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Carrier, N. (2019). Mobile people, phones and photography: Somali visual practices in Nairobi's Eastleigh estate. *Africa*, *89*(2), 225-245. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0001972019000044

Peer reviewed version

Link to published version (if available):
10.1017/S0001972019000044

Link to publication record in Explore Bristol Research
PDF-document

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Mobile People, Phones and Photography: Somali visual practices in Nairobi's Eastleigh estate

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Just as many in the global south are said to have gone from 'no-phones to mobile phones', so in recent decades have many gone from 'no cameras to mobile phone cameras'. This is certainly the case in Eastleigh, a suburb of Nairobi home to many thousands of Somalis (both Kenyan nationals and refugees and others from Somalia itself), and to many shopping malls that have emerged in the last twenty years through their transnational connections and commerce (Carrier 2016). It is also a place subject to much suspicion and malign state interference, as Somalis themselves have been for much Kenyan history (Lochery 2012). Its landscape has changed dramatically from an estate filled principally with single storey residential homes, to one heaving with multi-storey commercial buildings, as well as many apartment blocks and hotels. Despite this very visual transformation, there are apparently few photographic archives documenting this change, and Eastleigh continues to be a challenging environment for the practice of older forms of photography: those bearing professional cameras are often seen with suspicion given that there has been much negative reporting of Eastleigh and its residents in the media. Photography until recently was also a practice mostly restricted to the wealthier in the estate given the price of cameras, film and developing. However, Eastleigh is now much photographed given the ubiquity and accessibility of mobile phones equipped with digital cameras. Eastleigh is a place where many such phones are sold, and a place where most residents have their own phone with which they take photographs to upload onto social media.

This article engages recent writing in anthropology about digital photography and social media – particularly that of Daniel Miller (2015) – that explores the different usage of such photography compared to older imaging technologies, particularly their use more as modes of communication within conversations on social media rather than their use to memorialise events, places and people in the way printed photographs often are. What makes Eastleigh an interesting example of this, is that it is a place at the heart of many connections, both local and transnational including to Somalis residents in many Western cities as part of the Somali diaspora, and also in trade hubs of the East, and visuality forms a key part of how social media are used to manage such connections.

In this paper I place this contemporary form of photography within its historical context in a cityscape that has only recently become seen as a photographic subject, and use the case study of one Eastleigh trader in particular – my good friend and key informant, Mohaa – to understand how mobile phone photography is used there. I explore an archive of images

that he has circulated to me over the course of the last four years, and consider the meaning of this photography in an estate where even those not able to travel much beyond Nairobi are connected to people and places far away. I argue that mobile phone photography in the estate fulfils the communicational function set out by Miller on a global scale, linking the estate to Somalis spread throughout the world; I argue too that this photography fits well within the transnational commerce that runs through the estate. However, I conclude by showing how the explosion of photography in Eastleigh is also intertwined in the politics that run through the estate. This photography is not a neutral medium of communication, but is used by Somalis to counter the negative stereotypes of the estate in the media, resist state action in the estate, and demand better services from the county government through making its infrastructural decay visible. In the hands of those living in the estate, mobile phone photography offers some control of how this estate is represented visually. First, however, I offer some historical context for photography in East Africa, and in Eastleigh in particular.

Contemporary photography in East Africa – the coming of the cameraphone

East Africa, Kenya in particular, has long had an important place in the history of photography, and film and still images of the region, and especially its wildlife, have helped constitute the romantic 'image Africa' held by some of fantastic wildlife on endless savannahs. Photography by early European explorers, by the likes of Osa and Martin Johnson in northern Kenya in the 1920s (Johnson 1997 [1940]), as well as documentaries by the likes of David Attenborough and feature films such as Born Free and King Solomon's Mines, all played key roles in this regard, while glossy volumes of wildlife photography from the region continue to be produced. East Africa also had a role in making photography an intrinsic part of touristic practice, as its wildlife industry encouraged a switch from hunting safaris to photographic safaris. Humans often were left out of the picture, but the likes of the Maasai have also been seen as photogenic by tourists (the former long knowing the monetary worth of their poses), while in southern Ethiopia, Turton gives a vivid sense of the encounter of western tourists with the Mursi of the Omo Valley, an encounter fully mediated by the camera (Turton 2004), and one deeply uncomfortable for many involved.

Such image-making practice – usually by foreign visitors – has also been complemented by local photographic practices. Photo studios have long existed in such places as Zanzibar and Nairobi, allowing people not just to fulfil their functional photographic needs (obtaining passport photographs and so forth), but also to fashion their own identities and create lasting photographic memorials to important relationships. The famous studio photography of Sedou Keita and Malick Sidibé from West Africa brought such work both to academic (see Bigham 1999) and artistic attention, though East African studio photography has also been studied, for example in Mombasa by Behrend (2013). While the cost of film and cameras meant that most people in the region were photographic subjects rather than photographers in the twentieth century, the framed photographs on walls and the

photographic albums recording important life events, suggest the importance of these visual memories for that era.

