performed, and so on) into being, then such projects are always contingent and incomplete in the face of the excessivities of urban life and stuff that inevitably preclude any form of semantic closure. At the same time, however, the very grounds of possibility from which “the city yet to come” emerges — its potentialities and could bes — always arise from, and maybe even coexist with, at least in part, what is already present, socially and politically, imaginatively and materially, and however inchoate or obscure they might appear in any particular moment or vantage point. Indeed, in this sense, Nairobi’s recursive becomings might be understood to derive from exactly the tensions and ambiguities of coherence and uncertainty that we think are among the city’s central characteristics, and that were reflected in the fudged, incomplete (but we hope productive and illuminating) “muddle between editing and curating” (see introduction) that preparing this book involved. The ambition of *Nairobi Becoming* was always to mirror, however imperfectly, something of Nairobi itself in its form and aesthetics as much as in the substance of its partial reflections and critical interventions, and including, crucially, the city’s incompleteness. If the potentialities for Nairobi’s could bes do already exist, then we hope that some of the grounds from which these will be judged and made sense of will find traction in what has been presented and curated here.

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Joost Fontein is Professor of Anthropology at the University of Johannesburg. Between 2014 and 2018 he was Director of the British Institute in Eastern Africa in Nairobi, on secondment from the University of Edinburgh. He published *The Silence of Great Zimbabwe: Contested Landscapes and the Power of Heritage* (UCL Press, 2006), *Remaking Mutirikwi: Landscape, Water and Belonging* (James Currey, 2015), and *The Politics of the Dead in Zimbabwe, 2000–2020: Bones, Rumours and Spirits* (James Currey, 2022). He is currently editor of *Africa*, the journal of the International Africa Institute.

Gado started producing caricatures at 15 before becoming a freelancer for the *Daily News*, *Business Times*, and *The Express*. In 1992, he worked for the Nation Media Group and published his cartoons in the *Daily Nation*, the largest newspaper in Eastern and Central Africa based in Nairobi, Kenya. In 1999, Gado was elected Kenyan cartoonist of the year. He won the Cartooning for Peace Award in May 2016 in Geneva.

Craig Halliday is an artist and researcher who focuses on the intersection of art, politics, and activism and the potential of the arts and popular culture to extend and deepen the experience of democracy. From 2018 to 2020 he was co-editor of *Nairobi Contemporary*, the only print magazine dedicated to contemporary art in Kenya and the wider region.

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Onyis Martin is a visual artist based out of the Kobo Trust, where along with other artists, he mentors and facilitates aspiring artists with opportunities to develop their talent. Experimenting with a wide range of materials, Martin explores the human condition and the global geo-political interface, spe-

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Teresa Mbatia is as a Lecturer at the University of Nairobi, Department of Geography and Environmental Studies, where she teaches Urban Geography, Sustainable Urban Development, Urban Geo-Politics courses. Mbatia's main research interests are on citizen participation in the management of public urban greenspaces and implications thereof on spatial (in)justice and (in)equality in the use, management, and access of the nature reserves.

Elias Mung'ora is a visual artist. His work is mostly inspired by life in the urban space of Nairobi with paintings, drawings, photography, and woodcut prints being his principal media. His practice appears to share glimpses into everyday Nairobi's life by capturing significant moments such as a wedding or a portrait session. He is a member of Brush-Tu Artist Collective, a Nairobi-based artists' collective and the winner of the Manjano Art Competition in 2016 in Nairobi.

Dennis Muraguri is a mixed media artist working primarily in printmaking and sculpture. Recognized widely for his energetic woodcut prints featuring "matatu culture," Muraguri captures the social interstices created by the explosive creativity in the unregulated transport economy of Kenya. He has exhibited extensively, including a solo exhibition at Montague Contemporary, New York (2020). He has participated in international art fairs such as Intersect Chicago 2020, 1:54 Contemporary Art Fair, London, 2016, and the Jo'burg Art Fair, 2016. Muraguri was also one of the participating artists in the 2014 KLA Public Art Festival, in Kampala, Uganda and a Selected Artist at the 2018 Kochi-Muziris Biennale in India.

James Muriuki is a Nairobi-based artist specializing in photography and lens-based media. He is interested in transitioning societies in the Global South, the different knowledge systems occurring within the visual arts environments of those societies, and how these systems are enmeshed within the social fabric.

Al-Almin Mutunga is a Kenya-based photographer. His work has been featured on *The Daily Nation*, *BBC*, *Standard News*, among other venues. His work was nominated at the Kenya MasterPieces Awards, documentary category, in 2016, and he was the lead photographer of *Softie*, a documentary which was voted best editorial at Sundance and nominated at the Oscars in 2020.

Annie Pfungst applies an interdisciplinary visual, archival, and discursive practice to encounters with the materiality and spatiality of carceral and colonizing geographies, emergency landscapes, geographies of resistance, and the legacy of settler colonial violence. She has exhibited and presented photographic, installation, and multi-media works at galleries, conferences, and symposia in London, Sydney, Nairobi, Berlin, and Java. In 2021, Annie created *Haunting*, a visual walk through the carceral landscapes of empire across Palestine and Kenya.

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