Of course, such practices of visiting the studio, or hiring the services of a freelance photographer, are still commonplace, especially for special occasions. Yet like all other parts of the world, photographic practice in East Africa has been revolutionised by the coming of the mobile phone. As Vokes shows (introduction to this issue), there has been a phenomenal literature on mobile phones and their impact on various aspects of life in Africa, from managing finances (Morawczynski 2009), to managing sociality and intimacy (Archambault 2016). But the coming of the mobile (many cheap models of which are available throughout Africa courtesy of China) has also meant the 'democratisation' of photography through the cameraphone. While this is not yet a universalised technology, the mobile phone is certainly ubiquitous in my experience throughout Kenya, now with cheap smartphones expanding access to cameras and social media apps to view and disseminate images created. This technology has emerged with great rapidity, meaning that scholars of photography in Africa are only just realising the importance of this trend.

Beyond Africa, its importance is also not yet fully realised, though Danny Miller has provided us with an important analytical starting point in his article 'Photography in the Age of Snapchat' (2015). This contrasts use of images on social media platforms such as Facebook and Snapchat with older forms of viewing images such as the photo album, arguing that rather than a medium involving memory and representation, contemporary photography on social media is becoming 'a more transient form that is integral to social communication rather than the retention of the past' (ibid. 6). This, as Miller shows, is most evident with Snapchat, an app where messages and images sent are deleted within seconds of the recipient viewing them. Facebook is rather different, as that does allow for photo albums to be created, and so the display of someone's archive visual history, though again most images viewed are likely to be on the transient news feed, rather than on such albums. For Miller, such transience means analysis of photography in the film era (and in the earlier, pre-social media, digital era) has to be rethought radically, as people craft new purposes out of photography in an age where billions of images are created daily. Few of these images are printed off and displayed beyond cyberspace, and mostly they appear to be conversational. Miller argues that this actually makes them more significant anthropologically:

> This storm, this deluge of photographs now saturates almost every relationship, every concern and every interest anthropologists may wish to explore, from kinship to shopping. It is hard to imagine any topic of ethnography that would not be enhanced by studying social media photography… (Miller 2015: 14)

In East Africa, social media and mobile phone photographs appear used in very similar ways, albeit forming part of often very different conversations. They are a part of many people's mundane life, rather than older forms of photography that often were used to capture decidedly non-mundane moments in life, or, in the case of the photo studio and their often

creative use of backdrops and photoshop techniques, to help people transcend the everyday. The internet functionality of these same forms allows people to use visuality in the everyday conversations they have on social media.

In the case of the Somalis of Eastleigh (and elsewhere), these conversations are often global in reach, mapping onto to networks formed by the creation of such a huge, global diaspora in the wake of state collapse in Somalia in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and continued instability since (Carrier 2016). While Eastleigh houses both Kenyan Somalis and Somalians (citizens of Somalia, often in Nairobi as refugees), everyone in the estate is implicated in these networks, many having friends and family in the wider diaspora, and the internet-ready mobile phone is the most recent technology allowing people to keep in touch despite vast geographical distances between them. It is to Eastleigh and its photographic history that we now turn.

Eastleigh: Becoming a photographic subject

Historically, Nairobi's residential estates were never a hotspot for photography. In the colonial era, landscape photography was primarily a European pursuit that took place beyond towns and cities, especially in the wildlife-populated savannah regions that typify how many in the world imagine East Africa. Animals grazing with landmarks like Mount Kilimanjaro in the background soon became the classic image of East Africa. There was of course photography taking place in urban landscapes, though this appears to have been limited through restricted access to cameras, and a general absence of the city from what was considered photogenic. This would change in the later colonial period, as authorities wished to show the modernity of cities like Nairobi, and professional photographers working in Kenya in the 1950s were sometimes contracted to capture new infrastructure as it was built.[1] There are some archives with images of housing estates in Nairobi from this earlier period, but in the main such urban areas were not considered photographic subjects. This appears to hold for residents of such estates, whose photographic practice more centred around being photographed as individuals rather than capturing their surroundings.

This certainly appears true of Eastleigh: I tried and failed to find much photography that captured its landscape from before the late 1980s. In colonial times the estate had grown out of a plain northeast of Nairobi's centre as the future capital city was formed early in the twentieth century. Initially Eastleigh had been intended as a European township, but soon was settled instead by many of Nairobi's Asian population, as well as by a number of Somalis, some of whom had arrived in Kenya as gun bearers alongside Lord Delamere (Turton 1974; Carrier 2017). It became principally a residential area for those working in the

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[1] For example, a photographer named Charles Trotter – whose photographs are now part of the Empire and Commonwealth photographic collection held by the Bristol Archives – was a professional whose contracts often involved photographing bridges, petrol stations and buildings in central Nairobi. On the photography of modernity in Africa – in particular how photographers have attempted to capture African futures – see Vokes and Newbury 2018.

city centre, and not exactly an attractive one, certainly in the 1920s and 1930s when amenities were scarce and seasonally alternating mud and dust the chief constituents of its physical environment. Cameras were scarce in the estate, and visitors with access to cameras and film in that earlier period seem not to have taken any photographs there (including Karen Blixen who visited the family of her Somali housekeeper who lived there [Carrier 2017, chapter 1]).

In the later colonial period there are more photographic traces as the estate gradually became integrated into the city. Partly this resulted from its growing importance as a hub for transport. For much of the 1940s and 1950s, Eastleigh's aerodrome was the main point of arrival for international air visitors to Kenya, and a famous sign at the aerodrome giving directions and distances to other cities worldwide was much photographed by tourists. However, within the estate's residential area, there are a few more traces too as various landmarks became important for its various communities, including places of worship such as its Aga Khan Mosque (now a bakery) for which there are some photographs of its opening ceremonies that I found in the Kenya National Archives. But again, for most residents in this time, Eastleigh itself was not a photographic subject. One resident in colonial times would, however, become one of Africa's most famous photojournalists: Mohamed Amin (1943-1996), who covered many key events in African and wider history, was born in the estate to an Indian family.

After Independence, Eastleigh's Asian population left in large numbers, as the estate became 'Africanised', many Kikuyu in particular moved in on a path of upward mobility from Pumwani and similar estates (Eastleigh being seen as lower-middle class residential estate). Soon Eastleigh would have new landmarks, including several famous bars and nightclubs, one of which was an outdoor venue for some of Nairobi's elite musicians. There are some photographic traces of this era, particularly in newspaper reports, and in some academic publications such as Hake's 'Self-Help City' of 1977 that studied Nairobi with a case-study of a section of Eastleigh. However, I never managed to find a substantial photographic archive that would have allowed me to do use 'photographic elicitation' methodologies as I had with a colleague elsewhere in Kenya(Carrier and Quaintance 2012). One thing Eastleigh did have in this period was a photo studio, a notice in the Kenya Gazette of 1969 announcing the dissolution of a partnership in a studio called 'Old Eastleigh Photo Studio' by an Asian and a Kikuyu man.[2] Were it possible to find those involved in this business, one might find an archive of images that could help reanimate the visual history of the estate in this era. However, it is likely that such an archive's images would be focused on people visiting the studio, rather than the cityscape beyond the studio.

At this time, Eastleigh had changed little for several decades, its main architectural form being single-storey Indian courtyard buildings built from the 1930s onwards. However, it would change out of all recognition from the late 1980s demographically and

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[2] Kenya Gazette, 19th September 1969, pg. 952.

architecturally, and would soon become a photographic subject. This was due to the thousands of Somali refugees who came to Eastleigh as Somalia collapsed in the late Siyaad Barre era, coming to join Eastleigh's pre-existing Somali population made up of those who had come in its earliest period, and other Somalis who had moved there from Somali parts of Kenya. Somali presence in the estate catalysed an economic boom through their commerce and links to the markets of Dubai, as well as their ability to convert the residential spaces of the estate into places of trade (Carrier 2016). Eastleigh became a place of heaving commerce as an initial epicentre of this transformation focused on an old lodging-turned-shopping-mall called Garissa Lodge would soon spread throughout the estate, at first converting old buildings into malls, then demolishing old buildings and establishing new multi-storey malls in their stead. Over the course of around two decades, the estate became an East African hub for consumer goods from the East housing over 40 shopping malls, as well as hotels and restaurants catering to the many visitors from all over the Somali diaspora who now come to the estate.

This would also intensify photographic practice, especially by outsiders. Interest in the radical transformation of the estate drew journalists and academics to Eastleigh, many wielding large cameras. These buildings were often photogenic, but the general environment and infrastructure of an estate originally designed to house only a few thousand people now hosting many times that number crumbled. This meant that roads became pitted with potholes and often flooded with sewage in the rains. Thus the ground out of which these buildings sprung was hardly something to take photographic pride in – as one of my informants in 2011 said: 'look up it is Dubai; look down it is shit'.

This contrast helped make Eastleigh into a photographic subject: a visually dramatic juxtaposition of Somali investment and presence, and public neglect only too obvious in its crumbling infrastructure. Yet there has been resistance to such photography.Those taking photographs openly in Eastleigh on conspicuous cameras can meet with hostility, especially those with the kit of a professional photographer. A journalist friend told me how she had gone to Eastleigh around 2010 with a photographer who had stones thrown at him when he took out his camera in public. This relates to suspicion of media within the estate, especially given how Eastleigh has often been portrayed as a hotbed of radical Islam (a portrayal that culminated in the imagined version of the estate depicted in the film *Eye in the Sky* that dramatized a drone attack on an Eastleigh taken over by Somali militants that even the Kenyan army are afraid to enter). Eastleigh has also long been the site of security operations targeting Somalis (long seen as a dangerous presence in Kenya),[3] including an infamous round-up of Somalis in 2014 ('Operation Usalama Watch') supposedly to root out Islamist militants in the estate. This only heightened tension, and suspicion has been rife on the streets that any obvious outsider may well be a government or even CIA spy, and

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[3] On the history of Somali identity and presence in Kenya, see Lochery 2012, and Weitzberg 2017.

conspicuous photographic practice has been particularly suspect. Given there have been several Al-Shabaab attacks on the estate itself (Carrier 2016: chapter seven), there is also fear that photographs of buildings might be used by Al Shabaab to plot future attacks, a fear voiced by security staff at a ten-storey hotel in the estate when I asked to take a photograph of the building. This suspicion certainly affected my own photographic practice in the estate, curtailing it to wide-angle shots of the estate, or to portrait shots with people who trusted me. Street photography in the estate felt risky, particularly for a conspicuous outsider.

Islamic debates about photography have also been influential, making some further suspicious of a practice seen by the more conservative as *haram*. The first time this came to my attention was when one of my friends whom I photographed the day previously came bounding up to me insisting I delete the images on my camera. In the interim he had attended mosque and heard the Imam speak of all but passport photographs being forbidden. Such concern about photography and Islamic propriety link to injunctions against the creation of images and icons which some scholars insist includes photographs.[4] In Eastleigh dominant forms of Islam were once less conservative, including more Sufic traditions (see Jacobsen 2011; Carrier 2016, 102-105, and chapter 5), yet in recent decades with increasing influence of Salafism in the estate, more conservative Islam is evident whether in gender segregated restaurants, shops selling Islamic books, and male and female dress often being conspicuously Islamic. It is in this context that debates about photography came to prominence, and even for those who practice photography itself, photography is seen as something that if used unwisely might compromise Islam and reputation. Thus, while most in Eastleigh embrace mobile photography, there is fear that it could be used immorally, and many would not wish to be photographed by anyone they do not know and trust. This compares with attitudes to photography on the Kenyan coast, where according to Behrend (2013: 243), some reform Muslims 'have used veils and other forms of covering and withdrawing from visibility to establish new ways of protecting women in particular from the gaze of (analogue) cameras' while becoming yet more fearful of the potential uses and abuses of digital technology.

Although the estate and its buildings were being more photographed as it gained commercial fame and media interest as a place of refugees, its residents were not necessarily keen to be photographed there, usually practising photography either beyond the estate – especially in nice, green locations close to Nairobi[5] – or in settings within Eastleigh that could project them outside of a booming yet difficult landscape. Much

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[4] There is much debate online about this question, with websites such as the following attempting to find a path through contrasting interpretations: http://www.correctislamicfaith.com/picturesinislam.htm (accessed November 2016)

[5] A Kenyan Somali elder in Eastleigh insisted when I took his photo that he and his wife pose in front of a tree. He remarked that Somalis are always attracted to green when looking for a photographic backdrop, perhaps reflecting the importance of verdancy for Somali pastoralists.

photography in recent years has been *in*, not *of*, Eastleigh. These settings include several photo studios that now dot the estate. As research has shown elsewhere in Africa and beyond (Vokes 2012), these are important sites for self-fashioning and imaginations, as well as more mundane places where identity photos can be produced. Eastleigh's studio photographers are adept at photoshopping the subject out of the Eastleigh studio, and into such diverse locales as Swiss mountain resorts and American city scapes. Such photoshop-artists are always looking for new backgrounds to use in their work, as I found out when an Eastleigh studio requested they keep my pictures of Marafa (a strangegeological formation near Malindi) as customers might like to be photoshopped into that location. Photoshop skills are also appreciated not just for self-fashioning, but also for help in finding ways out of Eastleigh to Europe or North America, as many in Eastleigh attempt through resettlement programmes. One friend of mine hoped to be resettled in the US on a family reunion scheme through a claim to be married to her cousin who was already in the States. To make this false claim convincing, she had herself photoshopped onto a picture of him attending a wedding, making it look like they were bride and groom.

As well as photo studios, the digital age has spurred creativity in visual arts in Eastleigh, and e some exploit the potential offered by new imaging technology and Internet media to make their own visual representations of life as a Somali in Eastleigh. These include a youth group I got to know well called *Eastleighwood*, made up mainly of a mixture of Kenyan Somalis and refugees (but also some Kenyans of other ethnicities), whose name obviously links to Hollywood, Nollywood and the like. The brainchild of a friend who has become something of an Eastleigh impresario, it aims to highlight the challenges of life in the estate, attack stereotypes of Somalis, and reach a global Somali audience through connection to the diaspora. They have been working on documentaries and music videos, but also feature films for which trailers can be seen on Youtube. Several amongst them have had training in the use of cameras, and in editing and special effects software, the latter sometimes being used to create imaginative flights of fantasy, including one featuring a sequence of an alien craft landing atop a building in the estate. Eastleighwood have met with opposition to their activities, however, with some strict clerics viewing their film-making as haram and discouraging other youth from joining them, although they have much community support in general despite this.

Thus, while practising older forms of videography and photography in the estate is not easy – especially beyond the confines of a photo studio – there are those who live there and engage in such practices. But for most the experience of older forms of photographic technology is still as photographic subject rather than as photographer. Cameras and film were once scarce and only accessible to a few. It is this that has changed in the last decade as the coming of the camera phone has democratised photography throughout the world, even if the quality of the images falls short of the capabilities of modern professional equipment. Eastleigh is a place where the majority have access to mobile phones, it being a place where many cheap (and some expensive) models imported from China are sold. In

fact, for many in the estate with family around the world, the mobile phone has become a critical device for transnational communication, most using phones to access Facebook and the like nowadays rather than cybercafes. As almost all phones sold nowadays have a camera, the majority of residents in Eastleigh have image-making technology in their pockets, and most make use of this technology, including Mohaa, a Kenyan-Somali trader in the estate.

Mohaa and his mobile photography

Mohaa was someone I first met during my doctoral research from 1999-2002, at which time he was working as a conductor on his father's *matatu* public service vehicle, plying the route between Isiolo and Meru towns, one I travelled often in researching the stimulant khat grown in the Meru region. I had not seen him for some considerable time when, during my research in Eastleigh, I heard my old nickname from Isiolo (*makata*) rising above the hubbub, and Mohaa appeared out of the crowd and back into my life. He had long left Isiolo and sought business success in Nairobi, managing to join Eastleigh's entrepreneurial ranks as one of its thousands of shopkeepers, selling gents wear out of his small retail unit in one of the cavernous shopping malls. He gave me an apprenticeship in running a shop in Eastleigh, and in other aspects of life for Somalis in Nairobi, and we became firm friends.

When I was first in Eastleigh I only had a 'feature phone' rather than a 'smartphone', something that disappointed Mohaa as he wished to communicate with me through the messaging service *Whatsapp*. Without the capability to use the latter, our initial communication when not in person was either through Facebook, or through image-less texts. However, once I had upgraded my phone and installed Whatsapp, a blizzard of texts and images would periodically pass between us. Such easy communication between me and a trader in Eastleigh, even when I was back in the UK, proved extremely useful. Not only did it keep us in touch socially, but also allowed me easily to query aspects of the ethnography I had collected, highlighting the ever increasing ambiguities of what and where constitutes the anthropologist's 'field' (Gupta and Ferguson 1997).

Communicating through Whatsapp soon entailed a preponderance of visual images alongside the textual bulk of our conversations. Through the app it is easy to send images and videos, and Mohaa has certainly made the most of this. He is not concerned about the morality of photographic technology, arguing that Muslimclerics in Eastleigh and beyond themselves use the technology in promoting themselves, and that it is *what* and *why* you are photographing that matters morally rather than the technology itself. His visual generosity has given me a pocket archive of images from the trivial to the hilarious to the serious and solemn – images that express the emotions that we have communicated to each other, but also ones that give onto much wider social worlds and processes. This archive could be separated into the following categories:

Places

Within the archive, there are many images of places important to Mohaa. Indeed, given the frequency of images of certain places, one could perhaps draw up a map reflecting his personal geography of significance. These include his home town of Isiolo, and especially the house he has built with his wife (a school teacher who lives in Isiolo with their four children while Mohaa works in Nairobi), the house being a concrete representation of his and his wife's success, and so something to show off:

Figure 1: Mohaa's home in Isiolo

There are also several pictures of Pangani, the neighbouring estate to Eastleigh where Mohaa lives. But, given my own research focus in recent years on Eastleigh, and given that Mohaa runs a business there, Eastleigh features most prominently in the collection: it is itself a photographic subject for him. The epicentre of these images is his own shop, Nasiib Fashions, located in one of the estate's biggest shopping malls. As a shop proprietor in Eastleigh, Mohaa is a member of the estate's 'petty bourgeoisie'. While a much maligned class in Marxist analysis, as James Scott suggests in his cautious praise for its members, owning a small business is something that can give immense satisfaction and a sense of freedom alongside the livelihood it can offer (Scott 2012). In this regard, Mohaa takes great pride in Nasiib Fashions, and consequently often sends pictures of its changing face as he changes stock and refreshes his display.

Figure 2: Mohaa's Eastleigh shop

Mohaa also sends many photographs of Eastleigh more broadly, keeping me abreast of the latest developments in its 'mallscape'. For example, a recent shopping mall was opened called *Tokyo Shopping Mall* which Mohaa photographed:

Figure 3: Tokyo Shopping Mall

He also captures many key events in the estate, including recent demonstrations by hawkers who had long sold goods on the streets of Eastleigh, but were being pushed out by the authorities for clogging up thoroughfares. They were protesting their eviction on First Avenue, the main street in the estate:

Figure 4: Hawker demonstration, Eastleigh

Unlike Eastleigh's population of refugees – some of whom live geographically constrained lives – Mohaa travels much around Nairobi, for work and pleasure, and he often sends me photographs of different locations around the city. This is especially the case for parts of the city considered more photogenic than Eastleigh, and parts of the city much more commonly photographed. For Mohaa, these often involve pictures taken in the much higher end shopping malls of western Nairobi, and within their restaurants which he likes to visit.

However, places sent by Mohaa often are places he hasn't himself visited, but those that friends and family have visited, or those that constitute an imagined geography of significance. Given his Islamic faith, Mecca, as well as mosques in various parts of the world, sometimes feature in images he sends. He also has a good friend who for years lived in Eastleigh but was recently resettled to the USA, and images of the places visited in the States by this friend constitute part of the archive. More recently Mohaa visited India to accompany his wife for medical treatment, his first trip beyond East Africa, and sent me and other friends many images of his travels.

Things

Things dominate my archive of Mohaa's photographs too. Fittingly as a clothes trader, it is apparel that constitutes most things photographed by Mohaa. Indeed, flicking through the archive, numerous pictures of suits, t-shirts, sportswear and shoes emerge, demonstrating the ever-changing fashions that flow through Eastleigh and that are sold in Nasiib Fashions:

Figure 5: Suit jacket for sale, Eastleigh

Mohaa worked for a long time in the transport industry, while he also has a great knowledge and love for cars, something represented in the collection too with numerous images of vehicles. Food also features, especially pictures of dishes served in restaurants in the estate where we have dined together in the past, evoking shared memories and nostalgia.

In his spare time Mohaa likes to relax watching television, especially satellite broadcasts of European football, and having a good television is important for him and his friends, and as a consequence a number of pictures of his latest screens sometimes make their way on to my mobile phone. He also reads in his spare time, his choice of reading material often appropriate for an entrepreneur working in an estate where self-help business books are commonly sold:
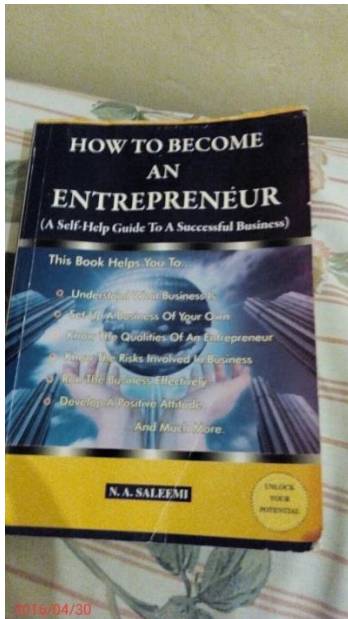
Figure 6: Entrepreneurial reading matter

Mohaa also sends me photographs of documents. These include photographs taken on his mobile phone of school certificates of his children, and also fund-raising (*harambee*, in Kiswahili) forms to encourage me to contribute to initiatives set up by family and friends.

People

However, the majority of photographs in his archive are portraits or group photographs of people. These include a number of photographs of his close family, as well as images of friends around the world. Mohaa's Whatsapp photographs also have a temporal depth as well as geographical breadth. These include photographs taken on his phone of photographs of him and friends in Isiolo from the 1990s:

Figure 7: A young Mohaa and friends, Isiolo

The above picture shows himself when young (on the left), as well as other 'comrades' (as he calls them) from his youth (including one now living in the USA).

Other photographs feature mutual friends at events that I was unable to attend when back in the UK. This included the wedding of a friend, which Mohaa attended and photographed in detail, sending me many pictures of the bride and groom, as well as other attendees.

The most common person pictured in the archive is Mohaa himself. Whatsapp and the mobile phone camera allow for a flow of personal pictures to be sent in a private medium that to some degree allows for presence across distance and time (bringing the there-then into the here-now in the phrasing of Roland Barthes [1980]). Such flows of pictures are part of a dialogue, and I share many images of my own family with Mohaa, in particular those of my young daughter as she grows, and my father whom Mohaa met a few years back.

Memes

The images in my collection sent by Mohaa do not just consist of those captured by him or his friends and family. As with most social media users, Mohaa passes on memes. As an Arsenal fan – who is well aware of my support for Manchester United – football memes often come my way, especially ones mocking United after a defeat. He also enjoys sending me memes that relate to khat (miraa, as it is known in Kenya), a substance that he knows I spent a long time researching. This particular example coincided with a teachers' strike in the country and suggested children were turning to chewing khat in their extended spare time:
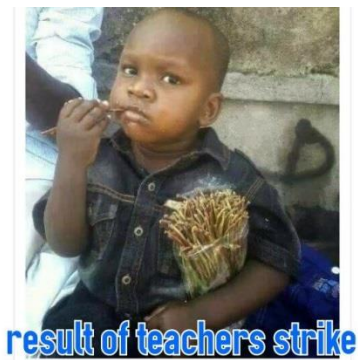

Figure 8: Khat-chewing child meme

However, he sends far more memes connected with Islam, especially those wishing the recipient a happy Ramadan or Eid.

 Although he knows me as an agnostic, he passes on to me such visual messages, reinforcing his own beliefs in doing so, and, of course, communicating his faith to others in the process. Indeed, on the more public space that is his Facebook site, most of his posts are of Islamic memes and hadiths: his cyber presence is very much an Islamic one (as is his non-digital life, structured as it is by his faith). As well as Islamic memes and images of Mecca and mosques,

Mohaa also sends through Whatsapp videos by internationally famous sheikhs, including the Indian Zakir Naik. Again, such videos flow through Somali and wider Islamic networks, performing faith digitally.

Visual connections, conversations and commerce on a global scale

This archive of Mohaa's photography – although presented here out of its textual context – suggests much about self-presentation and subjectivity for a Somali in contemporary Kenya, one keen to thrive as an entrepreneur, but also one who embraces their Islamic identity. It also reflects Mohaa's aspirations and pride in his achievements most concretely illustrated by his shop in Eastleigh, and by the house in Isiolo. Much could be read out of the photographs in this collection, especially when triangulated with the text and with further knowledge of his life. However, the archive also speaks to wider points about the use of mobile photography and social media in Eastleigh and beyond.

Whereas until recently communication with my friends in Kenya entailed written letters, emails and rare phone calls, Whatsapp and Facebook now mean that communication can be instant and highly visual. Mohaa has kept me updated on his personal life and his business through Whatsapp, and the visuality of the medium has certainly helped in this regard. The photographs sent alongside text messages have had a more communication and conversational role – as described by Miller – rather than being high quality images destined for printing off and memorialising. Indeed, the images usually are low in resolution once sent through Whatsapp, and would suffer in terms of quality if printed off. The images are usually not especially crafted, and occasionally blurred or out of focus. While some of the photographs do become treasured, especially those of loved ones, and become widely shared, these images are often ephemeral moments in a flow of communication that speak much about the maintenance of our relationship across distance. There is still self-curation in the images sent (as there is self-curation in much social interaction), but certainly to a lesser degree than on Facebook, more designed for exhibiting photographs like an old-fashioned album.

Miller paraphrases Gillian Rose on the meaning of the many images of family posted online: 'Although these are legitimated as memorializing the stages of child development, she too suggests that we should pay more attention to what this creates as a practice of photography employed now as a technology for the creation and maintenance of family relationships' (Miller 2015, 8). So too for the images sent back and forth between myself and Mohaa, only instead of family relationships, this technology allows the maintenance and development between an anthropologist and his friend and informant. The images can provide much needed information – some of which I have incorporated into my ethnography – but it is what they say about *us* that seems more to the point.

Of course, Mohaa communicates with many more people than just myself through *Whatsapp*. He has around 400 contacts on the app, including several in the USA, UK, France,

India, Switzerland, Uganda, Australia and other countries, as well as the majority of contacts resident in Kenya. Here the importance of mobile phone photography for somewhere so connected to so many elsewheres becomes obvious: they offer a form of visual sociality that is highly mobile, and hence can maintain bonds across distance and transcend physical locality. As Behrend highlights for Mombasa, 'picture messaging using mobile phones with integrated cameras (and video) has established photographic images as a new genre in mobile communication… Camera phones have created an increasingly instantaneous capacity for image making. They have accelerated the mobility of images: they allow instant viewing, sharing, sending, storing, and reworking.' (Behrend 2013: 241-242). Such images gives a far enhanced form of connection than text alone that can work if messaging someone the other side of the world as well as someone the other side of the estate, and for this reason a multitude of images constantly circulate out of and into Eastleigh through the global Somali diaspora, reinforcing bonds of solidarity that have helped Somalis survive and sometimes thrive in Eastleigh (see Carrier 2016, chapter 2).

Butthere is more going on than communication and relationship-maintenance. Mobile phone photography has also added a new dimension to the commerce that runs through Eastleigh. In Mohaa's photography we can see this in the prevalence of photographs of clothes: he sends these pictures to his potential customers. Much of Mohaa's trade involves reaching out to pre-existing customers rather than waiting for passing trade (Mohaa likes to say that his shop is his 'office'), and with mobile phone photography and Whatsapp Mohaa can alert customers to clothing they might like without having to do so face-to-face. For Mohaa, as for others in a trade hub like Eastleigh, social media and mobile photography offer a way to reach out not just to family and friends, but to customers. In this way, Whatsapp and photography allow Mohaa's shop to have a wide presence beyond the confines of the mall in which it is located, albeit a presence generally embedded in pre-existing social relations rather than extending to new ones.

In all this, Mohaa is far from alone. Mobile photography is a key way that information about stock is passed on, and just as with the use of photography to maintain social bonds, such usage reaches around the world. Many in Eastleigh either travel to the manufacturing and trade hubs of the East, or rely on fellow Somalis who do, and social media is used much to communicate about what is currently on offer in factories. This links to a wider phenomenon of people using Facebook pages as shopfronts, something common for Eastleigh traders, and found across the world. With a simple image taken on a mobile phone, one can advertise cheaply without the need to establish a standalone website. In this regard, social media has become an important aspect of what is termed 'globalisation from below' or 'low-end globalisation' (see, for example, Mathews 2011; also Carrier 2016), the trade around the world of cheap goods from the East brought through often informal networks, sometimes by renting small space on shipping containers, other times by smuggling goods through customs in suitcases (Peraldi 2001). The trade networks of these goods are becoming more underpinned by such social media technologies which allow a

certain democratisation of retail trade.[6] Mobile phone photography constitutes a crucial visual technology in this trade, and Eastleigh, as a hub for such trade, is also a hub for such photography.

Mobile photography, power and resistance

For traders and residents of the estate, Mohaa's use of mobile phone photography as a communicational and commercial tool is typical, allowing maintenance of local and transnational connections, and expanding digitally the reach of his Eastleigh shop. Yet mobile phone photography combined with social media has also generated new forms of resistance in the estate as Somalis there use it to fight back against stereotypical representations of the place and its people. In fact, some Somalis living and working there have become social media celebrities, including Ahmed Mohamed, a businessman who has become known as the unofficial 'Mayor of Eastleigh' for his promotion of the estate as a place of commerce and entrepreneurship. He has over 70 thousand followers on Twitter, and has leveraged this into a strong presence on the older forms of media in Kenya. In his interactions with mainstream Kenyan journalists and celebrities he has done much to make Eastleigh itself appear more mainstream.

Mohamed and other Eastleigh 'Twitterati' publicise events in Eastleigh (including a recent festival showcasing its businesses and arts), to emphasise the contribution of the estate to the Nairobi economy, and to counter negative portrayals. Like many others on social media a key moment for this was in 2014 when Eastleigh was being raided in 'Operation Usalama Watch' enacted after several attacks blamed on al Shabaab in Nairobi and elsewhere in Kenya (Carrier 2016: chapter 7). This operation by Kenyan security forces involved the rounding up of Somalis in the estate (targeting refugees in particular, though anyone of Somali ethnicity became someone of concern), many of whom were detained at Kasarani sports stadium north of Nairobi in horrific conditions. This spurred outrage among Somalis in Kenya, but also globally, as images of this operation spread throughout the Somali world. It also spurred the creation of a hashtag *#kasaraniconcentrationcamp* used to disseminate images of the round-ups in Eastleigh as well as the conditions in which people were detained in the stadium. Many of these images were taken by residents in the estate whose mobile phones now gave them some power to bring injustice to light. Quite how successful such photographic resistance was in tempering the heavy-handed operation is hard to know, but it certainly provided a powerful visual rebuke to the government.[7]

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[6] Griet Steel is currently working on a project about Sudanese women and their trade through Facebook, trade that allows Muslim women to sell goods without the need to venture into public.

[7] More recently, a brutal execution of suspected thieves in Eastleigh by an undercover police officer also made the rounds on social media having been captured on a mobile phone – though in this instance there was a mixed reaction in Eastleigh as some praised the policeman for ridding the estate of 'criminals' and sending a strong message to gangs

Social media and mobile phone photography also allow Eastleigh residents to complain of lack of services by the local authorities. Images of the dilapidated roads in the estate have long illustrated articles about the estate and helped encourage repairs in recent years. However, Mohamed and others more recently highlighted the problem of garbage collection in Eastleigh through a slew of images taken on phones of piles of rubbish littering the estate. These images were often combined with statements that Eastleigh provided much revenue to the county government and so basic services were a right for those in the estate. Such campaigns – combined with the contrasting celebration of new buildings and Eastleigh's changing landscape in social media photography – show how mobile phone photography and social media allow Somalis to grasp control over how the estate is represented and treated.

Here we see how Miller's focus on mobile phone photography as a form of communication overlooks questions of power: as with all forms of communication, it is far from a neutral medium, and such mobile visuality can create, maintain, resist and challenge forms of power and representation. In the case of Eastleigh, while older photographic practices in the estate involved outsiders representing Eastleigh and its residents as objects of photography, mobile phone photography (especially in the hands of those with influence on social media) allows Eastleigh residents themselves to exert agency over this visual format and to create new ways of representing a transformed estate. Not simply a form of communication, for more and more people throughout the world the mobile phone camera and its mobile imagery are twenty-first century political weapons.

Conclusion

Thus, despite Eastleigh not being much photographed historically, and even somewhere where photography was resisted, it is now saturated in images, and is itself very much a photographic subject, albeit an ambivalent one. More than Susan Sontag (1977) could have foreseen, the transnational lives of people in Eastleigh are mediated by digital visuality, as they are for people elsewhere. In an estate where people rely on networks of support that criss-cross the globe, and where trade involves maintaining links to far away trade hubs in the East, it is unsurprising that the democratisation of photography brought about by the mobile phone has been so seized upon. The ability to give visual insight into lives led spatially apart is a powerful feature of this technology, as perhaps most profoundly illustrated by another friend of mine in Eastleigh whose ex-wife and son now lived in Minneapolis: it was mainly through photographs sent through his phone that he was able to see his son growing up. As described above, anotheraspect of these photographs that resonates in Eastleigh is its ability to help in a more materialist regard: that is to facilitate

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operating in Eastleigh. The policeman in question apparently faced no charges. See article in The Star newspaper from April 1st 2017, available online: https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2017/04/01/cops-caught-on-camera-killing-suspected-eastleigh-gang-members-boinnet_c1536104

commerce. As technology develops further, perhaps Somalis will quickly take up the likes of virtual reality (now accessible using smartphones) to give an increased sensation of presence across distance? Meanwhile, the mobile phone in combination with social media has also given Somalis a way of resisting their stereotyping, and a way to protest the neglect yet also celebrate the success of Eastleigh. As well as a way of maintaining and enhancing communication, the often low-quality cameras on the back of our phones have given a new visual weapon of consolidating and resisting power.

But what will happen to this sea of photographs flowing through our phones? While some save all images into 'cloud' storage, many keep their mobile phone photographs just on their handsets, with the obvious risk of losing their visual archive with the loss of the handset. Mohaa himself laments having lost photographs with an old phone of his that went missing. In this way, not just particular photographs but also whole archives contained within these phones can be quickly lost – although given the constant taking of photographs, archives build up once more. Perhaps the sheer quantity of images that people make nowadays also diminishes their social importance beyond the communicative, although high quality images printed off at a photo studio may come to take on extra importance in contrast. In this regard the materiality of photographs remains deeply significant, as Elizabeth Edwards has long argued (for example, Edwards and Hart: 2004): what is chosen to be printed off and what is done with such images will surely still speak to the meaning attached to them. In the meantime, the phones we carry around in our pockets remain vulnerable visual archives of contemporary life, ones that can open up vistas onto social and political worlds.

Acknowledgements

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